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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ANTIPODEAN REWRITINGS OF *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*: PETER CAREY'S *JACK MAGGS* (1997) AND LLOYD JONES'S *MISTER PIP* (2007)

JANET WILSON

Counter-discourse theory urges readings of postcolonial fictions that are renarrativisations of canonical texts of empire in terms of their strategies of resistance. Recent novels by Peter Carey and Lloyd Jones amply acknowledge their debt to their precursor, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, but this chapter argues that the contestatory imperial relationship is overlaid with the equally compelling theme of postcolonial home and belonging. Carey exploits the oppositional "writing back" paradigm; Jones, by contrast, makes veneration of the Dickensian text central to his plot. Both, however, can also be described as diasporic novels in their preoccupation with the colony as home, as their colonial protagonists, after a fraught encounter with their Victorian heritage in the metropolitan centre of London, find their destiny/destination in the "return." Although this diasporic reading reiterates the familiar binaries of metropolitan centre and colonial periphery, it repositions the filial relationship as one of postcolonial habitation and settlement.

You prisoners of New South Wales,
Who frequent watchhouses and gaols
A story to you I will tell
'Tis of a convict's tour to hell.

(Francis McNamara, "A Convict's Tour to Hell"—composed a.d. 1839)¹

This chapter compares two recent antipodean novels, Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2007), both rewritings of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, in order to suggest that their engagement with the precursor's themes of thwarted expectations and self-

delusions culminates in new fictional departures. The exact relationship of the novels to the Dickensian canonical text of empire is complex and varied. Both move beyond the boundaries of decolonisation fiction, which in its oppositional use of language, its revisioning of colonial history and “‘rewriting’ of canonical stories” aims to destabilise the “assumption of authority, ‘voice’ and control of the word” within the dominant discourse.²

The practice of “writing back” to European canonical stories is relevant to any reading of *Jack Maggs*.³ In many ways Carey’s novel conforms to Helen Tiffin’s definition of the postcolonial counter-discourse as one that “writes back to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds” not as a substitute, but in order “to evolve textual strategies which continually consume their own biases at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse.”⁴ In telling the “alternative” story of *Great Expectations* by focusing on the convict Magwitch, who is reincarnated as the eponymous Jack Maggs, Carey adopts one strategy associated with the model, that used by Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, of making central a minor colonial character (i.e. Charlotte Brontë’s mad woman in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason, becomes Rhys’s Creole protagonist, Antoinette Cosway). He is less interested in exposing the blind spots and omissions of the Dickensian text, as occurs in a counter-discourse according to Tiffin,⁵ than in engaging with issues of precedence, canonicity and literary authority. Carey has described the theme of the convict wanting his son to be an English gentleman as “such an Aussie story,”⁶ and he further situates his novel firmly within the Australian literary tradition through a range of allusions and borrowings. He also promotes a version of colonial Australia as a place of good fortune, and in the final section in particular, in which Jack Maggs returns “home” from the heart of empire to live out a settled and happy existence, he moves decisively beyond the writing back contestatory framework.⁷

Lloyd Jones’s novel *Mister Pip*, by contrast, as Jennifer Lawn argues, cannot in any way be considered a resistant counter-discourse: the parallels to and borrowings from its source are too mediated by the process of telling to constitute a textual critique. Instead the novel demonstrates the opposite, homologous practice of reinforcing textual continuity with its European source by constructing a reverential relationship to the Dickensian parent.⁸ Rather than generate dynamic textual resistance to its Victorian precursor, *Mister Pip* celebrates the power of storytelling and reading, and revalues *Great Expectations* as vital cultural capital for the subaltern subject who suffers in the traumatic present moment. The narrator, Matilda, who tells of the tragedies that occurred in her village in

war-torn Bougainville in the early 1990s when she was only thirteen, later reflects on how the reading of *Great Expectations* by her teacher, Mr Watts, inspired her to identify with the Dickensian hero Pip. These elements of the *künstlerroman* (in the conclusion Matilda decides to write the very story which is being read) complicate and extend the relationship to the European source. As in *Jack Maggs*, there is the same engagement with the authority of the precursor text, the wish to appropriate narrative authority, and the concluding belief that “home” is in the southern hemisphere.

