

In the Name of God



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The Postcolonial 'Writing Back'

in

Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*

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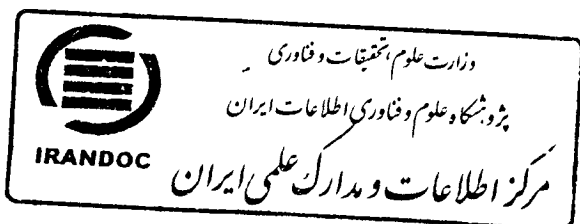
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Abstract

This thesis attempts an investigation of the postcolonial 'writing-back' in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*. The researcher analyzes the generic, historical, and narrative techniques by which *Jack Maggs*, in 'writing back' to the canon, dismantles the myth/image of 'the Antipodean' in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Firstly, it is argued that Dickens' writings fall within the larger picture of Australia which has disclosed its way through different texts, quasi-scientific and fictional, and subsequently, contributed to underpin a mythic construction of the Antipodes, which is here called the discourse of Antipodeanism. Likewise, Dickens' depiction of Australia in *Great Expectations*, caught among his journalistic portraits of the place, is acting out a completing piece for the puzzle of, on the one hand, his own incorporated understanding of the colony and, on the other, an Australian identity. On the theoretical level, this study is concerned with theories of Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. The researcher puts forward a new paradigm for reading *Jack Maggs*. Taking metafictional considerations of Carey into account, it is discussed how *Jack Maggs* can be seen as a display of discordant attitudes to inscribe Australia. With a reciprocal outlook, Carey's novel is set against the ideological bearings of its parent text. Carey exposes that *the language about Australia* affects not only Maggs, 'the Australian' but also Oates, Dickens' alter ego. The novel brings together the discordant attitudes towards writing and history by 'the author' and 'the Australian,' thus, in a linguistic metaphor, disrupts the signifier of Australia from the signified of the Antipodes. In addition, it is observed that Carey centers his novel on the most marginal events of *Great Expectations*. This technique reveals the understanding that 'the Australian' knowledge of the Self cannot possibly disentangle itself from the larger picture of the discursive representations of Australia in whose construction Dickens has already had a shaping role.

Chapter One
Introduction

General Background

Peter Carey was born in Bacchus Marsh in Victoria, Australia, on 7 May 1943. He came from a family of aviators and used car salesmen - occupations that figure prominently in his fiction. He attended a private secondary school and, later, Monash University in Melbourne. Carey found work in Melbourne as an advertising copywriter after graduating from Monash University in 1961. Close contact with writers Barry Oakley and Morris Lurie provided the inspiration he needed to seriously start writing fiction. After staying a period in London, Carey settled in Sydney and worked for an advertising agency. He spent intervals in Queensland commune, and wrote in his spare time. Once he established himself as a writer he moved to New York City in

the early 1990s, where he now lives and writes full time. He has been awarded three honorary degrees and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, the Australian Academy of Humanities and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Carey is now widely acknowledged as one of the most important post-World War Australian writers.

Carey first made his mark on the Australian literary scene with a series of short stories that blended fantasy and dark humor, two characteristics that have since become trademarks of modern Australian fiction. Proclaimed an Australian landmark at the time of its publication, the short stories assembled in *The Fat Man in History* (1974) move through macabre fantasy worlds that reduce reality to the level of absurdity. Carey's second collection, *War Crimes*, solidified his reputation as a remarkable, new fabulist author. Original stories from both works can also be found in an expanded collection of Carey's short stories, *Collected Stories*, 1994. The combination of science fiction and fantasy motifs with a realistic style, displayed in these short story volumes, has invited comparison with such modern masters as Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Carey's first award-winning novel, *Bliss* (1981) is the story of an advertising man's three drastically opposing experiences with death and resurrection. In this book, he created a world that hovered between fantasy and reality, a world that dismantled the reader's assumptions about time, reality, history, and character. *Bliss* has won the Miles Franklin Award (1981), the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award (1982), the National Book Council Award (1982), and the A.W.G.I.E. Award (1985). Demonstrating some of the flexibility and inventiveness learned during his advertising days, Carey adapted quickly to the demands of other writing styles.

