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**BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN REALITY AND FICTION:
PETER CAREY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
AND IDENTITY**

NEJASNÁ HRANICE MEZI SKUTEČNOSTÍ A FIKCÍ: AUSTRALSKÁ HISTORIE A
IDENTITA V POJETÍ PETERA CAREYHO

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I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze dne

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations used in referencing the following works of Peter Carey throughout this thesis:

- (30D) *30 Days in Sydney*. London: Bloomsbury, 2008.
- (IL) *Illywhacker*. London: Faber and Faber, 1985.
- (MLF) *My Life as a Fake*. London: Faber and Faber, 2003.
- (OL) *Oscar and Lucinda*. London: Faber and Faber, 1988.
- (TH) *True History of the Kelly Gang*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the analysis of Peter Carey's portrayal of Australian history in his novels *Illywhacker* (1985), *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), and *My Life as a Fake* (2003), while also taking into consideration the travel memoir *30 Days in Sydney* (2001). Carey approaches Australia's past critically and offers a playful rewriting of the "official accounts", striving to give voice to the marginalised, thus offering alternative versions not only of Australian history, but also the resulting national identity. This thesis first locates Carey within the historical novel tradition, and considers his rewritings from the perspective of postcolonialism, postmodernism and transnationalism. From the point of view of postcolonialism, Carey's novels serve as a tool of asserting the former colony's independence from the power of the metropolitan Centre over discourse. Postmodernism and its relativisation of established concepts and the blurring of boundaries provide Carey with narrative strategies such as unreliable narrators, historiographic metafiction, and multiple perspectives, which are examined in terms of how Carey employs them to call attention to the unreliability of historical sources, and by extension meaning and reality itself, to inspire a critical approach to history and nationality. His novels thus provide the reader with multiple versions of history, without singling one out as the definitive one. This thesis further explores how this inclusive approach is mirrored in Carey's approach to Australian identity, in which he questions the nationalist rhetoric stemming from the Australian Legend. His novels reflect the transnational reality of Australian culture, which has from the beginning been formed by multiple cultural interactions, drawing on diverse cultural capital, as demonstrated by the capital Carey draws on, as well as through his characters with foreign heritage. Through close readings of the selected novels within the aforementioned critical discourses this thesis comes to a greater understanding of Carey's strategies of subverting the established version of Australian history and Australian identity. By focusing on the historical, cultural, and literary context of his works, on his narrative strategies, the theme of lying, and the construction of national identity in his novels, this thesis presents Carey's view of Australia, which is quite critical, precisely because of Australia's inability to deal with its own past. Carey's novels are an attempt to aid in that process and help Australia come off age by fully accepting its past as well as its present.

ABSTRAKT

Diplomová práce se zabývá analýzou vyobrazení australské historie v románech Petera Careyho *Illywhacker* (1985), *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) a *My Life as a Fake* (2003), s přihlédnutím k jeho cestopisnému memoáru *30 Days in Sydney* (2001). Carey nahlíží australskou historii kriticky a předkládá čtenáři hravý přepis „oficiálních verzí“, kde dává prostor dosud opomíjeným hlasům. Nabízí tak alternativní pojetí nejen australské historie, ale i vzniklé národní identity. V předkládané práci je Carey nejprve zasazen do kontextu tradice historického románu, poté jsou jeho přepisy historie zkoumány z perspektivy postkolonialismu, postmodernismu a transnacionalismu. Z pohledu postkolonialismu slouží Careyho romány jako nástroj, který bývalé kolonii umožňuje upevnit svou nezávislost na metropolitním centru a vymanit se z jeho kontroly nad diskurzem. Postmodernismus, se svou relativizací zavedených pojmů a nejasnými hranicemi mezi pravdou a fikcí, poskytuje Careymu vyprávěcí postupy, jako jsou nespolehliví vypravěči, historiografická metafikce či užití několika perspektiv. Ty jsou zkoumány s ohledem na to, jak jich Carey užívá k upozornění na nespolehlivost historických pramenů, potažmo významu a skutečnosti jako takových, aby tak dal podnět ke kritickému přístupu k historii a národní identitě. Romány tedy čtenáři nabízejí několik verzí historických událostí, aniž by jednu z variant označily jako autoritativní. Práce dále zkoumá, jak se tento otevřený přístup odráží v Careyho pojetí australské identity, kde zpochybňuje nacionalistickou rétoriku s kořeny v „australské legendě“ konce 19. století. Jeho romány odrážejí transnacionalismus australské kultury, která od začátku byla a stále je formována různorodými vzájemnými kulturními vlivy a čerpá z různorodého kulturního kapitálu, což Carey předvádí v praxi jak kapitálem, na který navazuje, tak množstvím postav cizího původu. Pomocí pečlivého čtení (close reading) vybraných románů v kontextu již zmíněných kritických přístupů dospěla předkládaná práce k lepšímu porozumění Careyho strategiím, kterých užívá ke zpochybnění zavedených verzí australské historie a identity. Zaměření na historický, kulturní a literární kontext románů, na vyprávěcí postupy, téma lhaní a konstrukci národní identity umožňuje této práci vykreslit Careyho pohled na Austrálii, který je vcelku kritický, právě kvůli neschopnosti Australanů vyrovnat se s minulostí. Careyho romány chtějí k tomuto procesu přispět a pomoci Austrálii dospět tím, že plně přijme jak svou minulost, tak svou přítomnost.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the literary world Australia still occupies a peculiar position. Nowhere is this more apparent than in a literature department of an Australian university. In an Introduction to Australian Literature class at the University of Queensland we students were asked how many Australian works we had read. Most answered one or two that they were forced to read in high school. I, a student from a different country halfway across the world, appeared to have a much broader knowledge of the national literature of the country than its own citizens. The fact that the university offered only one other course in Australian literature that semester also shows the degree of interest in this field. Australians that I have encountered outside the university did not have much interest in Australian literature either.

It is not as if Australian literature is of little merit or that it is uninteresting. Instead one cannot help but be reminded of A. A. Phillips' essay "Cultural Cringe" from the 1950s, where he points to the prevailing conviction of Australians that their culture is somehow inferior. This remnant of colonialism persists today, and similar essays are still being written, for example Timoshenko Aslanides' "Australia's Ongoing Cultural Cringe" from June 2016, where the author states that "Australia [...] is still very much in the thrall of foreign cultures: of things English, thoughts American and travels European. I have met highly educated Canberrans who actually believe that Australia has no culture."¹ Thus Australians are much more likely to read books by American or English writers, or successful writers in translations, because these are massively advertised in our globalised world. Moreover, reading what the rest of the world is reading may also diminish that sense of isolation that Australians feel from the rest of the world.

The fact that an interest in Australian literature is not particularly encouraged at school or at universities also does not help promote the nation's literature. The publisher Michael Heyward complains that many classics of Australian literature – whether from 200 or 20 years ago – are out of print, rarely taught at school, and thus not subverting the students' misguided impressions that Australian literature is dry and "all about gum nuts and being lost in the bush and

¹ Timoshenko Aslanides, "Australia's Ongoing Cultural Cringe," *Independent Australia*, Independent Australia, 19 June 2016 <<https://independentaustralia.net/business/business-display/australias-ongoing-cultural-tinge,9128>> 14 Apr. 2017.

mateship”.² Contemporary Australian literature is perhaps not quite as neglected by readers (though still neglected by universities) as the classics and Heyward accounts for it in the following words: “What is it about a culture like ours in the way we charge headlong into the future? And we do charge headlong into the future.”³ However, many contemporary Australian writers rather charge headlong into the past in terms of their subject matter. Yet if the past is any more than a convenient setting, not all readers are particularly interested in looking back, even though – as these novels reveal – the past may have much to do with their future. Because when it comes to a viewing Australian history with a critical eye, the readers will likely prefer to charge into the future.

It is of no surprise then, that when I asked my Australian friends about Peter Carey – one of Australia’s best and most acclaimed contemporary writers, who won The Booker Prize twice and the Miles Franklin Award three times – only two (both high school teachers) had read some of his works. Most were aware of the name but they had never read him, nor seemed particularly interested when they were told what he wrote about. Of course, one cannot generalise based on the reaction of a couple of dozen people, yet it appears that Carey is not widely read by the general public. One reason may be that Carey is not an easy read, particularly due to his postmodern narrative strategies. His novels fit under the label of literary fiction, which compared to popular fiction does not sell nearly as well. A study of the book market in Australia conducted by Macquarie University estimates that literary books comprise only about 5% of book sales, and less than half of it is written by Australian writers.⁴ His novels are then primarily a domain of the more demanding reader. The novel that received the most attention from the general public is probably *True History of the Kelly Gang*, because it takes on such a famous figure, and also because it was extensively promoted around Australia. For example, the “One Book One Brisbane” campaign chose the novel to promote the reading of books by children and adults alike and inspire

² Michael Heyward, “Full Transcript: Michael Heyward,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Fairfax Media, 23 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.smh.com.au/national/full-transcript-michael-heyward-20120422-1xetw.html>> 14 Apr. 2017.

³ Heyward.

