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Jack Maggs: Carey's Homage and Reclamation of Australian Ancestral Identity

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to portray Peter Carey's Jack Maggs as an allegory to examine the complicated feelings Australians possess regarding their nation's origins. In the novel Carey want to possess, to own and to advocate his ancestor, who was presented as the necessary 'Other' in his British predecessor's Victorian classic Great Expectations. Carey reinvents the liminal convict from the Other into a legitimate and rightful part of Australia's history without diminishing his darkness and attempts to reclaim the Australian convict from within England's History through Jack Maggs' narrative of histories. Carey blends the genres of historical novel, fictional biography and metafiction with an intensively marked intertextuality, borrowing characters and plot elements from Charles Dickens' Great Expectations. The current study examines the question whether Carey's account transforms his predecessor's story from an imperial into an Aussie story? The researchers analysed the novel through postcolonial lenses and conclude that Australian identities should not be restricted by the inheritance of English outlook of the convict and guilty offender. Instead, it is time to position Australia's English inheritance into Australian histories.

Keywords

Jack Maggs, Predecessors, Other, Australian identity, Great Expectations, postcolonial.

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Introduction

Jack Maggs is Peter Carey's diasporic novel in its apprehensions with the colony as home as its expatriate protagonist, Maggs, after an anxious encounter with his Victorian bequest in the cosmopolitan city of London, find his future and hope in returning to his ancestral penal colony, Australia. Though this diasporic construing restates the accustomed binaries of the colonial frontier and metropolitan centre, it relocates the familial bonding as one of postcolonial settlement and tenancy. Carey fictionalized his ancestral land Australia from allegorical distances and a diversity of perspectives. *Jack Maggs* is a postcolonial response to Charles Dickens' Victorian classic *Great Expectations*. The narrative realistically portrays the complex ties between Metropole and Colony. Carey challenges his Victorian predecessor's depiction of imperial dynamics by reconfiguring the liminal convict figure as the central protagonist. While using a complex and typically postmodern narrative structure, Carey presents an imaginative portrait of Dickens' convict Magwitch.

Two stories are interwoven in the novel present in Victorian London. On one hand, Tobias Oates (this character is modelled after Charles Dickens) mesmerizes Jack Maggs and influences him to recollect details of his past life, particularly in the penal colonial Australia, through a series of agonizing flashbacks (Meyer 1997). On the other hand, Jack Maggs recall his pathetic childhood in London through a series of letters written to his son, Henry Phipps, the character modelled on Dickens' main character Pip, who is chosen to inherit Magwitch's fortune. Both the depictions portray the complex picture of Magg's life story. There is a constant struggle and frantic skirmish over the ownership of this remarkable story between Tobias Oates and Jack Maggs, which breaches the gap between Australia and England (Thieme 2001).

Peter Carey, through a very rigorous process, comes to the level with Charles Dickens' description of ancestral history of Australian people. He further presents his reinterpretation of the masterpiece produced by Dickens to show his excellent command over depiction of Australian culture in an elegant way as Dickens portrayed less acknowledged. This competition between Maggs and Oates to highlight that Maggs life incidents provide an example for the narrative of this novel. Carey, being an Australian writer, tries to reimagine the postcolonial elements that his ancestors in England left in order to recapture and revaluate the presentation of his native land as described in other texts. Maggs is named by Ma Britten because he spoke too much (93), this can be illustrated to the novel *Jack Maggs*, a text which symbolically speaks too much back to *Great Expectations*.

Carey's comments suggest that his imagined reinvention is an act of a critique and an expression of "love and tender sympathy". It is an act of advocacy and homage. According to John O. Jordan, Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* displays sympathy, perhaps even love, toward his British predecessor novel. Regardless of the postcolonial violence it ratify symbolically on his life and books, *Jack Maggs* holds Dickens in a rough but affectionate embrace" (2000: 300). Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp has commented persuasively about this complicated act of reimagining the convict story and argues that due to its intricacy, *Jack Maggs* does not neatly fit into the well-known paradigm in which "the empire writes back" to the metropole. She advocates that Carey's narrative scheme reverse the familiar

opposition between colony and home and anchors his narrative in an Australian, rather than a British, literary tradition (in Gaile 2005: 258).