The paradoxical nature of Carey's novels, the merging of lies with truth, fantasy with reality, is strongly reflected in his novel *Illywhacker* (1985) which sold 60,000 copies, 20 times the normal print run of an Australian novel. In *Illywhacker*, Carey draws upon the multiple strands of Australia's own culture and mythology. The story of 139-year-old illywhacker, (The term "illywhacker" refers to a con-man or trickster) Herbert Badgery, is the story of Australia itself. In the epigraph, Carey draws upon a line from Mark Twain, saying, "[i]t [Australian history] does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies." This popular novel was nominated for both the Booker Prize (1985) and the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel (1986) and was winner of the Ditmar Award for Best Australian Science Fiction (1986).

Carey's most critically acclaimed novel *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) also has a sense of historical allegory. This novel is a complex symbolic tale of the arrival of Christianity in Australia. As Carey develops the relationship between the story's two main characters, Rev. Oscar Hopkins and Lucinda Leplastrier, he creates an unsettling view of 19th-century Australia. *Oscar and Lucinda* won both the Booker Prize and the Miles Franklin Award in 1988.

While writing his next novel, *The Tax Inspector* (1991), Peter Carey moved to New York. *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994) invents a contemporary postcolonial nation called Effica to represent Australia and to signify its dubious role as an unofficial colony of the United States (called Voorstand in the novel). Carey released his sixth novel, *Jack Maggs* in 1997 (the novel in question of this study). A story with its own autonomous merits, *Jack Maggs'* attractiveness feeds upon its attempts to question the justice of the depiction that Charles Dickens allowed his character Magwitch in *Great Expectations* (1861). The story centers on Jack Maggs (the equivalent of Abel Magwitch) and his quest to meet his 'son' Henry Phipps (the equivalent of Pip). He is aided in this by the novelist Tobias Oates (a thinly disguised Charles Dickens),

who associates with the mischievous Jack Maggs in order to draw inspiration for his forthcoming novel which he desperately needs to produce because of his lack of money.

In *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001), Carey resurrects the legend of the Australian outlaw Ned Kelly to repaint a man whom history has labeled a crook and murderer as a good person forced by circumstances into a life of crime. *Jack Maggs* and *True History of the Kelly Gang* both won the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book) and with *True History of the Kelly Gang*, Peter Carey won the Booker Prize for Fiction for the second time.

In 2003, Carey published *My Life as a Fake* (2003), a story about a literary hoax, which gripped Australia in the 1940s. Combining fact and fiction, this book is based on the Ern Malley hoax of 1943, in which two poets created a fictitious poet, Ern Malley, and submitted poems in his name to the literary magazine *Angry Penguins*. It is told as a first-person narrative from the point of view of a young woman editing a literary magazine, and is presented as the account of her encounter with the perpetrator of the hoax after many years.

Theft; a Love story (2006) is a novel where a love story, a story of deceit and a story about family history and responsibility unfold around the world of art. It is told through the eyes of two men – the main character and his developmentally delayed brother. Each offers an insight into an interpretation of events. The settings are globally broad – with beginnings in Australia playing out on stages of Japan and New York. It won the 2006 Vance Palmer Prize, the Victorian Premier's Literary Award prize for fiction.

Carey published *His Illegal Self* in 2008. This book, which is set in 1972, tells the story of a boy called Che Selkirk, being brought up in New York by Phoebe Selkirk, his absent mother's mother. When he is eight, a woman who calls herself Dial kidnaps him. *Parrot and*

Olivier in America (2010) is Carey's latest novel to date. Set in early nineteenth America, it is the story of Olivier, an improvisation on the life of the French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville and Parrot, an engraver and copyist who spends his childhood in Australia. Olivier is sent to the New World to study the penitentiary system of the United States. On this voyage, Parrot is supposed to assist him as his secretary, but turns out to be a curious foil and friend for the French aristocrat. As in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, Carey explores the relationship between Australia and America, however this time as former penal colonies.