⁴ Jan Zwar, David Throsby, and Thomas Longden, “How to Read the Australian Book Industry in a Time of Change,” *The Conversation*, The Conversation Media Group, 14 Oct. 2015 <<http://theconversation.com/how-to-read-the-australian-book-industry-in-a-time-of-change-49044>> 16 Apr. 2017.

discussion, which boosted the sales of the book by approximately 8,000 copies, as the University of Queensland Press estimates.⁵

However, in light of Heyward's comment, Carey's ongoing concern with the past may be off-putting for some, as his novels do not romanticise history, nor use it only as a convenient setting, but actively question the issues in the nation's past that some people would rather forget about. While historical fiction has been popular with Australian readers and writers alike, Carey's rather radical and critical take on history may not be palatable for all, which explains the lack of first-hand experience with Carey's novels among my Australian friends. Still, his readership is reportedly considerable, as his sales have been high, especially after *Oscar and Lucinda* and *True History of the Kelly Gang* have won The Booker Prize,⁶ which has, however, been 29 and 16 years ago respectively, so current university students may indeed not have encountered him. He was not included on the syllabus of either of the Australian literature classes that I took at the University of Queensland. Although there is no readily available data, I would think his sales are higher abroad because, firstly, an Australian setting is still rather exotic for foreign readers, while the American one of some of his later novels also appeals to the bigger American market, and secondly, because Carey has lived in New York for almost 30 years now, and Australians tend to be suspicious of those who left to find success abroad.⁷ This is a classic example of the tall poppy syndrome widespread in Australia, as Carey acknowledges, which has often earned him initial bad reviews at home, like with *Illywhacker*, which has been called "a short story hiding in a novel", while received much more enthusiastically abroad.⁸

If quizzing my Australian friends on Peter Carey had unsatisfactory results, trying to ask anyone in the Czech Republic outside the English departments of universities would almost not be worth the effort. Australian

⁵ See David Fickling, "Legends of the Fall," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 25 Sep. 2002 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/sep/25/2>> 28 Oct. 2017.

⁶ The sales after a Booker Prize Win always rise dramatically, as *The Guardian* reports, including the numbers for Carey: "Booker Prize 2012: Sales for all the winners and the 2012 shortlist, including Hilary Mantel," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 10 Oct. 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/oct/10/booker-prize-2012-winners-sales-data>> 28 Oct. 2017.

⁷ See for example Graham Huggan, "Globaloney and the Australian Writer," *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 2009 Special Issue: Australian Literature in a Global World: 6.

⁸ See Carolyn See, "Why Australian Writers Keep Their Heads Down," *The New York Times Book Review* 14 May 1989: 36.

literature has been long neglected in the Czech cultural space, both in translation as well as education, even at said university departments, reflecting its peculiar position in the Anglophone literatures. So far, only four of Peter Carey's novels appeared in a Czech translation – *The Tax Inspector* in 1998 as *Daňová inspektorka*, *Oscar and Lucinda* and *True History of the Kelly Gang* in 2003 as *Oskar a Lucinda* and *Pravdivý příběh Kellyho a jeho bandy* following Carey's second Booker, and *Parrot and Olivier in America* in 2011 as *Parrot a Olivier v Americe*. The latter three were received very warmly by Czech critics,⁹ and Ladislav Nagy even lauds Carey as a brilliant writer and compares him to Cormac McCarthy, whose journey into the Czech language has likewise been difficult. However, until now none of the Czech translations have replicated what the Czech edition of *The Blood Meridian* did for McCarthy, leaving Nagy to bemoan the fact that Czech publishing houses and readers alike are not paying Carey enough attention, as the title of his essay on the subject announces – “Stále neznámý Peter Carey” (The still unknown Peter Carey).¹⁰ It is difficult to speculate whether this is because the readers' lack of interest in Australian issues, lack of publicity, or something completely different. One can only hope, like Nagy, that one day Carey will find his Czech readership that likewise has a lot to gain from Carey's novels which – although set in a remote environment – have a lot to say on topical issues of today, such as identity, nationalism, tolerance, and the lines between lies and truths.

All these issues are synthesised in Carey's explorations of Australian history, his major concern that surfaces in most of his novels. In his non-fiction work *30 Days in Sydney* Carey almost obsessively recounts what lies beneath the modern metropolis and remarks that “history is like a bloodstain that keeps on showing on the wall no matter how many new owners take possession, no matter how many times we paint over it”¹¹. This quotation perfectly sums up his approach to writing. He is aware of the Australian tendency to look to the future and through his writing he tries to force the readers to look into their past first,

⁹ See Jiří Hanuš, “Carey, Peter: Pravdivý příběh Neda Kelleyho a jeho bandy; Oskar a Lucinda,” *iLiteratura.cz*, Sdružení pro iliteraturu, 25 Nov. 2003

<<http://www.iliteratura.cz/Clanek/14803/carey-peter-pravdivy-pribeh-neda-kelleyho-a-jeho-bandy-oskar-a-lucinda>> 28 Oct. 2017; and Marek Jančík, “Carey, Peter: Parrot a Olivier v Americe,” *iLiteratura.cz*, Sdružení pro iliteraturu, 4 Oct. 2012

<<http://www.iliteratura.cz/Clanek/30591/carey-peter-parrot-a-olivier-v-americe>> 28 Oct. 2017.

¹⁰ See Ladislav Nagy, “Stále neznámý Peter Carey,” *HOST* Vol. XXXI, No. 9 (2015): 34-35.

¹¹ Peter Carey, *30 Days in Sydney* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008) 220.

because it is the past that made Australia what it is today. The historical novel is, in fact, a prominent genre of Australian literature and the fact that so many novels have been written about it recently, whether they are directly set in a historical period (e.g. novels of Thomas Keneally, Richard Flanagan, David Malouf, Tim Winton, Kate Grenville), or sometimes set in the present or the future strongly affected by the past (e.g. novels of Alexis Wright, Christos Tsiolkas), suggests that Australians have not quite come to terms with it. This also explains the general readers' reluctance to read about it, as they do not like to be reminded of the circumstances in which their ancestors took possession of the continent and their colonial past.

Carey's fiction is relentless in its tapping into the sensitive issues in the nation's past by transforming, rewriting, and subverting the accepted "truths" passed on from generation to generation, thus questioning the concepts of truth, history, and national identity themselves. His alternative version of history is anchored in the narrative techniques of postmodernism and in the contextual framework of postcolonialism, dismantling the imperial discourse of the coloniser and the colonised and asserting Australia's independence. Yet by eradicating the lies told by "official" history he often opens unpleasant topics that throw into question the foundations of Australian identity. These wounds, however, must be opened and drained first, in order to properly heal, which is what Carey's fiction is trying to alert to.

This thesis will examine Carey's version of Australian history through close readings of the following novels – *Illywhacker* (1985), *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), and *My Life as a Fake* (2003) – which together cover the span of Australian history from pre-Federation times until late 20th century, which is why they have been chosen as representatives of Carey's oeuvre, along with the fact that only these four combine the theme of Australian past with a preoccupation with lies, and concerns of national identity.¹² *Illywhacker* recounts the adventures of Herbert Badgery, a professional trickster, whose picaresque tale covers his personal as well as national history from the late 19th century to the beginning of the 21st, if his age can be trusted. *Oscar and Lucinda* is concerned with mid-19th century England and Australia, and focuses

¹² While these run through all of Carey's novels, all the aspects listed never appear in the same novel apart from the chosen four titles.

on the fate of two misfits – the independent heiress Lucinda and the effeminate priest Oscar, while addressing the colonisation and exploration of Australia. *True History of the Kelly Gang* reinvents the story of the famous bushranger Ned Kelly in the pre-Federation period, exploring the power relations in the colony. *My Life as a Fake* rewrites the Ern Malley literary hoax, exploring the cultural climate of post-WWII Australia, its relations with England, and the nature of literary creation itself through the 1980s diary of Sarah Wode-Douglas.

The first chapter will contextualise Carey's work by outlining the current cultural climate in Australia and by situating him in the tradition of the Australian historical novel, as well as discussing his views on history and the writing of history. Then it will further contextualise Carey's oeuvre in relation to postcolonialism, postmodernism and transnationalism, relying mainly on the work of Bill Ashcroft and Elleke Boehmer for postcolonialism, Linda Hutcheon for postmodernism, and Pascale Casanova and Graham Huggan for transnationalism. Existing scholarship on Carey's kind of historiography will also be discussed, particularly Andreas Gaile's theoretical approach to it. The second chapter will apply this framework to the selected novels, and explore the significance of lies and lying, first as a narrative strategy, and second as a concept according to which the main characters can be classified, depending on their relation to it, as either liars-opportunists, liars-creators, or the victims of lies. The third chapter will explore what such a portrayal of Australian history implies about Australian identity, and consequently how Carey's novels can be seen as political in this regard.

By questioning history Carey destabilises the traits associated with Australianness stemming from the nationalist Australian Legend of the 1890s, and he also reopens the question of Australia not only as the colonised but also the coloniser, and the processes of cultural exchanges that formed and are still (re)forming the Australian character. Through careful examination of the texts this thesis will come to a greater understanding of Carey's version of Australian history and its relation to postcolonialism, and by extension of the issues pertinent to contemporary Australian culture and literature, striving to prove that it is a subject worth the readers' attention.

2. CAREY IN CONTEXT: THE NATION AND ITS LITERATURE – POSTCOLONIALISM, TRANSNATIONALISM, AND THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

Before delving into the analysis of Peter Carey’s novels, it is necessary to locate Carey within the Australian literary space and the cultural climate he writes in, which is crucial for the analysis of his portrayal of Australian history and identity that will follow in later chapters. His work needs to be seen as a response to the continuing insecurity of Australians over their own culture, which stems from the country’s colonial beginnings and relative geographical isolation. Therefore, this chapter will first explore the connection between the nation and its literature, analyse the impact of history on today’s Australia, and outline the tradition of the Australian historical novel and Peter Carey’s place within it. By contextualising Australian literature, and particularly the genre of the historical novel, within the framework of postcolonialism, postmodernism, and transnationalism, this chapter aims to locate Carey in “the world republic of letters”¹ and formulate a critical approach to his work, which will be used in later chapters.

2. 1. Nation and the Role of Literature: Australian Values Debate

Art and its function in society has always been a fruitful subject for discussion. The two opposing poles are marked by, on the one hand, the “art for art’s sake” approach, associated particularly with the 19th century Aesthetic Movement, which proposes that art is free of any didactic, moral, or political motivations,² and exists solely to please the senses. On the other hand, the other approach views art in its socio-political context, examines its intentions and the ideology that underlies it. When it comes to literature, despite the fact that some literary works may appear to be divorced from reality or ideology, set in a kind of atemporal space, they are always, in one way or another, reflections of its time and therefore are by definition political, in the broadest sense of the word, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

¹ See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007).