In *Jack Maggs* Carey questions the way his ancestor (the convict) and his native land Australia were presented as necessary Others in the England's nation state grand narrative and in his British predecessor Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Carey reinvents the liminal convict from the Other into a legitimate and rightful part of Australia's history without diminishing his darkness. Carey's attempts to reclaim and own the Australian convict from within England's History through Jack Maggs ' narrative of histories. It also attends the subject matter of oppression closely through the writing process to dramatize the resisting and challenging position of the colonized nation. Hassall remarks that no other novel of Carey is as "deeply concerned as Jack Maggs is with the actual processes by which novelists gather, transform, and inscribe their material" (128).

Carey manipulates the narrative aspects by using the literary conventions such as metafiction and Intertextuality and succeeds in subverting and correcting the authorial authority and historical and narrative spaces as they are professed to be in Victorian fiction. Carey also thrives in creating a different method of identity formation. In the novel, *Jack Maggs,* the protagonist Carey's attempt to retrieve and repossess the claim of Australian identity and after that sees its place as an 'Other'. Carey wants to advocate a definitely his Australian identity and recognition through his works especially the language of games, detached it from the grand narrative of the English literature and to highlight globally his ideology through the novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Jack Maggs return to his 'Home' and his beginning of a prosperous life in Australia while abandoning the English centre, Carey could be suggesting that it is time for Australia to become a republic.

The subject of identity and the matter of scholarly portrayal of character are issues that most people, social and social gatherings have in like manner. In any case, for nations, for example, South Africa and Australia these issues are particularly imperative due to their one of a kind verifiable, political and social foundation. In South Africa, for instance, the inheritance of politically-sanctioned racial segregation still educates a lot of our present financial and social conditions and practices. South African books, for example, Zake Mda's Ways of Dying (1995), J.M Coetzee's Disrespect (1999) and Mark Mathabane's Miriam's Song (2000), address the hardships and outrages of life in the townships amid the politically-sanctioned racial segregation period; the development of majority rule government and the move of political powers in the penultimate decade of the twentieth century; the mending of enthusiastic and mental wounds caused by encounters before and the new difficulties and issues confronting all races inside the changed socio-political atmosphere of South Africa. Goldsworthy keeps up that in Australia, amid the period in the vicinity of 1900 and 1970, "any feeling of authentic obligation and acquired blame, as showed in the writing, was still for the most part centred around Australia's convict past" (2000: 111-112), and that this contribution with its convict history has a distinct effect on the arrangement of the Australian personality. In any case, this obsession with its convict history has brought about Australian writing's commitment towards the deconstruction and remaking of the country's history and the option development of an aggregate character.

This deconstruction, allotment and rethinking of the past is frequently done by returning "over and over to the authentic novel as a type of country working, of elective history composing, of appeasement for frontier blames" (Goldsworthy, 2000: 108). Goldsworthy records Judith Wright, Hal Porter, Thomas Keneally and Patrick White as creators who utilize topics identifying with the convict framework in their work. (2000:112). Peter Carey (b. 1943), who is viewed as one of Australia's driving creators of postmodern and post-pilgrim fiction, proceeds with the custom of creating topics identifying with the convict framework in no less than two of his books - *Jack Maggs* (1997) and *Kelly Gang* (2000). In reply to an inquiry regarding what had persuaded him to compose Jack Maggs, Carey addressed that, "albeit few current Australians are slid from the main convicts … they influenced the character of our country always" (Bold Type, 2003: l). He guarantees, moreover, that "Australians don't care to praise this minute when the country is conceived" (Strong Type, 2003: l). The affirmation and thought of the Australian convict history is imperative in the development of the Australian feeling of aggregate self.