Jack Maggs, a hybrid mix of historical fiction, convict literature and postmodern pastiche, is closely aligned to the Dickensian source which it critiques; it includes interactions with its characters as well as a newly invented author surrogate of Dickens, named Tobias Oates. The novel’s action takes place over three weeks, from 6 April to 13 May in 1837, during which time Jack Maggs, like Magwitch, arrives back in England vowing to challenge the class system that was responsible for his incarceration, and to reclaim his English identity. He soon becomes ensnared in a metadiscourse about authors and textual authority in which Dickens/Oates is a new persecutor. *Mister Pip*, by contrast, can be described as neocolonial; it is marked by racial differences, and conflict between troops hired by the local mining company and local rebels in a Pacific Island setting. *Great Expectations* is used as a pedagogic tool for teaching native school children during this crisis, and the transmission of the Victorian story in an oral format establishes a link with European “civilising” values. The novel’s uncritical reception among the villagers reduplicates the enthusiastic reception of Dickens in the colonies.⁹ But in the story the villagers’ celebration of Pip as hero threatens Christian belief, indigenous superstition, and the neocolonial redskin soldiers who attack their village.

Mister Pip shares motifs and themes with *Jack Maggs* that cumulatively suggest that the colony itself can be celebrated as a new space of belonging. Matilda’s affiliation with Maggs/Magwitch appears in her travel to London in order to discover more about Dickens and *Great Expectations* after she leaves the island. The metropolis becomes the site for testing ideals and exposing misconceptions, prompting the protagonists’ decision to reclaim their colonial status and return to the colony. In both novels, delusions about gentility and Englishness are a masculine trait shared by the orphan figures, Jack Maggs and Mr Watts, the school teacher in *Mister Pip*. The arc of disappointment they define can also be traced to the arbitrariness and collapse of filiative relationships (Mr Watts loses his baby daughter, Matilda loses her mother, Jack Maggs is betrayed

by his adoptive mother and the son whom he adopted). In both novels, the parallel quests for identity and belonging on the part of Matilda and Jack Maggs develop through a growing emphasis on the importance of storytelling and authorship, as the role and authorisation of the teller moves from one character to another. In *Mister Pip*, the tale-telling moves from Mr Watts, who teaches the village children, to the children themselves, as collectively they reassemble the story of *Great Expectations* after the book disappears, to the villagers who tell their stories, and finally to Matilda, the narrator, who claims the current text as her own.¹⁰ In *Jack Maggs*, the narrator's story about Maggs is overlaid with Maggs's stories of his life (one written in invisible ink and the second told under mesmerism to Tobias Oates), as well as Oates's story about the convict, which is eventually published as *The Death of Maggs*. The proliferation of oral narratives occurs alongside the destruction of written stories: the book of *Great Expectations* is stolen by Matilda's mother in *Mister Pip*, the draft of *The Death of Maggs* is burnt in *Jack Maggs*. The storytelling space opens up for new narratives despite these losses, as the narrator in the conclusion of *Jack Maggs* and Matilda in the conclusion of *Mister Pip* confirm. Finally, both novels are concerned with the genesis of the novel as articulated by the subaltern voice: the Indigenous "other" in *Mister Pip* and the cast-out victim of the Victorian class system in *Jack Maggs*.

In this chapter, observing what John Thieme calls "consanguinities" as well as differences between the novels, I ask how far a counter-discourse can be applied as a model for a reading practice. Its usefulness is restricted by the generic complexity of the novels and the model's limitations: that is, the dependence on a binary opposition between imperial and postcolonial discourses, the conception of colonial discourse as unitary, the homogenising of postcolonial literatures into an oppositional mould or as complicitous in the very structures they seek to resist.¹¹ I suggest alternatively that the diasporic narrative paradigm, which gains its momentum from the dislocation of the characters in the metropolitan centre, and their relocation to the colony through a revaluing of homeland and homecoming, more aptly captures the novels' concerns with the discovery of belonging. These values are celebrated by way of a conclusion, rather than being the dramatic core of the text, yet they convey optimism, and new departures from the complex relationship with empire. Whether challenging and overturning the writing back paradigm, as Carey does in *Jack Maggs*, or questioning the accuracy and authority of textual transmission, as the narrator of *Mister Pip* does, neither entirely escapes the hierarchical and oppositional structures inherent in the filial relationship. Both, however, in linking storytelling and the genesis of the novel to home

and a homecoming suggest the colony is a site for imaginary fictional beginnings. The articulation of the return home motif, arguably a feature of contemporary antipodean fiction,¹² reflects the white settler desire in New Zealand and Australia for increased indigeneity and settlement. The novels, therefore, might be considered as examples of diasporic writing—what Roger Bromley calls “narratives for a new belonging”¹³—in which issues of home and belonging are framed by narrative tropes associated with exile and migration, dislocation, and the “return” as the axis of self-realisation and empowerment.