As the discussion above indicates what makes Peter Carey a distinctive writer is his constant preoccupation to depict a novel picture of his home country. Indeed, Carey has always been devising quests into Australian history and identity. Loaded with postmodernist spirit, he shows a keen awareness to uncover the constructedness of the image of Australia, and the role of imperially directed texts in bringing about the imaginary representations of the country from the early days of its occupation. In response, he manages to question and consequently dismantle the cultural signifiers, which pervaded through imperial narratives. *Jack Maggs* (1997), more graphically than any other of his novels, in terms of both technical specificities and thematic considerations, shows such inclinations.

Consciously penned with a postcolonial gesture, *Jack Maggs* writes back to Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861). Carey's reworking of the Victorian masterpiece is centered on the character Jack Maggs, the illegal returnee in London who has been sent to Australia for life. Unlike Dickens' Abel Magwitch, the convict is given an opportunity to expose his history to the reader through writing. This novel, by definition, is an excellent example of what is technically labeled counter-canonical novel (Lane 18).

The Argument

Carey's *Jack Maggs* is an example of the post-colonial concept of 'writing back'. That is to say, the novel, though written over a century apart from Dickens' *Great Expectations*, is in fact interacting with this parent text. The principal protagonist of Carey's novel, the eponymous Jack Maggs, is undoubtedly indebted to the original Magwitch of the Dickens' novel. Although Carey does not call Maggs, Magwitch, the shared sound of the name immediately prepares one for other similarities. The two characters are both convicts, who for their crimes were deported at an early age to Australia, and more particularly, both characters settled in New South Wales. While the manner in which Magwitch makes his fortune is a little ambiguous, Maggs' wealth is a result of brick-making. They also share a common bond in their sponsor of a young man in their homeland, for Maggs, Henry Phipps, and for Magwitch, Phillip Pirrip.

The novel assumes a greater interest if one has some knowledge of the personal life of Dickens, for in the young Tobias Oates there are comparisons to be drawn with the writer of *Great Expectations*. The events, which take place in the novel, occur primarily in 1837, the year in which Dickens was beginning to write *Oliver Twist*, and had just published *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), which earned him a small degree of fame. Tobias Oates has also achieved a similar level of stature with his novel *Captain Crumley* in *Jack Maggs*. He has a clandestine relationship with his wife's sister, which in its consummation results in her disastrous pregnancy. Here, Carey is myth-making the life of Dickens himself, who was reportedly in love with the sister of his wife as well.

In *Jack Maggs*, Carey gives the colonized subject much more of a voice than in Dickens' novel, and is at pains to have him not the 'other' subject of *Great Expectations* but a much more

sympathetic creation. The London of Carey's novel is identifiable with that of the Dickens' canon. However, the world he creates is very much one of his own imagination. Things that were suppressed or unspoken in Dickens like homosexuality, illicit sexual passion, flogging of prisoners, the rape of child-prostitutes, and the abortion trade are unsentimentally exposed in this rewriting, as are Dickens's colonial assumptions. Carey upends Dickens's story of the convict who makes a gentleman out of the orphan boy who once helped him, comes back to take pride in him to the young gentleman's horror and dies a tragic death. Carey's convict, instead, deported for burglary in 1813, has made a lucrative career for himself as a brick-maker in New South Wales, enough to buy a house for the young boy who befriended him. However, when he returns to find him, he meets the man who will become his author.

More than a mere imitation, this is an exploration of how writing works as a form of trickery and mesmerism. Tobias Oates stands in Carey's great line of self-inventive opportunists and creative gamblers. Lies, tricks and disguises, have great creative power in Carey's writing, but they are also terribly dangerous. Oates fits into this pattern. He is an inquisitive, methodical, quasi-scientist, who has a risky obsession with the "Criminal Mind" (99), for which he wants to be, like a traveler exploring a dark, unknown city, "the first cartographer".