² See “Art for Art’s Sake,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/art-for-arts-sake>> 5 May 2017.

This is particularly important in regards to national literatures. After all, the birth of the nation-state – rooted in the philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who established strong links between the nation, and its language, its past and its literature, and who proposed that each nation has an equally valuable creative “genius”³ – has a strong connection to literature, which has been used to legitimise a nation’s claim to uniqueness and which served as one of the unifying elements on the basis of which a group of people “invented” themselves as a nation, defined as an “imagined political community”⁴ by Benedict Anderson, who emphasises the fragile basis of the definition of a nation. Apart from using the existing literary capital as a basis of a shared culture of an “imagined community”, literature also reflects on what those shared values are, either validating them or questioning them. In Australia, the topic of Australian values still inspires lively public discourse, which has most recently been reignited in April 2017, firstly by changes in immigration and citizenship laws, secondly by certain incidents during the ANZAC Day celebrations.

In April 2017, Australia’s Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced changes to the immigration and citizenship laws.⁵ These include a contentious point that prospective citizens will be tested on Australian values. Yet when asked to define those values, Turnbull stumbled for words, finally naming “freedom, equality of men and women, the rule of law, democracy and ‘a fair go’” and claiming these were “uniquely Australian. They are shared with many other democracies but... there’s something uniquely Australian about them”.⁶ Newspapers and the internet proceeded to rip Turnbull’s vague and decidedly non-unique definition to shreds, producing counter-definitions of said values – both ironic and serious – for example under the hashtag #AustralianValues on Twitter, which lists tweets ranging from the funny “abbreviating difficult foreign names to ‘old mate’ instead of just learning how to say them” or “‘Yeah, nah’ is a perfectly acceptable answer to just about anything”, to the quite serious, such as

³ See Casanova, 75-76.

⁴ Benedict, Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006) 6.

⁵ See Nicholas Reece, “New Citizenship Laws Fail Three Commonsense Tests,” *Herald Sun*, The Herald and Weekly Times Ltd 25, Apr. 2017 <<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/new-citizenship-laws-fail-three-commonsense-tests/news-story/a892866aa78b72a13a7a05b46ca1493e>> 5 May 2017.

⁶ Malcolm Turnbull quoted in: David Crosbie, “Australian Values? Who Are We Kidding?,” *PRObono Australia*, PRObono Australia, 27 Apr. 2017 <<https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2017/04/australian-values-kidding/>> 5 May 2017.

“promoting destruction of Great Barrier Reef” or alerting to Australia’s off-shore refugee detention centres.⁷

A similar media storm broke out on ANZAC Day, when an Aboriginal activist “hijacked” the dawn service in Adelaide, adapting the wording of the ceremony to include references to “invasion” and “stolen Kurna land”⁸, and when the writer and TV presenter Yassmin Abdel-Magied posted on social media “LEST. WE. FORGET. (Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine...)”,⁹ calling attention to Australia’s questionable attitude towards refugees. Abdel-Magied’s post was immediately met with outrage and even racist comments along the lines of “leave if you cannot observe our traditions”, as many perceived it as disrespectful¹⁰ of the occasion which remembers Australia’s and New Zealand’s fallen soldiers.

This led to another round of debate about Australian values and about what ANZAC Day actually celebrates and what it should mean to non-Anglo-Celtic Australians. David Stephens, for example, sees ANZAC Day as intimately connected to “white male Anglo-Celtic Australia” to which all immigrants are required to assimilate in order to be accepted as Australian, and he wrote in his opinion piece that “Australia needs more feisty, outspoken people like Yassmin Abdel-Magied, adding that ANZAC Day is an appropriate time to remember the horrors of war that people are experiencing now.”¹¹ Stephens certainly has a point in that ANZAC Day is tied to white male Anglo-Celtic Australians who, apart from being seen as fighting for Australian values,¹² were mainly used as cannon fodder by the British. Yet few people seem to remember the Aboriginal diggers who also fought – despite not even being formally recognized as Australia’s citizens then and being treated with the same appalling racism upon their return –

⁷ See screenshots of tweets in “How an ‘Australian Values’ Debate Puzzled Even Australia,” *BBC News*, British Broadcasting Corporation, 20 Apr. 2017 <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-39650480>> 5 May 2017.

⁸ See Michael Owen, “Anzac Day: Aboriginal Activist Tweaks 23rd Psalm to ‘Shadow of Invasion,’” *The Australian*, News Corp Australia, 26 Apr. 2017 <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/anzac-day/anzac-day-aboriginal-activist-tweaks-23rd-psalm-to-shadow-of-invasion/news-story/1a43670e62574801d5b1d703d76b4514>> 5 May 2017.

⁹ After the backlash she deleted the post and apologised. The post was quoted e.g. in Matilda Dixon-Smith, “Not Getting Political On Anzac Day? That Misses The Whole Point,” *Junkee*, Junkee Media, 26 Apr. 2017 <<http://junkee.com/anzac-day-political-point/103275>> 5 May 2017.

¹⁰ See for example Dixon-Smith.

¹¹ David Stephens, “Australia needs more feisty outspoken people like Yassmin Abdel-Magied,” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 27 Apr. 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/27/australia-needs-more-feisty-outspoken-people-like-yassmin-abdel-magied>> 8 May 2017.

¹² See Dixon-Smith.

and who were only allowed to lead the ANZAC Day march in Canberra for the first time in 2017.¹³ Such selective history is not atypical for Australians.

These recent events and the ensuing discussions are a living proof of Australia's insecurity over its own values and consequently over the pillars on which the nation was built. The liberal view of history, which erases inconvenient facts, such as the Aboriginal presence in the ANZAC troops at Gallipoli, speaks of the same insecurities and the trouble of reconciling with the past, which ultimately impacts on the present and the future. While these issues are being debated in editorials in reaction to current events, Australia's novelists have always found history a fascinating subject and a great platform from which to interrogate the issues of Australianness, the uncomfortable aspects of Australia's history, and the problems they gave rise to. A historical novel is the perfect canvas for a writer, who can simultaneously paint a picture of the past as well as the present, while the temporal distance the historical setting provides allows the reader to hide behind the illusion that the issues the novel raises are a safe distance away. Also, the nature of fiction is that the world it operates in is imaginary, which gives the novelist a certain artistic licence when recreating the past – a luxury the historian does not have.

2. 2. Fact vs. Fiction: the Australian History Wars

The appetite for historical fiction in Australia has no doubt been influenced by the so-called “History Wars” that have been brewing in the country since the late 1960s, when the historian Henry Reynolds proposed alternative views of history that did not overlook the Aboriginal presence and researched the settlement of the continent from their perspective.¹⁴ His contesting of the established view of history was continued by other historians, but it also attracted a lot of criticism, perhaps best summarised by the historian Geoffrey Blaney, who coined the term “Black Armband of History” in 1993 to describe what he thought

¹³ See Megan Pallin, “Our shameful past: Australian ANZAC’s who were treated like second class citizens upon their return home,” *News.com.au*, News Life Media Pty Ltd, 25 Apr. 2017 <<http://www.news.com.au/national/our-shameful-past-australian-anzacs-who-were-treated-like-second-class-citizens-upon-their-return-home/news-story/d48aca0fea76712ed385c2daea8135a3>> 8 May 2017.

¹⁴ See Tony Taylor, “Australia’s ‘history wars’ reignite,” *The Conversation*, The Conversation Media Group, 31 Mar 2016 <<http://theconversation.com/australias-history-wars-reignite-57065>> 29 Apr 2017.

an overly negative account of the nation's past.¹⁵ In 1996 the conflict transcended the academia when the newly-elected Prime Minister John Howard rejected this view of history and declared the dispute a political one, distancing himself from the previous Prime Minister Paul Keating, who was pro-multicultural and worked towards the reconciliation with the indigenous population. Upon his election, Howard stated that "one of the most insidious developments in Australian political life over the past decade or so has been the attempt to rewrite Australian history in the service of a partisan political cause".¹⁶

The historian Stuart Macintyre maps out the History Wars in an eponymous book and notes that the conflict ultimately arose between the conservative proponents of an "old Australia" such as Howard and Blaney, and what the conservatives called the elite, or the "chattering class", composed especially of leftist intellectuals.¹⁷ While the former dismiss the wrongs done to Aborigines by claiming they have long ago been erased by the progress the country has made, and who are sceptical of multiculturalism (as Howard's policies have proved), essentially promoting the "official view" of history harking back to the Empire, the latter questioned this official view, which was perceived by Howard as "a campaign which has been designed above all to delegitimise the settlement of this country".¹⁸ Macintyre himself fits into the latter group, yet he is no proponent of such wars, as he sees them as detrimental to the discipline, since they rage without any respect for the rules of the field, which should be "characterised by lively argument as new interpretations challenge old orthodoxies".¹⁹ Yet these wars rage on, and both camps have much to say in the debate about Australian values, as evident from the aforementioned reactions to the new immigration bill and the ANZAC Day events. The nature of the settlement of Australia, the Stolen Generations, and Aboriginal land rights remain ongoing issues of Australian history, manifest in recent debates about a university guide urging history teachers to refer to Australia as being "invaded" rather than

¹⁵ See Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2004) 3.

¹⁶ John Howard quoted in: Macintyre and Clark, 1.

¹⁷ See Macintyre and Clark, 2-3.

¹⁸ John Howard in Macintyre and Clark, 4.

¹⁹ See Stuart Macintyre, "The History Wars," *The Sydney Papers* Vol. 15 (Winter/Spring 2013): 83.

“discovered”, which have again enraged the conservatives.²⁰ Yet a successful and unanimous definition of shared beliefs is the key to the creation of a nation, according to Anderson’s model. It is no wonder then, that since Australians are not yet clear on one of the foundation pieces of the national puzzle, they have such trouble articulating values that are “uniquely Australian”.