The novels invoke familiar Victorian stereotypes of the colony as a place of danger and destruction, a dark pit of hell down under, only to overturn them.¹⁴ The Dickensian legacy—the horrors of punishment by deportation to the penal colony of New South Wales—is a cogent point of entry into the colonial past in *Jack Maggs*. Maggs relives this trauma upon his return to England, when he is haunted by a phantom figure associated with his scourging as a convict during sessions of mesmerism at the hands of the Dickens’ surrogate, Tobias Oates (the latter hoping to extract his stories). The stereotype appears in *Mister Pip* in the context of the neocolonial world of Bougainville, and in the atrocities committed during the blockade of 1990–94 against the foreign mining company exporting the island’s copper. The indigenous community has been deserted by the whites, who had provided their entire educational and medical infrastructure; the villagers are at the mercy of the redskin soldiers brought from Port Moresby to fight for the mining company. Emblematic of the dark pit of hell is the claustrophobic, impenetrable jungle, a hiding place for the villagers, a place where rebels hold secret workshops, a site for atrocities committed by the redskins.

The challenge to this stereotype of the colony as hell is mounted by the male protagonists, who proclaim Englishness as a source of history, belonging and identity. Deluded in this belief, they ultimately must reconcile it with their colonial identities. Concepts of English identity and the English gentleman have become detached from their original class and social signifiers, but these metropolitan-based values require new understanding in order to be re-assimilated into neocolonial contexts. Matilda and Maggs carry this forward in both novels, and this move is linked with new stories that emerge from their critique of the Dickensian author figure and his textual authority.

Carey’s novel opens with the eponymous Jack Maggs, surrogate for the shadowy, sinister Magwitch of the Dickensian precursor, travelling “home” to England from the hell-hole of the penal colony of New South Wales to where he had been deported, with the aim of reinforcing his

Englishness. Carey's counter-discursive strategies are played out in Maggs's moral education in Victorian London, which in 1837 was at the height of its power as the centre of the British Empire. His claim to belong—"But you see, I am a fucking *Englishman*, and I have English things to settle. I am not to live my life with all that vermin. I am here in London where I belong"¹⁵—includes reviling Australia (where in fact he has prospered financially and personally by becoming a pub owner and fathering two children): "I am not of that race ... The Australian race ... The race of Australians ... I am an Englishman."¹⁶ Orphaned at the age of three months, a victim of the class system and pushed into a life of crime, Maggs is obsessed with reinventing himself and his adopted son, Henry Phipps (the Pip figure), as English gentlemen. His fantasy of becoming an icon of respectability within the same socially unjust order that had determined his deportation includes reunion with Phipps. But already a "permanent outsider,"¹⁷ Maggs meets with even more savage rejection upon his return, and his three-week visit in the summer of 1837 culminates in the realisation that the father-son relationship is false and doomed to failure. The crooked and callous Phipps immediately goes into hiding when he hears of his return, harbours murderous instincts towards his father, and is incited to fire a pistol at him when they meet at the novel's end.

The returnee's rejection has symbolic overtones: Maggs is refused access to his "foster mother," an abortionist who introduced him to a life of childhood crime, named Mary—"Ma"—Britten and "the Queen of England,"¹⁸ both evidence of Mother England's casting out of her returned sons. It is only in the novel's conclusion, when he becomes romantically attached to the appropriately named Mercy Larkin, servant to Mr Percy Buckle, the *nouveau arriviste* grocer for whom Maggs also works, that he is freed from the prison-house of his delusion. Mercy is his agent in this release, notably from the traumatic reliving in his mesmeric sessions of being lashed by a phantom soldier. To his comment that he was lashed by a cockney, a soldier of the King, she responds that both the punishment (and the Victorian judicial system), were imperially induced: "Then it were the King [i.e. George IV dressed as a commoner] who lashed you."¹⁹

