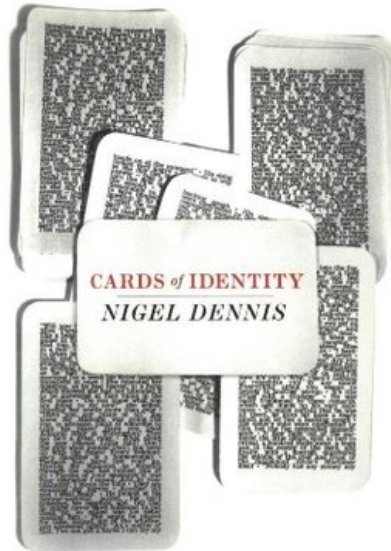


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Cards of Identity

Nigel Dennis

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Cards of Identity

Nigel Dennis

Cards of Identity Nigel Dennis

A Scathing Satire On Psychology, Identity Theory And Class Prejudice -- herewith Cards of Identity. The plot centers on an annual meeting of the Identity Club, a group of psychologists who come together to present "case histories" promoting their chosen theory of identity. These case studies (three of which are presented in the novel) are not scientific treatises, but fictional representations of characters in line with the author's biases. In fact, members of the Club aren't allowed to interact with actual patients when creating their stories. Surrounding this meeting is the equally bizarre story of the local townspeople, who are brainwashed and transformed into servants for the convention, and who end the book with a show-stopping Shakespearian play.

Cards of Identity Details

Date : Published May 1st 2002 by Dalkey Archive Press (first published 1955)

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Author : Nigel Dennis

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Genre : Fiction, Novels

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From Reader Review Cards of Identity for online ebook

Tracy says

This was one of the weirdest books I've ever read. Difficult to follow at parts- but very creative. A totally unique plot though. And a cool ending too.

Guy Brookshire says

My whole life I have been told that great storytelling is impossible without "real" characters that "undergo significant transformation." This book is a mushroom cloud over that principle.

John says

Good fun, but ultimately too wordy and unsatisfying. The futility of some real lives is only slightly less fantastic than the roles assigned by the elite in this book.

Sketchbook says

I tried a couple of times. When I discovered it was attracting ants and other critters, I tossed.

Mark says

Despite the fascinating premise of this novel, I stopped reading after about 25 pages out of sheer boredom. The plot line disintegrated into painfully trivial and lengthy dialogues between characters who were just introduced a moment ago. I gave the book a chance to recover my interest, skipping ahead several times, but to no avail. This is unfortunate because the book yielded some interesting psychological insights in the initial pages (even if satire was the author's intention).

Greg says

Quite a few people here on goodreads dot com don't seem to like this book. I was a bit surprised by this since I found it to be pretty darn funny and a light and quick read but that had some interesting criticisms of the 'current' (1950's, or today in certain branches of academia / intellectual thought) vogue of identity theory. Actually this is kind of a prophetic book, since identity theory wouldn't really get underway for another few years after this book was written, sometime in the 1960's. Maybe there is a very limited audience who finds poking fun at insular narrow-minded theory an enjoyable way to spend their free time.

My only read problem with the book was the 'Shakespearian' play presented about ¾'s of the way through the novel. It was an interesting device to use, but it did kind of drag on a little too long, or maybe it just wasn't that good of a play, or maybe that was the point and reading it while sitting in the cold wasn't the best place to try my patience with it. I don't know, but it was kind of a low point in the book, which happened to coincide with the high point of the plot conflicts. Such confusion in how to think about those 75 or so pages. I thought maybe I'd write a long diatribe against identity theory and its silliness / stink of being acceptable while the epistemologically similarly grounded movements like evangelical Christianity, white power groups, and other repulsive reactionary hate are frowned upon (yes evangelical Christianity is a hate group, their *love* stinks of Orwellian doublespeak—more on this later, I have started this year off with a bang of annoyance and disdain for these motherfuckers). But I won't write this now, but maybe return to it in another review where the rant will be even more angular and unwelcome.

Jesse says

Cards of Identity by Nigel DENNIS

David says

Definitely the most peculiar book I've read thus far in 2008. From the book's back cover:

"Cards of Identity is a scathing satire of psychology, identity theory, and class prejudice. The plot centers on an annual meeting of the Identity Club, a group of psychologists who come together to present "case histories" promoting their chosen theory of identity. These case studies (three of which are presented in the novel) are not scientific treatises, but fictional representations of characters in line with the author's biases. Surrounding this meeting is the equally bizarre story of the local townspeople, who are brainwashed and transformed into servants for the convention, and who end the book with a show-stopping Shakespearean play."

Nobody is who he seems to be in this book. Identity is fluid, and can be reshaped overnight, should you have the bad luck to fall into the clutches of the wrong kind of unscrupulous psychologist. By far the most interesting part of the book is that described in the final sentence of the summary above - the remolding of several local villagers, through skillful manipulation by the psychologists, who create fictitious histories and identities for seven of the townspeople, whom they then persuade to inhabit these new roles. It's fascinating to follow the way Dennis sets this up - basically, it is accomplished by exploitation of class prejudice, the respect accorded authority figures, and the subjects' individual weaknesses, and is made to seem quite plausible.

The central portion of the book, which contains the three 'case studies' mentioned in the summary, is not nearly as interesting. The book jacket states that Dennis translated works of the Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler, and that this provided him material for Cards of Identity. It's probable that each case study skewers some particular theory of identity, but this kind of academic in-joking is likely to be lost on most general readers.

Unfortunately, the same judgement ultimately applies to the entire book. There is a lot of brilliance on

display, mindgames within mindgames throughout, with much satirical skewering of psychologists and academics. Problem is, unless you have an a priori interest in psychological theories of identity, and some familiarity with Dennis's specific targets, you are likely to end up feeling sidelined by all the cleverness on display.

On the other hand, if you're feeling adventurous, I guarantee you that this will be like no other book you read all year.

Lobstergirl says

The first part of the novel is enticing, up to the point where two middle class siblings are brainwashed into thinking they are the servants to a trio of aristocratic impostors. A doctor, nurse and patient are then recruited to be the next victims. The vast middle, in which the members of the "Identity Club" descend on the mansion for their annual meeting to present papers, is unrelenting tedium. And it finishes strong with 52 pages of high quality imitation Shakespeare. ("Art steamed, clam?" "This hotty beam exonerates my chills." "My grief oblates in oozy gutturals." "Closet your humour in a secret drawer,/Coddle your languor/Into sharp infamy" (i.e. come put your erection inside me). "How's my buttocks, Madam; for there's the test? 'Tis hard to thwart the roll of a lifetime, and moreover one that's joined to the eyes, making every turn of the keel swing the lanterns of the poop."

The themes are that personal identity is infinitely malleable, people are highly suggestible, and class and gender can be inverted and subverted with ease. "If there were more women like your father, this would be a cosier world," says one character to another.

For me, the novel collapsed under the weight of its hard-laboring cleverness (a recurring problem with a certain type of British novel from the 20s to the 50s).

Of historical interest (this is another thing that pops up in many British novels of the era, and I always count the instances) is the one *nigger* reference. "I wouldn't choose a mauve tie and a pale green shirt for myself, especially with a spade-beard and a nigger-brown suit. However, I know nothing about gardening."

Tuck says

funny novel about who we are, or say we are. or what others think we are? i want a brainwashed town to do my bidding too.