While the History Wars have brought attention to the issues of Australian history, the radically opposing views of both sides in this violent argument do not contribute much in terms of inspiring further discussion which would genuinely strive to uncover what really happened and how it bears on the meaning of Australianness. As Macintyre notes, “the first casualty when war comes is truth”²¹, and he is right in that the desire to uncover the truth seems to have been lost in this war as the arguments have been turned into a politician’s weapon against the opposition. However, the question is whether there is a truth that can be uncovered. While absolute truth can hardly be recovered, it is important to re-examine and reinterpret the existing historical accounts in light of new evidence, or from different perspectives, and that is why the rewriting of history – so dreaded by the conservatives – is so crucial. The existence of initiatives such as Honest History, which produced an eponymous book, and whose objectives are to

bring together material, existing and new, which presents key themes of Australia’s past (including perceptive treatments of the Anzac tradition), helps explain why Australia is as it is today and where it has come from, and assists readers to come to their own conclusions about what should be the building blocks of our future. It aims to encourage debate and stimulate informed discussion.²²

serves as proof that Australians still feel that the past is problematic – and not just the colonial one. This is well reflected in the Australian historical novel, which could be easily characterised by the same objectives.

2. 3. Rewriting History: the Australian Historical Novel

As Macintyre observes about the nature of history, “the suggestion that rewriting history is a sinister activity rests on a naïve view as something fixed, fully disclosed and final, a record of immanent truth that only malcontents could

²⁰ See Jamie Smith, “Return of Australia ‘history wars’,” *Financial Times*, The Financial Times Ltd, 1 Apr. 2016 <<https://www.ft.com/content/d0a0e7c2-f7b9-11e5-803c-d27c7117d132>> 29 Apr. 2017.

²¹ Macintyre, 83.

²² “Our Objectives,” *Honest History*, Honest History Inc, 26 June 2013 <<http://honesthistory.net.au/wp/about-us/our-objectives/>> 23 May 2017.

deny.”²³ Australia’s writers seem to be more aware of the nature of history than some historians, and of its strong bearing on the present, so it is no wonder that it is they who have been doing most of the rewriting of history in recent decades, while the historians have been at war. Since one of the consequences of the History Wars has been the loss of credibility of historians in the eyes of their audience, it is no wonder that the audience now more readily turns to the more readable historical fiction produced by novelists, when historiography itself has turned out to be fiction. Mark McKenna also links the popularity of historical fiction to the History Wars and asserts that

in Australia today, historical fiction, perhaps more than ever before, is shaping popular conceptions of the past. Readers are both more willing to trust fiction as history and more content to accept a stereotype of historians’ work as boring, hiding behind the pretence of objectivity, or narrowly confined to the drudgery of the archive.²⁴

McKenna’s statement comes from an essay published in 2006, where he discusses the surge of historical fiction around the world, but identifies Australia as the place where this trend is most prominent, as exemplified in the 2006 Miles Franklin Award shortlist composed predominantly of historical fiction.²⁵ The 2016 shortlist reveals that historical fiction is still going strong and that its scope has widened as more and more novels cover the late 20th century, such as the 2016 winner *Black Rock White City* by AS Patrick, which explores the life of Serbian refugees in 1990s Melbourne.²⁶ Likewise, Australian fiction that receives Man Booker Prize nominations has in recent years also been of the historical kind. The last Australian nominee and also the winner in 2014 was Richard Flanagan’s *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, set during the construction of the Burma Railway during WWII. Previous nominees include Peter Carey’s *Parrot and Olivier in America* in 2010 and Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* in 2006, both also historical novels.

As mentioned above, historical fiction is a great means of interrogation of Australianness, which also offers the opportunity to address the problems of the past as well as the present. Historical fiction has always been a popular genre in

²³ Macintyre and Clark, 13.

²⁴ Mark McKenna, “Writing the Past,” *The Best Australian Essays 2006*, ed. Drusilla Modjeska (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2006) 98.

²⁵ See McKenna, 97.

²⁶ See Monica Tan, “Women and Melbourne Writers Dominate Miles Franklin 2016 shortlist,” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 29 May 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/may/29/women-and-melbourne-writers-dominate-miles-franklin-2016-shortlist>> 17 May 2017.

Australia, and from the cultural beginnings of the nation the rewriting of the versions of the past, imposed on Australians by the coloniser, the British Empire, have been a means of staking one's claim to the past and to authoritative discourse. Historical novels exploring the present by examining the past are nothing new in Australian literature, as they appear as early as the 19th century, even before the establishment of the Federation, for example Marcus Clarke's convict narrative *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874) or Rolf Boldrewood's bushranger romance *Robbery Under Arms* (1888),²⁷ whose authors created important versions of Australia's past.²⁸ Thus a tradition of historical writing in Australia developed, which was significantly reinvigorated in the late 1950s as a result of the publication of Patrick White's *Voss*, and Thomas Keneally's early novels, which may have inspired the revival of the historical novel towards the end of the 20th century,²⁹ along with the History Wars. Since then, historical fiction has been a strong current in Australian literature, produced by authors such as Thea Astley, David Malouf, and Tim Winton, apart from the aforementioned Kate Grenville, Richard Flanagan, and Thomas Keneally, and of course Peter Carey.

2. 4. Peter Carey's Place in the Historical Novel Tradition and His View of History

Even though Peter Carey may not be the most popular historical novelists in Australia, as discussed in the Introduction, he certainly is one of the loudest voices of the Australian historical novel, a genre that allows him to articulate his strong views on Australian history, and the consequences of this history for national identity. While not all of Peter Carey's novels can be classified as historical, and not all deal directly with Australian history, out of the 13 novels he has published so far, at least eight can be labelled historical novels (*Illywhacker*, *Oscar and Lucinda*, *Jack Maggs*, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, *My Life as a Fake*, *Parrot and Olivier in America*, *The Chemistry of Tears*, *Amnesia*). Out of the remaining ones, two (*Bliss* and *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*) still debate the questions of history and the effects of colonialism, while only in the remaining

²⁷ See Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 61.

²⁸ See Macintyre and Clark, 21.

²⁹ See Elizabeth Webby, *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 193.

three is history of little concern (*The Tax Inspector*, *Theft: A Love Story*, *His Illegal Self: A Novel*).³⁰ While Carey's recent novels have been more concerned with America, reflecting on the country that has been his home since 1990, his newest novel, published at the end of 2017, returns to the country of his birth and the issues of history. Called *A Long Way from Home*, it revolves around the 1953 Redex Trail, a car race around Australia, and Carey asserts that "it explores what it means to be a white Australian".³¹ Thus, during his career, he has created a substantial body of historical novels that covers almost all of Australia's past, and ventures into world history as well. However, it seems Carey became a historical novelist almost against his will, when one recalls his interview after the publication of his first historical novel, *Illywhacker*: "I hate having to write books about the past. It's so terrifying because I know nothing about it. (...) I hope I don't have to write books about the past ever, ever again".³² His interest to know more, and a desire to perhaps make a difference, however, ensured the past has remained his primary subject matter.

Carey has always been open about his opinions on Australian history in his interviews, non-fiction work, as well as his novels. He does not hold back in his criticism, and asserts the lies Australians tell themselves need to be rectified in order for the nation to move forward: "It's trite, but important, to also remember that the present always has its feet in the past. In Australia, where the past has been the subject of denial and memory-loss, it's essential, it seems to me, to go back to the past and try and untangle all the lies we've told and been told."³³ The idea of the past lurking in the present is an ever-present concept in Carey's writing, as the epigraph to *True History of the Kelly Gang* – William Faulkner's "The past is not dead. It is not even past"³⁴ – testifies. This point is perhaps most forcibly made in *30 Days in Sydney*, Carey's non-fiction account of his visit to the city in 2000. The book focuses on perhaps the most debated issue of Australia's

³⁰ Based Andreas Gaile's classification of Carey's novels, only including also the two latest ones, unpublished at the time of publication of Gaile's work: Andreas Gaile, *Rewriting History: Carey's Fictional Biography of Australia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010) 286-287.

³¹ Stephen Romei, "Peter Carey's Next Novel Surveys Australian History and Race," *The Australian*, News Corp Australia, 18 Mar. 2017 <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/peter-careys-next-novel-surveys-australian-history-and-race/news-story/a2e08d3158d1b8821730e55f5fde4be5>> 30 Apr. 2017.

³² Sophie Wilson, "Peter Carey's Search for Elusive *Illywhacker*," *The Varsity* (Literary Supplement) 26 Nov. 1986: 3.

³³ Peter Carey, "The 'Contrarian Streak': An Interview with Peter Carey," Interview by Andreas Gaile, *Fabulating Beauty*, ed. Andreas Gaile (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 3.

³⁴ Peter Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) 1.

past – the concept of Australia as *terra nullius* – the land of nobody. Wherever Carey goes in Sydney, he finds evidence to the contrary and floods the reader with his findings about “this modern good-time city of beaches and restaurants, of sailing boats and boozy Friday nights, [which] was formed by traumas that it cloaks so casually you might easily miss them” (30D 5). Carey makes sure that you do not, asserting that “two hundred years later the past continues to insist itself upon the present in ways that are dazzlingly and almost unbelievably clear” (30D 5). While his account of Sydney is obviously steered in this direction to emphasise his point, the aforementioned debates about Australian values and identity prove that unless Australians come to terms with the past, their national self-definition will remain problematic.

Carey seems to have taken the task of untangling the lies of history partially upon himself in his novels. He makes no secret of the fact that he perceives the discovery of Australia as an “invasion”³⁵, and resents that his generation grew up thinking themselves English³⁶, being told the convenient version of history. History is something that ought to be revisited, reinterpreted, and rewritten, and if historians are not doing a good enough job, that is where the historical novelist comes in. Carey’s novels alert the reader to the different versions and interpretations of the past, often offering contradictory points of view, and leave it up to the reader to decide which is more likely. His narrative strategies, which will be discussed in the following chapter, ultimately draw attention to the unreliability of historical sources, history books, and even newspapers as Carey shows how one event can be recorded differently, and how sources that claim authenticity are not authentic at all.