Being a victim of this imaginary England of the mind is also true of Mr Watts in *Mister Pip*, whose excessive embrace of his Victorian cultural heritage, symbolised by his preaching of *Great Expectations* as "an enlightened cultural gospel,"²⁰ gives him intellectual ascendancy over the Indigenous villagers. Originally from Wellington, New Zealand, Mr Watts, "the last white man" in the village, over-invests in whiteness. He dresses as "a gentleman" in a white linen suit, an old white shirt and he

wears a tie,²¹ identifying, as Alistair Fox says, with the “imaginary plenitude of the European culture of his forebears.”²² On becoming the village school teacher, he reads to the children a chapter a day from his copy of *Great Expectations*, encouraging them to identify with the life of Pip. The narrator’s approval of whiteness as the colour of all important things—“ice-cream, aspirin, ribbon, the moon, the stars”—suggests her Eurocentrism in identifying racial differences: black (the villagers), red (the New Guinean redskins of the *wontok* system, who worked for the mine and patrol the island in gun boats and helicopters) and white (Mr Watts).²³ But she also notes Watts’s disconnection from reality and his search for refuge in fiction: “Away from Mr Dickens and England, Mr Watts was lost,” because he was “more comfortable in the world of Mr Dickens than he was in our black-faced world of superstition and mythic flying fish.”²⁴

The stereotypical associations of Englishness and whiteness, introduced through readings of the Dickensian text, provokes the search of the first-person narrator, Matilda, into the previous identity of Mr Watts, after these values are challenged through Watts’s death. Jones ignores the liberationist potential of his theme of anti-colonial insurrection, and reasserts the background to his story in equally stereotypical images of anarchic disorder: the rebels (“independence fighters”) are typecast as little more than children, illiterate villagers doomed to almost certain death in the unequal conflict, while the redskin soldiers (employed by the mining company), exhausted by malaria and yellow-eyed with jaundice, employ guerrilla tactics, raiding villages in search of the rebels, and killing indiscriminately. Like Matilda’s mother, Dolores Laimo, who is jealous of the place the white boy Pip has in the heart of her daughter—Matilda traces his name in the sand of their beach—the redskins are threatened by “Mr Pip’s” charisma among the villagers, and conceive of him as a potentially dangerous rebel leader. When the evidence of the book itself, which would prove that Pip is no more than a character in a story, is not available, because Dolores Laimo has hidden it, they demand to see him in person. Mr Watts’s punishment for identifying himself as Mr Pip in an attempt to save the villagers from being massacred is to be shot and fed to the pigs. This is also the fate of Matilda’s mother, who offers up herself in a similarly questionable heroic gesture, in order to save her daughter from being raped.

Jones, as Jennifer Lawn points out, constructs a narrative voice that is consistently equivalent to that of a young child, and lacks the more sophisticated diction of the older Pip who looks back on his younger self critically in the parent text.²⁵ But Jones is interested in the way that the

imagination, when inspired by the reading process, can interact with the pressures of reality and overtake them by providing a refuge of its own. Matilda has to reconcile Mr Watts's gift to the children with her perception that he had in other ways misled them by bowdlerising Dickens' story. She discovers upon reading the full text of *Great Expectations* in the school library at Townsville that he had avoided the fact of evil by omitting the episodes of Orlick who attempts to kill Pip, and the other convict, Compeyson, with whom Magwitch struggles and dispatches to a watery grave. She learns upon meeting his first wife in Wellington that he was a weak man who may not have saved her from the redskins, even had he been able to do so. She records that Mr Watts confesses to the villagers that his charismatic promotion of Pip as hero "is a confusion that I did not see coming until it was too late."²⁶ Yet the novel suggests that his sacrifice is ultimately empowering for Matilda because it leads to a growth of moral awareness. Mr Watts's elusiveness to the villagers reflects a symbiotic relationship: "He was whatever he needed to be, what we asked him to be. We needed a teacher, Mr Watts became that teacher. [...] When we needed a saviour Mr Watts had filled that role. When the redskins required a life Mr Watts had given himself."²⁷

Contemporary theorists of diaspora such as Avtar Brah, Jana Braziel and Anna Mannur, and R Radhakrishnan, argue that recent transnational writing about migration, exile and travel overturns the divisions of colony and empire, is accountable to more than one concept of homeland, including a "homing instinct," and complicates notions of nation, location and identity by demonstrating that home is "living within the hyphen."²⁸ Both novels can be read as transnational along these lines, in their testing of relative values and locations of home: their protagonists return to the original metropolitan homeland of England and subsequently revalue their colonial habitation. But the themes of homeland return and new fictional beginnings depend on the familiar contrast between colony and metropole, and their inevitable reinscription of the binaries of the writing back paradigm differentiates these novels from other diasporic novels which may embrace multiple locations and plural journeys.²⁹ In *Jack Maggs*, the original Dickensian text is reassessed with an historical consciousness: Carey's critique of the ideology of Victorian class and empire replicates the language and atmosphere of the times in a realist fashion. Jokes are included—Carey Street, for example, is realistically located in the maze of London Streets³⁰—and names, titles and positions are ironically inflected, such as Ma Britten (Mother Britain), the name of the dishonest abortionist who brings up Maggs and teaches him to be a thief; but Carey is less

interested in verisimilitude than the construction of illusion through parody and pastiche.