Carey utilizes a wide assortment of account modes, which incorporate dream (The Bizarre existence of Tristan Smith), the picaresque mode (*Illywhacker*)), the tale (Discussion with Unicorns) and authenticity. Krassnitzer (1995) claims that "Although Carey blends certainty with dream in his composition he views himself as a pragmatist as he expounds on reality" (37). However, at whatever point Carey utilizes authenticity, for example, in *Oscar and Lucinda* and *Jack Maggs*, it is to subvert the strategies utilized by authenticity and pragmatist creators. In books, for example, *The True History of the Kelly Gang* Carey compares fiction and realities, while in *Bliss* he moves from authenticity and joins dream and strange components.

Much of the time Carey utilizes more than one account mode inside one novel and this "ability to blend story modes turns into a trademark highlight of Carey's anecdotal practice" (Woodcock, 2003:12) that outcomes in a half and half style. The purpose behind Carey's utilization of these blended accounts and cross breed styles is that it empowers him to "make disengagements, upsetting any gathered standards of anecdotal hone" (Woodcock, 2003: 9).

Woodcock (2003) likewise calls attention to that Carey has an "adoration for the odd, an interest for the nightmarish, a get a kick out of the shameful, the strange, the offensive."(11). this ends up plainly obvious in books, for example, *Tristan*, *Euphoria* and *lllywhacker*. *Tristan* holds components of surrealism, enchantment authenticity and dream, while both Bliss and *lllywhacker* are overflowing with sexual episodes clarified in offensive detail. Delight additionally holds components of imagination, which is apparent in the episode when Harry tells the police that an elephant had sat on his auto (cf. BS, 73) and the juxtaposition of settings, for example, when Harry looks down on his body as he kicks the bucket (cf. BS, 11 &12). Part Four concentrates on an investigation of *Jack Maggs* with respect to Carey's postmodern treatment of story angles, for example, plot, setting, portrayal and centralization in his fiction, particularly in his novel, *Jack Maggs*. It additionally incorporates a talk of Carey's utilization of intertextuality and metafiction as artistic traditions (Daniel 1991).

Much the same as postmodernism, the term postcolonial is a disagreeable one. Post-colonialism is worried about the historical backdrop of the decolonization of those social

orders that were earlier subject to settler persecution. The wonder of post-colonialism incomprehensibly incorporates both the demonstration of colonization, the accomplishment of power and the improvement of a changed postcolonial culture. While post-colonialism includes the historical backdrop of imperialism, it centres more on the triumph than on the fight (cf. Youthful, 2001:60). Be that as it may, it goes a above and beyond than only an insignificant festival of triumph over imperialism: it too calls attention to which changes still need to happen with a specific end goal to dissect, uncover, furthermore, subvert any contemporary, hegemonic frameworks that may endeavour to rule in a financial, social and political sense. Youthful (2001) claims that "post-colonialism is both contestatory and conferred towards political standards of a transnational social equity." (2001:58). It is worried about the condition of cognizance of a world request that refutes any frontier and colonialist belief systems and is conferred towards recommending elective types of social and political personalities what's more, elective belief systems. Postcolonial writing incorporates and explains on a few of the predominant postmodernist topics, for example, the impact of place and uprooting on the arrangement of character; the development of personality in relationship to spatial and transient settings; hybridism; national and social character and the impression of the other. Additionally, worries of postcolonial writing are the certain issues, for example, liminality, insignificance, omitted voices and the annulment and assignment of dialect as hegemonic device.

Post-colonialist composing additionally proceeds with the postmodernist penchant of modifying the past with a specific end goal to challenge the legitimacy and reasonability of past portrayals and recognitions. Postcolonial writing is worried about the persuasion amongst history and how history is delineated in fiction; it endeavours towards appropriating the predisposition and partial portrayal of underestimated gatherings and societies and it ends up plainly a standout amongst the most critical types of intertextuality inside the postmodern and postcolonial writing. The first content is remade keeping in mind the end goal to undermine, revoke and re-fitting particular meta-narratives. In spite of this rebellion of presuppositions and meta-stories, McHale (1992:24) suggests that not all meta-narratives are surrendered and proposes that they are decreased to end up 'little stories'. This decrease of the meta-narratives fills in as a subversion of the hidden suppositions of known philosophies and recognitions. The way that meta-stories are subverted, power the readers to fundamentally consider reality as it is hypothesized inside his fleeting and spatial setting.