All his historical novels play with the trustworthiness of historical sources, most obviously perhaps *Illywhacker*, where the protagonist and a notorious liar Herbert Badgery also has a degree in history and reads the imaginary historian M. V. Anderson who claims that “our forefathers were all great liars”, which is a “great foundation stone”³⁷ of Australian history, or *My Life as a Fake*, where an invented history becomes true and comes to haunt its creator. Another novel that illustrates well Carey’s preoccupation with such concerns is *True History of the*

³⁵ Edmund White, “Putting the Land of his Mind on the Literary Map,” *Sunday Times* [London] 20 Mar. 1988: G8.

³⁶ Carey, “The ‘Contrarian Streak’,” 7.

³⁷ Peter Carey, *Illywhacker* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985) 429.

Kelly Gang, as it plays with different perspectives on Kelly and fills in the gaps Kelly's letters and trial transcriptions do not cover. In an interview with Andreas Gaile, Carey talks about writing Kelly's history, yet his claims could be applied to all his historical novels:

I'm saying to my readers: 'We don't know what really happened. There are so many different ways to think about what happened out there in the unrecorded historical dark. Here, look at this: I've made it up, but it's consistent with the facts.' So, firstly, I enjoy that, I've taken a little snippet of history and given it a totally new interpretation, and then I've done this, and anybody who knows the recorded history will enjoy this, I hope. But it does ask a very serious question of the serious reader: have you even bothered to imagine other possibilities?³⁸

Carey always cloaks his rewriting of history in uncertainty and unreliability, never proposing one absolute truth – instead he offers the reader new possibilities and forces them to think about them, thus enforcing that rethinking of Australian history that is so sorely needed.

Carey, of course, knows the difference between history and historical fiction, which he compares to Shakespeare's histories: "of course we all know it's a work of art, and we don't wish it to be investigative reporting, or even history. Do you go to *Richard III* to find out what really happened? No, you go to it because it's great literature, and because of this it can be used as a lens through which to look at Shakespeare's time or our own."³⁹ That is exactly what Carey's novels do – they take the reader into the past, while also illuminating the present. Simultaneously, then, Carey is able to address how the misconceptions about the past impact upon the national consciousness:

When I began thinking about *Illywhacker*, I was concerned about how we see ourselves. We think we're so anti-authoritarian and free, and refuse to look at how dependent we are economically, culturally, militarily. While we're on our leash or in our cage we can strut about and bark, but we're a very frightened people. (...) There's nothing stirring in our national symbols other than Waltzing Matilda which is a celebration of a theft. We mistrust success, are only comfortable with defeat. It is a particularly sexist country, our public life is particularly corrupt, very few people seem to care, and yet here we are cursed with a love of that place.⁴⁰

As Carey is similarly cursed, he feels obliged to invent Australia as its national novelist. In an interview with Edmund White, also on the subject of *Illywhacker*, he was asked whether he felt "the obligation to forge the conscience of [his] race"

³⁸ Carey, "The 'Contrarian Streak'," 8.

³⁹ Carey, "The 'Contrarian Streak'," 3.

⁴⁰ Peter Carey, "Homeward Bound," Interview by Robyn Davidson, *ELLE* [US] Apr. 1988: 64.

and replied affirmatively, elaborating: “I felt that the country still had to be invented – even seen. We Australians haven’t been invented yet. But this situation irritates me. Who has to worry about what it means to be English or Chinese?”⁴¹ However, this lack of a fixed image of Australia also gives its people, including Carey, an advantage, as they can at least partially control how the country is invented.

2. 5. The Historian vs. the Historical Novelist: Questions of Authenticity and Artistic Licence

This invention, however, is not without inherent ethical issues. As is apparent from Carey’s take on the historical novel, issues of authenticity, fakery, and the extent of artistic licence are important concerns permeating the genre. With so much historical fiction produced which enjoys such wide readership, is based on extensive research, and is often seen as having more authority than traditional historiography in Australia, the line between the historical novelist and the historian is becoming blurred. Yet when one looks back at the history of writing about the past, and the first “histories” and chronicles, it is apparent that the line has not even always existed. The word “history” came to English as a borrowing of multiple origins (Greek, Latin, Old French), and it entered English multiple times in slightly different senses.⁴² While the original Greek meaning of the word refers to “a learning or knowing by inquiry; an account of one’s inquiries, history, record, narrative”⁴³, probably the first borrowing into English via Latin was as “*storia*” meaning “history, narrative, story”⁴⁴, suggesting that story was not differentiated from history, at least until the 15th century, for which OED yields first examples of “history” as “the formal record, or study of past events”.⁴⁵ However, for a long time “story” and “history” were entangled and their features mixed, so the role of the historian must have encompassed more creativity and artistic licence than in modern historiography, and was perhaps not too far from the contemporary historical novelist. While the Enlightenment

⁴¹ Carey in E. White, G8.

⁴² “history, n.,” *OED*, Oxford University Press, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/87324?rskey=q4bVMT&result=1#eid>> 31 May 2017.

⁴³ “history, (n.),” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, Douglas Harper, <http://etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=history> 31 May 2017.

⁴⁴ *OED*.

⁴⁵ *OED*.

steered historiography, and all sciences, towards a more rigorous and rational enquiry, the connection between history and story – or fact and fiction – never disappeared, and became a contentious point in the postmodern era.

Hayden White, a historian and theoretician, called attention to the fact that a historical account is inevitably of literary nature, reliant on language and tropes – “a verbal structure in the form of narrative prose discourse”⁴⁶ – which means that every history is essentially a story, with a certain plot and an underlying ideology. There can therefore never be one ultimate objective version of history. White’s thesis thus practically equates historiography with a literary genre, hence erases the boundaries between historical fiction and historiography. Such a conclusion is a double-edged sword, producing on the one hand the History Wars, and on the other hand the increasing reliance on historical novels for information about the past.

With the increased importance and credibility attributed to historical fiction also come certain issues of how to represent the past in an artistic yet also (somewhat) truthful way. Most of these issues are ethical, regarding aspects such as impersonating historical figures, (in)authenticity of sources, and the balance between truth and fiction – in other words where exactly do the boundaries of artistic licence end. Peter Carey’s *True History of the Kelly Gang* is a good example of an author having to contend with these issues. Written from the point of view of Ned Kelly himself and presented as a collection of his letters, Carey has to channel Ned’s voice and realistically flesh out a historical figure from the historical documents available, while using his imagination to fill the gaps. His version of Kelly is further complicated by the fact that the book ostensibly presents itself as a collection of historical documents – Ned Kelly’s letters to his daughter – with an archivist’s commentary on the state of the documents, quality of the paper, etc., and the occasional news report, with the title claiming historical authenticity as a “*True History*”. This type of narrative and a deeper analysis of the novel will be addressed in the next chapter – for now, suffice it to say that Carey ventures on thin ice by impersonating a historical figure of mythical status whom people tend to see as either a national hero or a murderer, with little room in between. While the portrayal is complex, Carey’s novel leans more towards

⁴⁶ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) ix.

Kelly as a hero, which is achieved – apart from altering certain events – precisely by letting the reader see into Kelly’s head, know his motivations, and as if to hear his voice, which is more likeable than the real Kelly of *The Cameron Letter* and *The Jerilderie Letter*. These tools are unavailable to the historian, yet they enable the novelist to steer their narrative and their readers in the desired direction.

While Carey does not temper with what we know of Kelly too much, other historical novelists go further and invent quite controversial things. For example Richard Flanagan’s novel *Wanting* (2008), represents the famous explorer Sir John Franklin as a rapist,⁴⁷ and the portrayal of the Aboriginal girl Mathinna is largely Flanagan’s invention, as the historical sources about her life are scarce.⁴⁸ However, the purpose of taking such liberties with history is usually not to misrepresent the past or create a scandal, but to convey what the novelist perceives as the larger historical truth – in the case of *Wanting*, while the portrayal of Franklin as a rapist may be seen as ethically problematic, marring the explorer’s reputation, his rape of Mathinna can be read as a metaphor for the abuse of the Aboriginal people. By turning historical figures into fleshed-out characters with emotions, motivations, and thoughts that history has little access to, they communicate the essence of what happened, which is often easier in fiction than in historical accounts.

However, while Carey’s representation of Ned Kelly is not so contentious from the ethical point of view, Flanagan’s representation of the Aboriginal people is more so. In general, the representation of disadvantaged groups in fiction is quite problematic, especially if it is a representation of their point of view. For example, Thomas Keneally’s novel *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972), based on the life of the bushranger Jimmy Governor at the time of the Federation, is written in the voice of a half-caste boy, for which it has been criticised, as Keneally thus essentially appropriates the Aboriginal voice – something he himself admits he would not dare do again if he was to write the novel now.⁴⁹

In the age of political correctness, concerns like this remain a talking point, as evidenced at the Brisbane Writers Festival in 2016. In her speech, the

⁴⁷ See Richard Flanagan, *Wanting* (London: Vintage, 2016).

⁴⁸ See Penny Russel, “Girl in a Red Dress: Inventions of Mathinna,” *Australian Historical Studies* 43.3 (2012): 341-62.

⁴⁹ See Tony Birch, “‘The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith’ by Thomas Keneally for Reading Australia,” *Australian Book Review* June-July 2015, No. 372, <<https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/reading-australia/thomas-keneally/the-chant-of-jimmie-blacksmith-by-thomas-keneally>> 2 June 2016.