Carey takes further the “writing back” paradigm as exemplified in the modernist practice of Jean Rhys. Like his other fictions, the counterdiscursive strategies introduced in *Jack Maggs* precipitate his challenge to the European literary tradition. As Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp points out, this is undertaken in order to negotiate his complex place at the edge of empire.³¹ Carey plays with ideas of fictive beginnings and origins, with authorship and authority, and by using postmodern metafictional techniques extends the emphasis on the arbitrariness and failure of filiative relationships to the Victorian legacy that underpins the *Jack Maggs* story. The theme of theft, which dominates the Magwitch story in *Great Expectations*, is reintroduced at the meta-level in order to complicate assumptions about creativity, authorship and ownership. The Dickensian story of a return with its moral improvement is superseded by a prolonged struggle over the authorial control of Maggs’s story extracted from him by mesmerism by Tobias Oates (who resembles Dickens, who practised mesmerism on his wife and friends in 1842, in the belief that, like poetry, mesmerism exemplified the inventive powers of the imagination). Oates wants to pin down the criminal mind in order to write a novel, to be published as *The Death of Maggs*; Carey, in a self-reflexive gesture, converts this into a struggle over the ownership of the convict’s story.

By suggesting that Oates/Dickens is “colonising” Maggs for his own purposes, and rewriting the story of the thief (Magwitch) who makes good, Carey shifts the moral focus away from the Victorian question of what makes a gentleman, into issues of textual authority/authorship. In delineating Phipps’s attempt to “steal” Maggs’s life for fictional ends, with its implications of Dickens’ own practice as literary predator, Carey exposes “the deceptions practiced by imperial fictions of England on its offspring.”³² As Annegret Maack points out, the thief who is an author (Maggs) reversed into the author who is a thief (Oates/Dickens) provides a new equivalence between centre and periphery.³³

Furthermore, by implying that the story of Maggs/Magwitch was never “given” to Oates by its antipodean protagonist, Carey subverts the linear relationship between canonical text and colonial descendant, the original and its sequel, just as he destabilises the power of creator over created, coloniser over colonised, conscious over unconscious. In disrupting this order, he undermines the notion of the original text that is central to the “writing back” paradigm. In the words of Bruce Woodcock he thereby extends his “act of postcolonial retaliation against a parent culture.”³⁴ Maggs’s resistance epitomises the novel’s enactment of a form of textual

resistance to being “authored” by a metropolitan voice. Carey gets his back on Oates in a metafictional rebellion against the author and writes in his journal that “now it is the criminal mind that controlled Tobias.”³⁵ Oates is never allowed to control the story while Maggs is alive; it is abandoned after Maggs destroys the manuscripts, and only written down (and serialised, as was *Great Expectations*) in 1859, two or three years after his death under the title *The Death of Maggs*.³⁶ In the conclusion we are told that seven copies are sent to his wife Mercy in Australia, who gives them to the Mitchell Library (but with the dedication to Percy Buckle, former employer of Mercy and Maggs, cut out, in denial of the “enunciatory power that such enshrinement normally entails”),³⁷ so ensuring the literary survival of Maggs and his life story. Carey concludes his pointed appropriation of Dickens’ text by making the serialisation of *The Death of Maggs* correspond to the exact dates of the serialisation of *Great Expectations* in Britain in 1860–61 in *All the Year Round*.