Post colonialist composing shows a few of the story procedures utilized as a part of postmodernist written work, for example, insertion, juxtaposition, superimposition and misappropriation of spaces to make new settings; heteroglossia and polyphony to exhibit elective focuses of perspective of existing thoughts and different strands of intertextuality with a specific end goal to, for case, subvert presuppositions. Krassnitzer (1995) states that "Diminish Carey's work … is universal, yet in addition Australian; Australian however non-nationalistic."(1995: 4). He is at the same time a postmodern furthermore, postcolonial writer and his works give the pursuer ideological, chronicled and political measurements. In the novel *Jack Maggs*, Carey gives a fascinating edge to the postcolonial re-composing of ace accounts as he returns to Victorian fiction so as to reclassify, fitting,

rehash and reconsider different personalities and spaces. *Jack Maggs* tends to scholarly shape and tradition while including the already quieted voices.

Jack Maggs exploits the 'writing back' paradigm in order to suggest that its engagement and association with the predecessor's themes of embittered expectations, hopes and self-delusions ends in new fictional departures. The novel's factual relationship to the Dickensian canonical document of empire is intricate and moves beyond the confines of decolonisation fiction. *Jack Maggs* in its oppositional use of language, its rewriting of canonical story and its revisioning of colonial history aims to subvert the inference of the 'authority voice' within the popular discourse. In recounting the 'alternative' narrative of *Great Expectations* by focusing on the lawbreaker Magwitch, reinstate as the eponymous Jack Maggs, Peter Carey employs the same strategy that the famous scholar Jean Rhys adopted in his masterpiece, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, of reviving a minor colonial character as the central (i.e. the character of mad woman, Bertha Mason in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, becomes Antoinette Cosway, the Creole protagonist in Rhys's novel).

Carey is least concerned in revealing the blind spots and oversights of the Dickensian novel, which according to Tiffin is the integral part in a counter-discourse, rather he engaged with the issues of canonicity, literary authority and precedence (Tiffin 1987). He placed his novel strongly within the Australian literary tradition, and portrayed the convict's theme longing for connecting his roots with the Empire to become an English gentleman which makes this narrative an Aussie story (Terdiman 1985). He intends to approve an account of colonial and penal Australia as a far better region and a home of good fortune. In the concluding section of the novel when Maggs returns his sanctuary place, his 'home' from his dream land, the heart of empire to begin living a satisfied and contented life, Carey absolutely moves away from the writing back paradigm. Maggs 'return' as the orientation of empowerment and self-realisation (Ho 2003).

Jack Maggs, like Dickens's Magwitch, finds himself trapped by his past, and by his legal identity as a transportee. He must be indebted to the Empire for sparing his life and this self-determination exists only if he assents never to return to his birth place. When he wished to break this contract, he discovers the harsh truth that he has been cast out of his English inheritance. And he fully realized that his new home has so changed him that he can never return. Hughes (1988) stated that Maggs, like Magwitch, has been twisted into a permanent outsider, and the only possibility of his freedom is lying back there, on the outside (5). Being a product of the imperial birthplace, Jack Maggs recognise himself as an English man. He is unfortunately marked out for beginning his life as a thief and deceived by his well-born benefactor. Due to a life of a crime he is accordingly cast out, never to be allowed to return. His roughness, his fortitude, his vengeance, the very characteristics that allowed him to survive in the penal colony, they are the very same qualities that forces his infatuated love for Phipps that encourages his self-sacrifice and generosity.