American author Lionel Shriver railed against the concept of “cultural appropriation”, especially in relation to writers who write about the experience of people from other cultures, ethnicities, or minorities. She criticised the limits it imposes on the writer, and dismissed the arguments by emphasising the essence of fiction: “As for the culture police’s obsession with ‘authenticity’, fiction is inherently inauthentic. It’s fake. It’s self-confessedly fake; that is the nature of the form, (...). The name of the game is not whether your novel honours reality; it’s all about what you can get away with.”⁵⁰ The Australian author Yassmin Abdel-Magied walked out halfway through the speech, and proceeded to write an incensed opinion piece, where she described Shriver’s speech as “a poisoned package wrapped up in arrogance and delivered with condescension”⁵¹ that was ultimately “a celebration of the unfettered exploitation of the experiences of others, under the guise of fiction”⁵². Abdel-Magied’s main issues are that writers that write about the experience of people from disadvantaged groups without permission do so for their own profit, thus taking away the opportunity of that group to write their own story themselves, and she sees that as essentially a continuation of colonisation.⁵³ While both writers certainly have a point, Abdel-Magied seems to ignore the fact that sometimes such novels give voice to people who were previously never granted one, and this is especially important in regards to historical fiction, since the authentic voices from that period may now forever be lost. Granted, such recovered and imagined voice can never be authentic, but as Shriver says, fiction is by definition the realm of the imagination. At the same time, however, the experiences of others need to be treated respectfully, and some writers walk a fine line between respect and exploitation.

Literature that most markedly transcends this fine line is that which pretends to be something it is not. In 1994 Helen Darville published a novel called *The Hand That Signed the Paper* under the pseudonym Helen Demidenko, claiming Ukrainian ancestry and authenticity of the events the novel relates as

⁵⁰ Lionel Shriver, “Lionel Shriver’s Full Speech: ‘I hope the concept of cultural appropriation is a passing fad,’” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 13 Sep 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/13/lionel-shrivers-full-speech-i-hope-the-concept-of-cultural-appropriation-is-a-passing-fad>> 2 June 2017.

⁵¹ Yassmin Abdel-Magied, “As Lionel Shriver Made Light of Identity, I Had No Choice But to Walk Out on Her,” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 10 Sep 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/10/as-lionel-shriver-made-light-of-identity-i-had-no-choice-but-to-walk-out-on-her>> 2 June 2017.

⁵² Abdel-Magied, “As Lionel Shriver (...)”.

⁵³ See Abdel-Magied, “As Lionel Shriver (...)”.

they were supposedly related to her by her ancestors – the events of the Holocaust in the Ukraine. When Darville’s true identity was discovered, it created a huge scandal and provoked a debate about how far a novelist can go in appropriating the stories of others.⁵⁴ However, the issue with Darville’s novel is rather the deliberate deception of its audience through creating a false backstory of the author, which is as disrespectful to the Ukrainians as to the Australians, and which at least in part tried to capitalise on the fact that the Australian literary establishment was hungry for multicultural writers.⁵⁵ She is not the first writer to have used a pseudonym and make up stories about herself, but she tries to sell her fiction as a personal history and lend it a substance it does not have – a practise Abdel-Magied would justifiably condemn.

While the fiction writer should have artistic licence, it should only extend so far and acknowledge the line between artistic licence and a scam. While Carey’s *True History of the Kelly Gang* ostensibly makes claims on authenticity as a historical document, the reader is never in doubt that it was Carey who wrote it, not Ned Kelly. While most readers cannot tell what is merely Carey’s imagination and what has a basis in historical records, they are aware that the novel is a mix of both. With Darville’s novel, this awareness may be harder to channel, if the reader trusts the author’s claims that the story is essentially true. With a historical novel that is especially problematic, particularly when it tampers with such serious topics as the Holocaust, and at a time when historical novelists are accorded almost as much authority as historians. On the other hand, Darville is just another author in the line of famous Australian literary hoaxers, such as James McAuley and Harold Steward who in 1944 created the persona of Ern Malley and his modernist masterpiece *The Darkening Ecliptic* (the subject of Carey’s novel *My Life as a Fake*, which will be discussed later), or the poet Colin Johnson aka Mundryooroo, whose claims to Aboriginality have been exposed as false.⁵⁶ Perhaps that is the reason why (in)authenticity is such a prominent issue in Australian literature and a frequent topic in Peter Carey’s novels, which will be explored in the following chapter.

⁵⁴ See for example Huggan, *Australian Literature*, 108.

⁵⁵ See Huggan, *Australian Literature*, 108.

⁵⁶ See Maureen Clark, *Mundryooroo: A Likely Story* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2007) 13.

2. 6. History Versus Myth: Critical Approach to Carey's Historiography

Having outlined the basic aspects of Carey's approach to writing Australian history and the complications involved in the production of the genre of the historical novel, it is time to mention the possibilities of how to approach Carey's historiography critically. Carey's particular brand of history is an aspect of his writing frequently discussed by literary critics. Any review or essay on Carey's historical novels can hardly fail to mention how Carey rewrites Australian history, with most critics focusing on how Carey manipulates his sources, and plays with the boundaries between truth and fiction, and history and myth, thus "maintaining a dynamic balance between competing versions of the historical past",⁵⁷ as Graham Huggan asserts. His version of history has been described frequently in relation to the breakdown of grand historical narratives⁵⁸, to revisionist history⁵⁹, and cultural memory⁶⁰. Most of these, however, focus on individual works, and so far there has been little criticism that proposes an argument about Carey's historiography in general. The only critic to venture in detail in this direction thus far is Andreas Gaile, one of the most prominent Carey scholars, who in 2010 analysed Carey's Australian history in his body of work and formulated a theoretical basis for his arguments in his critical study *Rewriting History: Carey's Fictional Biography of Australia*.

Gaile proposes to view Carey's history as "mythistory", a concept borrowed from historiography, which he defines as "a type of discourse that eschews the essentials of traditional Western epistemology and necessitates a recalibration of the bearings of those readers who still think in categories such as true and false, right and wrong, fact and fiction".⁶¹ Gaile takes Robert Scholes' claim about writing – that "we do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it"⁶² – as a starting point for concluding that "there is, epistemologically, no

⁵⁷ Huggan, *Australian Literature*, 62.

⁵⁸ See Bruce Woodcock, *Contemporary World Writers: Peter Carey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 10.

⁵⁹ See Ansgar Nünning, "The Empire Had Not Been Built by Choirboys: The Revisionist Representation of Australian Colonial History in Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*," *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey*, ed. Andreas Gaile (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004): 179-197.

⁶⁰ See Graham Huggan, "Cultural Memory in Postcolonial Fiction: The Uses and Abuses of Ned Kelly," *Australian Literary Studies* Vol. 20, No. 3 (May 2002): 132-145.

⁶¹ Andreas Gaile, *Rewriting History: Carey's Fictional Biography of Australia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010) 11.

⁶² Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) 7.

difference between a truthful imitation of the world and an untruthful illusion summoned up by the forces of the imagination”⁶³ – an ideal situation for a historical novelist. For Gaile, myth exemplifies this type of discourse, as it dissolves the categories of “true” and “untrue”, and creates rather than recreates the past, inviting a reading which suggests that the events recounted probably happened in this way, and at the same time suggests that they probably did not.⁶⁴ Gaile further points out that myths become particularly important when one needs to familiarise the unfamiliar, as is for example the case of settler colonies such as Australia, where the local mythologies encountered imported ones.

According to Gaile myth is a useful concept through which to approach “Carey’s investigations into the nature of narrative” – how stories function in society, as well as how Carey’s novels function.⁶⁵ Moreover, the novels themselves contribute to Australian mythology which, Carey feels, is far from rich.⁶⁶ It is therefore important to analyse how that mythology is constructed. Myth and history in Carey intertwine, as one is refashioned into the other and vice versa, which are features of the “mythistory” genre, where “myth and history are seen as complementary ingredients of historical discourse”.⁶⁷ The mythistorian thus must take into account not only what really happened, but also the myths circulating about it, and the process of signification.⁶⁸ Therefore Gaile feels that the concept of “mythistory” is the best critical framework for approaching Carey’s texts, as “from all the critical concepts at hand, it best describes the nature of Carey’s writings, which are framed on one side of the generic scale by *mythos* and on the other by history, thus oscillating between *poiesis* and *mimesis*, invention and representation, and ultimately, truth and lie.”⁶⁹ This oscillation is the focal point of Carey’s historiography, which foregrounds the unreliability of historical accounts.

Gaile conducts his reading of Carey’s *oeuvre* in the context of “postist” discourses of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism,⁷⁰ which are contexts that emerge in most of the critical work on Carey. Similarly to Gaile, this

⁶³ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 34.

⁶⁴ See Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 35.

⁶⁵ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 40.

⁶⁶ See Carey, “The ‘Contrarian Streak’,” 15.

⁶⁷ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 42.

⁶⁸ See Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 43.

⁶⁹ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 43.

⁷⁰ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 21.

thesis takes postmodernism and postcolonialism as its starting point in the discussion of Carey's blend of history, while also incorporating transnationalism. While the subject of this thesis is very similar to Gaile's study, since it is the only substantial work on this topic, this thesis strives to contribute to the debate by taking a slightly different approach and focusing more closely on Carey's narrative strategies, the themes of lies and lying, and national identity, discussed in the following two chapters. While Gaile covers all of Carey's novels up to the date of publication, this thesis only focuses on several selected texts most relevant to its arguments. The smaller scope allows for a more nuanced reading of said texts. Gaile's study will be taken into consideration throughout, as will his concept of "mythistory" applied to Carey's version of history. However, before we take a closer look on Carey's works in the following two chapters, let us take a look into how postcolonialism and transnationalism contribute to the discussion, on Australian literature in general, and on Peter Carey in particular.

2. 7. The Australian Historical Novel as a Tool of Postcolonial Literature

The need to challenge the misconceptions about Australian past sustains the popularity of the historical novel in Australia, which is a tool particularly useful for postcolonial literatures. As a former colony of the British Empire, Australia has been controlled by Britain, who asserted their power and assured their dominance in various ways. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, language is one of the principal tools of control,⁷¹ being "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established".⁷² Controlling the discourse in and about Australia enabled the British to assimilate the strange, foreign, and new to their experience, and practically erase the Indigenous presence from the continent, and with it the whole of the continent's history. As Elleke Boehmer notes, "where the British established a cross, a city, or a colony, they proclaimed the start of a new history.