As Denis Hassell, Bruce Woodcock and others have argued, the culminating perception that a royalist, imperial ideology lies behind his imprisonment underpins the process of identity change as Maggs transforms himself into an Australian and makes good his escape with Mercy from London back to Australia, where together they found a dynasty.³⁸ This distancing from the original is also reinforced by affinities and overlap with other texts of the Australian literary canon. Carey’s adaptation of Dickens’ novel conforms, for example, to the well-established sub-genre about returnees. The deluded return to the metropolitan homeland is the subject of *The Way Home* (1925), volume two of Henry Handel Richardson’s trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* (1917–1929), in which Richard Mahoney, an English migrant to Australia who returns to England, fails in his attempt to resettle and re-migrates to Australia; and also of Martin Boyd’s novel, *When Blackbirds Sing* (1962). Similarities have also been found between *Jack Maggs*, and the colonial male adventure novel, such as Rolf Boldrewood’s *Robbery Under Arms* (1882–1883), and convict literature like Marcus Clarke’s classic novel, *His Natural Life* (1874), and the poem by Francis McNamara, the epigraph to this chapter. Australian texts overlap with English intertexts such as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*—Mercy’s alternative ending was to have married Percy Buckle, and so like Pamela improve her class status—and complicate the filiative relationship and line of descent from original to Carey’s text by introducing satire and comic distance.³⁹

Unlike Peter Carey in *Jack Maggs*, Lloyd Jones does not draw on the local literary canon to reinforce and contextualise his alternative story to

that of the ur-text; instead he develops *Mister Pip* into a *künstlerroman* by foregrounding the values associated with the migrant, diasporic subject whose journey leads to reinterpretation of the meaning of home. Matilda assimilates Mr Watts's values about social mobility and self-determination, and his understanding of Pip's transition from one level of society to another as a migration: "Each leaves behind the place they grew up in. Each strikes out on his own. Each is free to create himself anew."⁴⁰ Like Pip she will discover her destiny by leaving the island, the only home she has known, travelling to her father in Townsville, then to Wellington to find out more about Mr Watts, and finally to London, to complete her enquiry about what he means to her. A sense of belonging remains with her as part of her response to *Great Expectations*, because in identifying and empathising with Pip's relationship to Joe Gargery she learns to revalue her island environment as her true home. Dwelling on the importance of the forge where Joe lives—it "was home: it embraced all those things that give a life its shape"⁴¹—she lists what home means. This proleptic moment anticipates the novel's conclusion in which she consciously decides to defy the odds (being a girl and black), to use her own voice to tell the story, and to return home: "Pip was my story, even if I was once a girl, and my face black as the shining night. Pip is my story, and in the next day I would try where Pip had failed. I would try and return home."⁴²

Matilda arrives at this decision after her search for the real Mr Dickens leads her to abandon her doctoral research on him in the British Library. Her visits to Rochester and the foundling Hospital in Brunswick Square, in Gravesend, to see the mannequin of the author reclining on a chair in his study—a false tourist image of the Dickens she had been introduced to in the tropics—lead to disillusionment. She then conflates Dickens, the author and historical figure, with Mr Watts, who is *her* Mr Dickens (but also the agent of that transmission), and Pip's story with her own. This process of transition means converting her search for an historic truth into an act of reconstruction—that is, of writing her own life story.

Mr Watts's obsession with Dickens as an icon of Englishness reflects the enthusiastic colonial reception of Dickens in Australia; for example, at its peak, 3,000 copies of *Nicholas Nickleby* were consumed in the first printing and 30,000 copies of a pirated edition of *Pickwick Papers* published in Hobart in 1838 were sold.⁴³ Yet as *Mister Pip*'s action is generated by imposing a single Eurocentric discourse on a native epistemology, its ideology is comparable with the Christianising motives of colonial education. Helen Tiffin alludes to the importance of "great" literature in arguing that canonical counter-discourse aims to "investigate

the European textual capture and containment of colonial and postcolonial space”:

often the very [colonial] texts which facilitated such material and psychical capture [of alterity] by colonizers were those which the imposed European education systems foisted on the colonized as the “great” literature which deals with “universals”; ones whose culturally specific terms were to be accepted as axiomatic at the colonial margins. Achebe has noted the ironies of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* being taught in colonial African universities.⁴⁴

Jones’s novel, in extolling the virtues of an enlightened text such as *Great Expectations*, and illustrating its halo of goodwill to the point where the school teacher lays down his life for the children in a sacrificial gesture, would seem to subscribe to liberal humanist beliefs;⁴⁵ certainly it seems to confirm the “inaugural power” of the English colonial book that John O Jordan attributes to Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby*, which was read avidly in a cattle station in outback southeastern Australia in 1841–42.⁴⁶ But Matilda’s search for understanding draws attention to the folly of promoting the text in this messianic way as she takes on the role of the Pip figure. The last section of *Mister Pip* exposes the discrepancy between the colonial enthusiasm for Dickens on account of his “cultural authority and originary enunciative power,” and Matilda’s contemporary postcolonial reality in which she evolves from subaltern subject into an author figure.⁴⁷