Jack Maggs, a convict literature, a hybrid blend of a postmodern pastiche and historical literature, is diligently associated to the Dickensian source which it reviews. The novel implicates relations with the characters in *Great Expectations* as well as a newly imagined Tobias Oates, the writer surrogate of Dickens himself. The action of the novel started from 6th April to 13th May in 1837. During this three weeks' time space Jack Maggs, like Magwitch, arrives back in the Metropolis determined to reclaim his English identity and

challenge the class system that was responsible for his imprisonment; he immediately becomes trapped in a meta discourse about writers, textual authority and text in which Tobias Oates is a new tormenter. The novel invokes well-known Victorian stereotype of the colony as a home of darkness and danger as mentioned in the story a 'dark pit of hell down under', only to inverse and downturn them. The Dickensian inheritance, the terrors of condemnation by transportation to the New South Wales' penal colony, is a vigorous point of access into the colonial history in Carey's *Jack Maggs*. Maggs re-experiences this distress upon his arrival to his birth place, England, when he is haunted by a ghost figure related with his afflicting as a convict during the mesmerism's sessions at the hands of the Dickens surrogate, Oates (Gaile 2001).

The challenge to this stereotype of the colony as dark and hell is transcended by the man protagonist, who proclaims Englishness as a source of his identity, belonging and history. Deluded in this reliance and trust, Maggs eventually needs to reconcile it with his expatriate identity. Perceptions of the English gentleman having English identity have become removed from his social and cultural origins, however, the big cities and their values require novel and new considerations in order to penetrate into neo-colonial setups. Jack Maggs is the substitute for the obscure, baleful Magwitch of the Dickensian antecedent, travelling his dream home, England from the pit of hell of the penal colony to where he had been exiled from England, with the intention of reclaiming his English identity. Carey's counter-discursive approaches are played out in Jack Maggs' moral education in Victorian London, which was the thriving centre of the British Empire in 1837. In Maggs' case, he is obsessed for the ideology of national and social recognition in England as a notion and as an illusion of England.

Maggs becomes the victim of the class system since his birth and pushed into a life of crime in his early childhood. According to Bruce Woodcock, Maggs is the return of capitalism's repressed colonial 'Other'. He is England's orphan, betrayed by Ma Britten into the kind of criminal child labour that Marx documents in Capital as part of capital's "were wolf-like hunger for surplus labour." Maggs is eager to reinvent himself as an English gentleman. His dream of becoming an idol of uprightness and decorum within the same prejudiced and unjust social order that was responsible for his banishment include reunion with his adopted English son, Phipps. But his dream collapsed when he realized that he is already a 'permanent outsider'. He was severely rejecter upon his return, and his three-week stay in the Metropole ends in the realisation that the father–son relationship is a complete disillusionment (Bromley 2000).

The callous Phipps without delay left home to hide when he hears about Maggs return, having fatal instincts towards his patron, and provoked enough to fire a pistol at him in the closure of the novel. The returnee's denunciation has symbolic implications. For instance, Maggs is refused admittance to his 'foster mother', Ma Britten an abortionist who instigates him towards criminality in his childhood. She is called 'the Queen of England' and Mary, 'Ma Britten'; both substantiation of Mother England's banishing her son's return. It is towards the end of the novel, when he becomes committed to the suitably named Mercy Larkin, Mr Percy Buckle's servent, who liberated him from the prison of his fantasy and illusion. She is his mediator in this freedom, particularly from the distressing reliving in his hypnotic sessions of being pounded by a phantom figure. She awakes Maggs from his delusion in two ways. Firstly, she explicitly relate the horror

of the King's transportation system and unveiled Rudder, a cockney, the king's soldier who lashed him. She told him that the penalty (and the Victorian judicial system), were imposingly encouraged: "Then it were the King [i.e. orge IV dressed as a commoner] who lashed you" (346). Secondly, she helps Maggs realised his true identity by showing deep interest in his biological children. She repeatedly reminds Maggs:

"You have babies in the place where you have come from."

His mouth tightened in denial.

"My real son is an Englishman".

"I meant your real children".

"I am not of that race".

"What race?

"The Australian race" he said. "The race of Australian".

"But what of your babes?"