⁷¹ The situation in Australia as a settler colony differs from that of other colonies, where English was a foreign language for everyone, unlike here, where the convicts spoke English as well. The coloniser's domination over the language in this case is thus more subtle and nuanced, but nevertheless still present in the form of official literature and history written by the colonisers rather than the colonised. While the differences from other colonies warrant further discussion, the lack of space does not allow it, as they are not essential for the purposes of this chapter.

⁷² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989) 2.

Other histories, by definition, were declared of lesser significance or, in certain situations, non-existent”.⁷³

To take control of their history, Australians needed to reclaim their language and produce their own literature, a written manifestation of the language. Ashcroft et al. see this process as characteristic of postcolonial literature and call it “abrogation”, which turns the English of the colonial Centre into ‘english’ of the colony, incorporating local linguistic variants (e.g. Indigenous words⁷⁴, substandard grammar), which become metonymic of the cultural difference.⁷⁵ While in Australian English the linguistic features are not as prominent as in other non-settler colonies, the appropriation of language also means subverting the established discourses used to describe one’s country, thus “writing back to the Empire”.⁷⁶ The historical novel is a genre particularly popular with and well-suited to postcolonial literatures, as it allows the former colonised to rewrite the history that was imposed upon them by the colonisers.

Not many studies explore this connection, but Hamish Dalley’s study *The Postcolonial Historical Novel: Realism, Allegory, and the Representation of Contested Pasts* offers much insight into the topic. He sees the historical novel as a central genre of postcolonial literature, because of the prominent but controversial position of history in the former colonies:

The postcolonial world is characterised as a space in which history can never be taken for granted, and is subject always to conflict over past events and their meaning for present generations. The contested nature of postcolonial history is reflected in the literature, as much as in the theory and criticism that describes it. (...) Postcolonialism is thus, to a large extent, a discourse of and about the writing of history in multiple forms – one that necessarily engages with debates in which aesthetics are as much at stake as politics.⁷⁷

He advocates the postcolonial historical novel as a prominent source of knowledge about the past, or rather different versions of the past, even though it is produced through narrative techniques of fiction and with fictionalised elements. According to Dalley, the postcolonial historical novel is ultimately a realist genre,

⁷³ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 24.

⁷⁴ The use of Indigenous words, however, is also problematic, because of Australia’s position as both the colonised and the coloniser. Similar problems are carried over to literature, as discussed in the previous sections on cultural appropriation.

⁷⁵ See Ashcroft et al., 38-40, 51-57.

⁷⁶ The phrase is based on Salman Rushdie’s statement “the Empire writes back to the imperial centre”, as mentioned in Ashcroft et al., 33.

⁷⁷ Hamish Dalley, *The Postcolonial Historical Novel: Realism, Allegory, and the Representation of Contested Pasts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 4.

despite the employment of techniques of historiographic metafiction or magic realism, “insofar as it asserts the epistemological claim that fictional narratives about history ought to be treated as serious interpretations of the past, open to dialogue with rival accounts and archival sources”.⁷⁸ His argument thus dismisses the issues of disentangling truth from fiction in historical novels discussed above, as in his view even the fictionalised parts, or stories of fictionalised characters represent “large-scale historical processes”.⁷⁹ Therefore even a creative version of history is a valid contribution to the discussion about a former colony’s past.

Peter Carey’s historical novels can thus be seen as “writing back to the Empire”, challenging the official accounts of not only colonial past, thus taking control of the “invention” of Australia, this time produced by its own people. His novels open up exactly the kind of dialogue Dalley talks about, prompting people to consider different versions and interpretations of history, and the implications for Australian culture and society. To get these points across in the most effective way possible, Carey draws on postmodernism and its blurring of boundaries, which has greatly influenced the contemporary historical novel.

The process of rewriting history in historical fiction was in many ways facilitated by the arrival of postmodern thought, which was liberating for the colonial subjects, as it rejects clear dichotomies (e.g. the Centre versus the Other), genre distinctions, or any kind of notion of clear boundaries or of totality – in short, it problematises all established notions people have about the world, exposing both the pros and cons of each concept, without providing any answers. Linda Hutcheon in her study *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* asserts that “postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges”.⁸⁰ Hutcheon therefore concludes that postmodernism contradicts “our dominant liberal humanist culture” by refusing to subscribe to any “master narrative” which, though attractive, is only illusory, since one cannot with certainty determine what is true and what is fiction.⁸¹ The distinction between art and life, reality and fiction, history and story thus disappears, as discussed earlier in connection to Hayden White’s arguments about historiography. Such relativising of established

⁷⁸ Dalley, 9.

⁷⁹ Dalley, 10.

⁸⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1995) 3.

⁸¹ Hutcheon, 12.

concepts helps the former colonial subject in “writing back to the Empire”, because it invalidates the authority of colonial discourse. The postcolonial historical novel relying on postmodernist thought is thus a perfect medium for “writing back”.

In fact, the postmodern relativisation of established concepts gave rise to what Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction”⁸² – a mode of writing which calls attention to the unreliability of historical sources, and by extension of meaning and reality itself, which also features in Carey’s oeuvre, as will be discussed in the next chapter. By being “both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay[ing] claim to historical events and personages,”⁸³ often proclaiming themselves to be ‘authentic historical documents’, historiographic metafiction novels prompt the reader to rethink history and its relationship with the present. Yet rather than deny the existence of history, meaning, and reality, historiographic metafiction merely questions these concepts, as Hutcheon observes, “[t]here is no pretence of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel”.⁸⁴

Postcolonial literatures strive to do precisely that – to construct their own versions of reality as opposed to that which has been thrust upon them in the colonial past. The status of history, and by extension of all discourse is revealed to be only a human construct, and as such each nation can then construct itself anew through language, of which it by now has regained control. Since self-definition is now available to everyone who commands the tool of language, the concept of the Centre is exploded, as Hutcheon notes: “The local, the regional, the non-totalising are reasserted as the centre becomes a fiction – necessary, desired, but a fiction nonetheless.”⁸⁵ Because the existence of the Centre has been taken for granted for so long, it still virtually exists as something to write against, although the former occupants of the “periphery” now enjoy the same position as the centre both from the outside as well as the inside. This awareness of the role of the Centre, and by extension of other outside influences, helps call attention to the fact that

⁸² Hutcheon, 5.

⁸³ Hutcheon, 5.

⁸⁴ Hutcheon, 40.

⁸⁵ Hutcheon, 58.

Australian nation and Australian literature have not sprung up in isolation on the Australian soil, but are a product of various influences.

2. 8. Australian Postcolonial Literature: National Versus Transnational

Another useful way of looking at Australian literature, and particularly Peter Carey's work, is in the context of transnationalism. With colonial expansion, the world suddenly became a much smaller place, as people gained access to foreign goods and came into contact with foreign cultures more frequently. As a result, interaction and exchange between cultures grew not only in frequency but also in impact, and the cultural transactions helped to shape many a postcolonial literature. Graham Huggan's perspective on Australian literature is enlightening in emphasizing this shaping force:

Australian literature has helped make Australia what it is by engaging with what others have made out of Australia. In this sense the 'postcoloniality' of national literatures such as Australia's is always effectively *transnational*, either derived from an apprehension of internal fracture (e.g. via the figure of the culturally hyphenated migrant), or from a multiplied awareness of the nations' various engagements with other nations, and with the wider world.⁸⁶

Huggan's understanding of the postcolonial approach to literature relies on its ability to offer a transnational understanding of national literatures, looking at their interactions with other cultures and countries, and how these form the literature at home. In Australia, it has always been like that, since people had a certain idea about the continent even before its discovery, and these conceptions ultimately helped to shape its perception by others from the early days. While in the past it was mainly interaction with Britain that shaped Australian literature – playing with genres and themes established in British literature, influence of British culture – nowadays the interactions stretch across the globe. In today's globalised world outside influences are inevitable, especially as many Australian writers live and write abroad, and respond to global rather than just local goings on.

Australian identity and literature is thus not only a product of its own nationalistic efforts, but also of cultural exchanges and of Australia's image abroad. From its very beginnings, it has been a place where different cultures meet, interact, and merge. While the influence of Britain today is not as strong,

⁸⁶ Huggan, *Australian Literature*, viii.

American culture is a big influence – through TV, film, music, and other cultural commodities – along with Asia, and the increasingly multicultural groups of immigrants in Australia. This further complicates the question of national identity and values, based on the 19th century tropes, when the cultural makeup of Australia was quite different to today, and partially explains why national identity and values are such a talking point, as discussed earlier. This therefore begs the question of the usefulness of the distinction between national and transnational, as it seems the days of the nation states are – at least in some places – nearly over. That is not to say that a country’s culture can have no unique features, merely that a redefinition of those features and a widened scope may be needed to accommodate all the members of the respective society.

All of this is reflected not only in the public debate, but also in art. In literature in particular, more and more writers write for a global audience rather than just local, and draw on global influences.⁸⁷ It is therefore important to be aware of these underlying forces in Australian literature when analysing it. Huggan criticises the literary critics’ “reliance on national(ist) tropes”⁸⁸ and instead he calls for “a comparative postcolonialism in which Australian literary/cultural trends and movements are understood within the larger context of transnational cultural traffic and global economic flows”.⁸⁹ Paul Giles sees this type of nationalism as a protective mechanism: “One reason Australian literary studies has been uncomfortable with transnationalism is because of its underlying investment in a protectionist intellectual economy whereby the home culture has come to be regarded as a centripetal point of refuge from the rest of the world.”⁹⁰ Giles identifies this as one of the reasons why Australian literature is not accorded the respect and attention as for example American literature, as the critics, influenced by the widespread promotion of a middle-brow ethos in the Australian cultural space, have failed to “bring [Australian] authors properly into dialogue with writers in other contexts.”⁹¹ It is not that that dialogue is not there on the part of the Australian writers, only that it is rarely discussed by the critics. A transnational perspective tries to do just that. Thus, instead of emphasising

⁸⁷ See for example Tim Parks, “The Dull New Global Novel,” *Where I’m Reading From: The Changing World of Books* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2015) 47-51.