The major differences in the novels’ treatment of their Victorian source can be traced to the cultural contexts and patterns of settlement in both countries. Carey’s revisionary approach to the early history of New South Wales as a penal colony provides a crucial motive for applying the writing back paradigm to *Great Expectations*. In the conclusion he overturns this stereotype associated with convict literature: Maggs has four more children by Mercy and gains prosperity and social status as president of Winghamshire in New South Wales. In contrast, Jones, a New Zealander (*Mister Pip* was first set in New Zealand, but Jones changed the setting to Bougaineville when he realised that the dichotomising of white and Indigenous ethnicities might be problematic at a time when the government was implementing an official bicultural racial policy),⁴⁸ shows affinities with the New Zealand literary tradition in which European or British intertexts function as extensions, parallels, or analogies to the story being told, rather than as part of a counter-discursive strategy.⁴⁹ Like other New Zealand novels *Mister Pip* shows little evidence of an adversarial, contestatory relationship to the English canon, one that would require conscious intervention into and reformulation of colony–empire power

relations. The almost complete lack of “acts of filial rebellion” against the imperial centre may be attributed to the Anglicisation of New Zealand through colonisation,⁵⁰ and its stereotyping as a “Better Britain” and a “Pastoral Paradise” where settler dreams might be realised.⁵¹ This was initiated through the propaganda of the Wakefield New Zealand Company, which recruited British citizens as settlers.⁵²

If the oppositional writing back paradigm exposes culturally specific and national differences in the novels, the diasporic-postcolonial model reveals commonalities: notably the subaltern subject’s propensity to be deluded by the imagination and by longing for the metropole. Writing is celebrated as a mode of articulating and confronting such blind-spots. Carey’s novel has affinities with other antipodean narratives about “the return” (both to the metropolitan homeland of England and to the colony), while both dwell on the motif of individual transformation through writing fictive auto/biography (Maggs writes his story in invisible ink which, as Thieme argues, suggests the plight of the subaltern who cannot make his words fully visible).⁵³ Finally, and crucially for a reading based on the diasporic tropes of migration, exile and home, there is a common emphasis on the individual trajectory, as Pip’s journey through the class system in *Great Expectations* develops into the journeys made by Maggs and Matilda between colony and metropole and back again.

Mister Pip has been read as an “allegory of colonialism,”⁵⁴ and *Jack Maggs* as a postcolonial, postmodern rewriting of the Dickensian text: both can partly be viewed in terms of the writing back paradigm which Richard Terdiman claims is about re/location of meaning: “Situated as other, counter discourses have the capacity to *situate*: to relativize the authority and stability of a dominant system of utterances which cannot even countenance their existence.”⁵⁵ But I suggest in conclusion that the model of diasporic writing offers a somewhat different perspective. The relocation of storytelling and stories in the colony displaces the hegemonic discourse of the precursor text rather than relativises it, as a different community of readers is anticipated in the colonial home, which in these two novels is claimed by their narrators as a place of belonging and a host to new fictions.

Notes

¹ McNamara, Francis. "A Convict's Tour to Hell," in *Hell and After: Four early English-language poets of Australia*, ed. Les Murray (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 2005), 12.

² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 82, 91, 97.

³ Bruce Woodcock, *Peter Carey*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003), 122.

⁴ Helen Tiffin, "Postcolonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," *Kunapipi* 3 (1987): 18.

⁵ Tiffin, "Postcolonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," 22.

⁶ Ramona Koval, "The Unexamined Life: An interview with Peter Carey," *Virtuous Reality*, special issue of *Meanjin* 56.3–4 (1997): 669.

⁷ John Thieme also argues that Carey is staking out different territory for postcolonial fiction. See *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 109.

⁸ Jennifer Lawn, "What the Dickens: Storytelling and Intertextuality in Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip*," in *Floating Worlds: Essays on Contemporary New Zealand Fiction*, ed. Anna Jackson and Jane Stafford (Wellington: Victoria Univ. Press, 2009), 151.

⁹ JO Jordan in "Dickens Re-Visioned: Jack Maggs and the 'English Book'," in *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenges of Reading*, ed. Rossana Bonadei and Clotilde de Stasio. Proceedings of the Milan Symposium, Gargnano, September 1998 (Maggio: Edizioni Unicopli, 2000), 293, comments that of all English writers, Dickens most embodied cultural authority in Australia.