This thesis is an investigation of the postcolonial writing-back in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*. Such a reading may arouse a negative response from those who are familiar with previous analyses of the novel. This feedback may be based on the overt tendency of a number of critics to date to review this book in the light of Carey's explicit attempt to overturn Dickens from an Australian perspective. Nevertheless, the researcher feels reasonably compelled to exercise a different method of reading. In fact, the issues that will be discussed in this study are

rather unexplored in several respects. Firstly, the present study aims at analyzing and verifying the postulated idea of Dickens as having collaborated with colonial discourse of Australia, namely Antipodeanism. This is not to release Dickens from blame for his imperially-directed considerations in his writings. However, many critics take the sheer fact for granted that Dickens worked for years to clarify the image of Australia in his journalistic works. Surprisingly, it is in this clarification that falls his misdeed against the southern colony.

Hence, the researcher, in a comprehensive historical outlook, traces the evolution of Dickens' constructed picture of Australia in his both journalistic and novelistic careers. It is argued that, at its best, the discursive understanding of Australia that Dickens sustains in his works is a slightly modified and updated continuation of the view that described Antipodes: the 'empty' land at the opposite side of the world. Textualizing Australia, Dickens, wittingly or not, falls back upon the shaping metaphors of literary and quasi-scientific works, which have already depicted the place. Thus, the thesis firstly argues how Dickens' complicity in building up the Victorian narrative of Australia as a British colony led to mollify the potential unease of materially occupying the land. To make the argument more specific, the researcher explores the presence and workability of the same colonial notions against Australia in *Great Expectations*.

Having discussed that, the researcher moves on to inquire into the postcolonial inclinations of Peter Carey's work on a more solid ground. Original perspectives are taken to analyze the intertextual relationships of *Jack Maggs* with *Great Expectations* in the light of the already examined colonial considerations of the Victorian master. In doing so, the notion of writing and its power to either beget or annihilate an imaginary construction are taken into account. It is discussed that the Australian convict and the writer follow opposing attitudes in

their writings. On the one hand, not unlike Dickens, Oates builds up a predisposed picture of the Australian character. On the other, Maggs tries to dismantle Oates' writing, thus the textual image of the colony. Finally, the researcher considers the two characters who move to Australia at the end of the novel, namely, Jack Maggs and Mercy Larkin. This part of the study mainly analyses the relationship between reading and identity-making in Australian characters. Accordingly, the researcher comes up with reasonable answers for the following questions:

- How do Dickens' journalistic and novelistic careers display the inherent tenets of the discourse of Antipodeanism?
- How do Dickens' seemingly philanthropic economical targets for dispatching the lower classes to Australia manage a pattern of alterity for the Australians?
- Regarding the old trope of *terra nullius*, how do Dickens' class considerations in his depiction of white settlers of Australia cancel out those of race common in colonialist discourses?
- How does Foucauldian concept of bio-power explain Pip's pattern of subjugation to Law and, in the process, elimination of Magwitch, as the Australian, from his narrative?
- How is Pip's desire for being subjectified around the norm translated into the politics of Magwitch's exclusion from his narrative?
- In what ways can the characterization of Magwitch be seen as the synthesis of the charger of death imagery and the threatening force of power? How does this psychological portrayal correspond with social/political image of Australia?

- Viewed in a socio-psychological light, how does *Great Expectations* become an ambivalent dialogue between Pip and Magwitch in terms of both desire and aggressivity for the ‘other’?
- What are the differences in attitude to writing between Tobias Oates and Jack Maggs?
- How does Oates’ narrative of Maggs put him in the established Victorian mythical representations of the Antipodes?
- How does Maggs succeed to disrupt the imaginary construction of Australia which the writer puts forth?
- How does the assumed discursive trope of oppositionality of the Antipodes turn upon the writer’s own head?
- How do Carey’s metafictional measures demystify the romantic idea of writing and the writer?

Thesis Outline

The researcher carries out an analysis of Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* in the light of the author’s postcolonial purposes to dismantle the internalized understanding of Australia in Dickens’ *Great Expectations*. In so doing, the five chapters of the thesis are respectively allocated to the following issues:

In general, the first chapter provides the reader with adequate biographical and professional information about Peter Carey, and the significance of the intended novel. The

problem to be addressed, and the points in which this study proves itself significant and original are respectively presented, followed by a series of relevant research questions. Afterwards, the employed sources are shortly introduced. In addition, a section is included to present the critical approaches of the researcher. The final section, however, clarifies a number of technical key terms, which might appear complicated or unclear to the reader.