"Damn you, don't look at me like that. I am an Englishman"

"You are their da, Jack. They walk along the street they think they see your face in the clouds." (340)

At last, she convinced Maggs that he has to take responsibility of his biological Australian children. After the crucial encounter with the king's soldier (the symbol of his English gentleman in the person of his 'son', Phipps) (McNamara 2005), Maggs was released from the prison of his nightmares and delusion. After realising the horrors of the system with their source, he turns on his back to the imperial Empire and returns to the penal colony, where he finally found 'Mercy' (O'Reilly 2002).

Furthermore, by inferring that the story of the convict was remained with the antipodean protagonist and not 'given' to Tobias Oates, Carey challenges the temporal linear connection between the established text and colonial inheritor, between the original text and the response, just as he undermines the creator's power over created, conscious over unconscious and coloniser over colonised. In disturbing this scheme, he subverts the concept of "the original text and sequel that is central to the writing-back paradigm" (Gaile, 2005: 258). As Bruce Woodcock states that, in these ways Carey extends his 'act of postcolonial retaliation against a parent culture' (Woodcock, 2003:122). Maggs's resistance epitomises the novel's portrayal of a form of written resistance through a metropolitan author's voice. Maggs takes power and control of the story to the extent of shackling Tobias and tells him, "you are just a character to me too, Toby" (Carey, 280). This determines the metafictional revolt of character against author instigated when Maggs wrote Tobias Oates into his journal (Cary, 26).

Unfortunately, he fails in his attempt and returns to Australia. Richardson's *The Way Home* (1925), and *When Blackbirds Sing* (1962) by Martin Boyd are also deal with the same theme of returnees. *Jack Maggs* also has similarities to Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* (1882–1883), the expatriate male adventure novel. Further, Marcus Clarke's classic novel, *His Natural Life* (1874), based on convict literature also has striking parallels with *Jack Maggs*.

Maggs must also come to terms with an Australia which he chooses as his real home, a true place of his actual selfhood. It may be ironical that the place he considers his prison at first changed into a place of real freedom. The irony that perseveres in contemporary Australia, whose citizens usually commemorates convict ancestry and the pride of the English Empire that has superseded shame in their ancestors.

The process of selfhood begins for Maggs in the series of letters he writes to his adopted son, who was his only hope of reconciliation with his claimed home and English identity. These letters also represent a kind of counter narrative to the one that Tobias Oates extracted from him through the hypnotic process, hoping to employ Maggs's story in his next novel. This chain of encounters cause sufferings to both characters, but Maggs ultimately comes out from it with an inimitable voice. According to a critic Elizabeth Ho, Maggs has "remaster[ed] his own text" and overcome the "anxieties of Intertextuality" by articulating true selfhood. It is this fully realized self that Maggs takes back to Australia along with Mercy Larkin, and with clearly rewarding results. Carey's description of Jack's final dispensation emphasizes this, as well as its difference from the fictional shape it will take in Oates's eventually published novel, called The Death of Maggs. The comparing of "That Race" with "That Book" evidently privileges the former. Life supplant and outstrips text, particularly when that life authorizes itself in authenticity and persists itself in children.

Conclusion

By revisiting Dickens's masterpiece *Great Expectations*, Carey reveals social, cultural, historical, identity and literary issues within a postmodern and postcolonial context. He manipulates the narrative aspects by using the literary conventions such as metafiction and Intertextuality and succeeds in subverting and correcting the authorial authority and historical and narrative spaces as they are professed to be in Victorian fiction. Carey also thrives in creating a different method of identity formation. In the novel, *Jack Maggs,* the protagonist Carey's attempt to retrieve and repossess the claim of Australian identity and after that sees its place as an 'Other'. Carey wants to advocate a definitely his Australian identity and recognition through his works especially the language of games, detached it from the grand narrative of the English literature and to highlight globally his ideology through the novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Jack Maggs return to his 'Home' and his beginning of a prosperous life in Australia while abandoning the English centre, Carey could be suggesting that it is time for Australia to become a republic. *Jack Maggs* also suggests that Australian identities should not be restricted by the inheritance of English outlook of the convict and guilty offender. Instead, it is time to position Australia's English inheritance into Australian histories. Analogous to the burden of Lucinda's inheritance Australia wants to, "slough off the great weight of her inheritance."

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