¹⁰ Lawn, "What the Dickens," 144–50.

¹¹ Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, "The Writing-Back Paradigm Revisited: Peter Carey, *Jack Maggs*, and Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*," in *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey*, ed. Andreas Gaile (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), 247–8; Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts*, 2–4.

¹² See, for example, Janet Frame's *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962); Elizabeth Jolley's *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* (1983) and Murray Bail's *Homesickness* (1980); cited by Janet Wilson, "Constructing the Metropolitan Homeland: The Literatures of the White Settler Societies of New Zealand and Australia," in *Comparing Postcolonial Diasporas*, ed. Michelle Keown, David Murphy, and James Procter (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 138–9.

¹³ Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2000), 1.

¹⁴ Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts*, 4.

¹⁵ Peter Carey, *Jack Maggs* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), 128.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 312–13.

¹⁷ Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1988), 588.

¹⁸ Carey, *Jack Maggs*, 92–3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 318; cited by Woodcock, *Peter Carey*, 126.

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- ²⁰ Alistair Fox, "Inwardness, Insularity, and the Man Alone: Postcolonial Anxiety in the New Zealand novel," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45, no. 3 (2009): 270.
- ²¹ Lloyd Jones, *Mister Pip* (London: John Murray, 2008 [2006]), 59.
- ²² Fox, "Inwardness, Insularity, and the Man Alone," 270.
- ²³ Jones, *Mister Pip*, 4.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25, 58.
- ²⁵ Lawn, "What the Dickens," 160, referring to the rating made by Janice Harayda, "*Mister Pip*": *One Minute Book Reviews*, 27 September 2007. <http://oneminutebookreviews.wordpress.com/2007/09/24> (n.d.).
- ²⁶ Jones, *Mister Pip*, 92.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.
- ²⁸ JE Braziel, and A Mannur, "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies," in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, eds JE Braziel and A Mannur (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 3; Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 16, 180, 193; R Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location* (Minneapolis, MN and London: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996), 175–6.
- ²⁹ See, for example, the discussion by Syrine Hout in "The Last Migration: The First Contemporary Example of Lebanese Diasporic Literature," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 43, no. 3 (December 2007): 286–96.
- ³⁰ Jordan, "Dickens Re-Visioned," 298; for an Australian literary in-joke on the names of Hazlitt and Hasluck (author of a novel titled *Quarantine*), see Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts*, 114–15.
- ³¹ Schmidt-Haberkamp, "The Writing-Back Paradigm Revisited," 248–9.
- ³² Woodcock, *Peter Carey*, 128.
- ³³ Annegret Maack, "Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*: An Aussie Story?" ed. Gaile, *Fabulating Beauty*, 234.
- ³⁴ Woodcock, *Peter Carey*, 122.
- ³⁵ Carey, *Jack Maggs*, 271.
- ³⁶ Woodcock, *Peter Carey*, 122.
- ³⁷ Jordan, "Dickens Re-Visioned," 299.
- ³⁸ Anthony J Hassall, "A Tale of Two Countries; *Jack Maggs* and Peter Carey's Fiction," *Australian Literary Studies* 18, no. 2 (1997): 132; Woodcock, *Peter Carey*, 121–2.
- ³⁹ On these intertexts see Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts*, 117–22.
- ⁴⁰ Jones, *Mister Pip*, 78.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 46–7.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 219.
- ⁴³ Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts*, 103.
- ⁴⁴ Tiffin, "Postcolonial Literatures," 22.
- ⁴⁵ Lawn, "What the Dickens," 162.
- ⁴⁶ Jordan, "Dickens Re-Visited," 293.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, referring to Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 102.
- ⁴⁸ Fox, "Inwardness, Insularity, and the Man Alone," 269–70.

⁴⁹ Lawn, "What the Dickens," 151–3.

⁵⁰ Mark Williams, "A Waka on the Wild Side: Nationalism and its Discontents," in *Contemporary New Zealand Cinema: From New Wave to Blockbuster*, eds Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray (London: IB Tauris, 2008), 183–4.

⁵¹ Founded in 1838 by Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796–1862) and largely responsible for establishing settler communities in South Australia and New Zealand.

⁵² J Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (London: Alan Lane and Penguin, 2001).

⁵³ Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts*, 116.

⁵⁴ Fox, "Inwardness, Insularity, and the Man Alone," 269.

⁵⁵ Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-century France* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 16.