In the second chapter, the researcher will argue that Dickens' writings about Australia fall within the Victorian myth/image of the Antipodes. This takes two main sections. In the first, it is argued that Dickens' depiction of Australia in his novels, as well as his journalistic portraits of the place, is acting out a completing piece for the puzzle of, on the one hand, his own incorporated understanding of the colony, and, on the other, the modern Australian identity. In the next section, the researcher will take the Foucauldian concept of bio-power and try to demonstrate Dickens' complicity with colonial justifications in *Great Expectations*. In this part, Pip's ambivalent responses to the character of Magwitch are attentively examined.

In the third chapter, having codified Dickens' textual partiality against Australia, the researcher will take an original textual perspective to formulate the opposing attitudes of Jack Maggs and Tobias Oates towards the idea of writing. This chapter is in turn divided into two main sections. Firstly, before making any hasty remarks, the practice of counter-discursive writing and its significance in regard to the very hybridity of the Postcolonial are discussed in a few pages. This part of the study holds a unique and autonomous validity for the counter-canonical writing, irrespective of its associations with postmodernism and poststructuralism. In the second section, the researcher puts forward a new paradigm for reading *Jack Maggs*. Taking metafictional considerations of Carey into account, the researcher discusses how *Jack Maggs* can

be seen as a display of discordant attitudes to inscribe Australia. With a reciprocal outlook, Carey's novel is set against the ideological bearings of its parent text. With metafictional tricks, Carey shows that, *the language about Australia* affects not only Maggs, but also Oates, the maker. It is seen that the metaphoric constructions that Oates employs to inscribe the convict's history backfires on him.

Chapter Four is concerned with two main objectives. Firstly, it is seen how Carey manages to dislocate the most marginal elements of Dickens' *Great Expectations* to the heart of his novel. It is discussed that, as a postcolonial counter-discursive novel, *Jack Maggs* is capable of being regarded as a text revealing of its being caught among different layers of narrative. On a second level, the researcher argues that characters in *Jack Maggs* construct their identities based on their responses to texts, by either to absorb their latent signifying systems or to reject them. This idea draws on characters and identities as subjects affected by narratives.

Evident from its title, the final chapter concludes the previously-discussed chapters. Composed of three sections, it firstly sums up the whole argument, including assumptions, critical and theoretical perspectives and the outcomes, of the body of the thesis. In addition, some suggestions are introduced for further research in this area.

Literature Review

As discussed above, *Great Expectations* and *Jack Maggs* compose the primary sources of this study. Alongside these novels, however, other scholarly sources are put to use to equip the

research with valid critical points of view. These secondary sources come under five categories in terms of their areas of focus, and their theoretical affiliations.

Books and articles of the first category illustrate epistemological precepts of the postcolonial studies. These sources are essential to carry through the research effectively, since they account for postcolonial politics and techniques of reading texts. From this list, Edward W. Said's classic, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), is of special importance. Said argues how forms of cultural formations, such as literature, internalize and subsequently solidify imperial hierarchies. For him, British novel unmistakably manifests a pattern of binarist attitudes against colonies. The researcher is particularly influenced by Said's idea of "contrapuntal reading" (75). By this, Said proposes a comprehensive methodology of reading which, in correspondence with the text itself, gives an equal importance to cultural, biographical, and political aspects of its author's career and his times. In the same category fall the articles which expand upon the major concepts or issues in postcolonial theory. These papers discuss problems like exploring epistemological differences between the postmodern and the postcolonial (Kwame Anthony Appiah, Simon During), or the forms of representations of imperial tendencies in colonialist literature (Abdul R. JanMohamed). These articles are drawn from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995) edited by Ashcroft et al.

The second category is of those materials that provide insight into the role of imperial authority in instructing the discursive understanding of Australia. These sources mainly discuss that *the knowledge* about Australia was charged by the imperial direction to gain power over the colony. In this regard, Simon Ryan's paper, "Inscribing the Emptiness, Geography, Exploration and the Construction of Australia," is especially helpful. He examines how the quasi-scientific