⁸⁸ Huggan, *Australian Literature*, ix.

⁸⁹ Huggan, *Australian Literature*, xiv.

⁹⁰ Paul Giles, “Transnationalism and National Literatures: The Case of Australia,” *Journal of the European Association for Studies on Australia* Vol. 15, No. 3: 2.

⁹¹ Giles, 5.

Australia's isolation and peculiar nature, both Huggan and Giles advocate a broader perspective more suitable in today's globalised world. By identifying transnational links Australian literature will not lose its individuality, it will merely assert its importance in global terms.

While it may seem counterintuitive, transnational currents are evident even in Australian historical novels, which are no longer concerned mainly with national issues. Susan C. Brantly explores the transnational historical novel in the postmodern era mainly in regards to the Swedish literary scene, yet her observations about the relevance of transnational currents in this genre are universal: "The historical novel is not just a local, regional phenomenon, but has become, during the postmodern era, a transnational tool for exploring how we should think of nations and nationalism and what a society should, or should not, look like."⁹² The historical novel thus has an important political function, addressing issues relevant in today's globalised world, where the definition of national identities and values is ever harder. Peter Carey's novels are particularly concerned with this topic, as will be discussed in the last chapter. As Brantly also points out, contemporary historical novels often have a much broader scope in terms of the space they cover and address, commenting on world history. Good Australian examples include novels such as the Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Christos Tsiolkas *Dead Europe*, which uncovers the dark European history and its bearing on today's Australia, Les Murray's verse novel *Fredy Neptune*, which does the same with world history; or some of Peter Carey's novels.

In her study *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova maps out the workings of the literary world from the transnational perspective, emphasising the international currents influencing national literatures. Casanova emphasises that the traditions and literary heritage of a national and linguistic area form the basis of its literary capital in the world republic of letters, which operates similarly to the financial market on the basis of exchange of commodities, i.e. literary capital.⁹³ She points out that literatures such as American national literature, which could be seen – compared to European literary traditions – as somewhat younger and lesser, had to look elsewhere to enrich their own tradition: "the

⁹² Susan C. Brantly, "Introduction," *The Historical Novel, Transnationalism, and the Postmodern Era: Presenting the Past* (New York: Routledge, 2017) 16.

⁹³ See Casanova, 13 and 34-39.

United States in the 1920s was literarily a dominated country that looked to Paris in order to try to accumulate resources it lacked”.⁹⁴ Casanova’s claim applies as much to American literature as to Australian literature, which has not yet accumulated enough capital, it seems, to be granted the same status as American literature. Opening itself to dialogue with other literatures is the way for Australian literature to amass sufficient capital and configure it to its national literature to put itself firmly on the world literary map.

Richard Flanagan’s inaugural Boisbouvier Lecture is a great illustration of how Australia can accumulate literary capital. In his speech, Flanagan discusses his “top ten Tasmanian novels”,⁹⁵ which include Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Albert Camus’ *The Outsider*, and other “Tasmanian writers – Cortázar, Márquez, Baldwin, Carver, Lispector, Rosa, Bolaño and Chekhov”.⁹⁶ Flanagan’s ‘Tasmanian’ literary canon illustrates how he has appropriated foreign cultural capital and made it his own, because it resonated with him and because he found his experience reflected there:

[T]heir worlds were already mine, and everything I read was everything I had already lived; (...) I passed through the writing of their books to the other side where there was some understanding and some reconciliation that was also a form of love for what my world was and for what all our worlds are.⁹⁷

Flanagan, essentially, shares Casanova’s view of the transnational nature of the literary world, and sees literature as something which reflects local or personal experience, but has universal resonance, which is why he rejects the term “national literature”: “I don’t believe in national literature per se. I do believe in Australian writing, conceived mostly in obscurity, frequently in poverty, almost always in adversity. I believe in that writing as important, as central, and as necessary.”⁹⁸ What he rejects is thus not the idea of literature specific to Australia, but perhaps just the narrow-minded view that does not look beyond the borders in order to promote similarly insulated nationalist culture.

⁹⁴ Casanova, 42. A substantial part of Casanova’s study is about the importance of Paris, being the centre of the literary world, consecrating writers from all over the world; nowadays, with the dominance of English-language publishing, it is more London and New York that perform this role (Casanova 88).

⁹⁵ Richard Flanagan, “Does Writing Matter?,” *The Monthly*, Schwartz Media, October 2016 <<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2016/october/1475244000/richard-flanagan/does-writing-matter>> 29 June 2017.

⁹⁶ Flanagan, “Does Writing Matter?”.

⁹⁷ Flanagan, “Does Writing Matter?”.

⁹⁸ Flanagan. “Does Writing Matter?”.

Peter Carey's view of Australian capital is similar to Flanagan's and definitely transnational in its outlook. Perhaps the most palpable current detected in Carey's work is English literature, evident for example in *Jack Maggs*, which is essentially a rewriting of Dickens' *Great Expectations*, or in *My Life as a Fake*, inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and full of references to English modernists. Both novels reflect Carey's ambiguous relationship to the literary tradition that is the foundation stone of Australian literature: "One of the great riches that we Australians inherit is English literature. So it's fine to quarrel with it, but it's also ours".⁹⁹ But Carey draws on literary capital from outside the Anglophone tradition. In fact, he admits that at the start of his career, he was trying to escape the "'dun-coloured realism' of [his] country's literature",¹⁰⁰ and looked to the magic realists, with Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* being one of the most important influences on his writing.¹⁰¹ The influence of magic realism often remarked upon in criticism of Carey's works, and Gaile, for example, points out how well magic realism is suited to postcolonial discourse.¹⁰² This subject will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Moreover, as a writer living abroad, Carey is particularly prone to transnational influences, and the distance from his homeland – both physical and psychological – gives him a different perspective on his home country. Having been living in New York for decades, he has acknowledged the influence of this on his writing, particularly when writing his novel about Ned Kelly: "In the case of *The Kelly Gang*, I was absolutely writing a story for Australians. But living in New York reminded me that people didn't know the story, so I couldn't assume anything, and that made the story better".¹⁰³ His life in America doubtlessly also influenced the subject matter of some of his novels, such as *Parrot and Olivier in America*, inspired by the life of Alexis de Tocqueville. Also, the increasing Asian presence and influence in his home country has likewise found reflection in his

⁹⁹ Carey, "The 'Contrarian Streak'," *Fabulating Beauty*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Carey, "Like Joyce, García Márquez Gave Us a Light to Follow into the Unknown," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 18 Apr. 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/18/joyce-garcia-marquez-peter-carey>> 30 June 2017.

¹⁰¹ See Carey, "Like Joyce (...)"

¹⁰² See Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 67

¹⁰³ Peter Carey, "Peter Carey, The Art of Fiction No. 188", Interview by Radhika Jones, *The Paris Review* No. 177 (Summer 2006), <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5641/the-art-of-fiction-no-188-peter-carey>> 30 June 2017.

works, particularly *My Life as a Fake*, most of which is set in Malaysia, and which even features one of the main characters, Christopher Chubb, adopting a Malay-based pidgin.

Exploring the transnational currents running through Carey's work can thus be enlightening, uncovering connections outside the Australian locale, which, however, have to be interpreted in relation to the Australian context, with the implications that arise. Taking a transnational approach to Carey's historical novels sheds light on the various cultural influences that produced Australian history and culture, which only supports Carey's global and inclusive vision of the world, where nations, while retaining their uniqueness, are inevitably linked through cultural exchanges happening within as well as outside of their borders. Transnationalism is thus, along with postcolonialism and postmodernism, a useful tool for the analysis of Carey's work – as well as all of Australian literature – that will help shed light not only on the workings of the narrative strategies Carey employs, discussed in the next chapter, but particularly on the subject of construction of Australian identity in his novels, discussed in the fourth chapter.

3. LIES AND LIARS: CAREY'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES AND THE CHARACTERS THEY PRODUCE

“Remember, this is the country of the duck-billed platypus. When you are cut off from the rest of the world, things are bound to develop in interesting ways” (MLF 19), cautions John Slater, the English poet in *My Life as a Fake*. He is not alone in this opinion, as since Australia's discovery people have wondered at the strangeness of the continent, fraught with paradoxes that have had a great influence on how the country and its history have been recorded and ingrained in people's imagination. The observations of a nineteenth-century writer, Marcus Clarke, encompass the general feeling:

But this our native or adopted land has no past, no story. (...) The very animal life of these frowning hills is either grotesque or ghostly. (...) The natives aver that when night comes, from out the bottomless depths of some lagoon the Bunyip rises. (...) Australia has rightly been named the Land of the Dawning. Wrapped in the midst of early morning her history looms vague and gigantic.¹

This land of peculiarities and controversies, of coloniser as well as the colonised, this “mythical Australia, where reside / All things in their imagined counterpart”,² according to the poet James McAuley, was a place like no other, with a history that on the one hand reaches tens of thousands of years into the past, yet on the other hand is simultaneously written anew, ripe with Aboriginal mythology, but none the white settlers could relate to.

It is no wonder than that people's impressions of Australia were shaped by the fantastical nature of its history, as exemplified by Mark Twain's observations:

And what was the origin of this majestic city and its efflorescence of palatial town houses and country seats? Its first brick was laid and its first house built by a passing convict. Australian history is almost always picturesque; indeed, it is so curious and strange, that it is itself the chiefest novelty the country has to offer, and so it pushes the other novelties into second and third place. It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies. And all of a fresh new sort, no mouldy old stale ones. It is full of surprises, and adventures, and incongruities,

¹ Marcus Clarke, “Preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's *Poems*,” *The Australian Legend: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Carver, class material for The Australian Legend course at Durham University (October 2013) 3.

² James McAuley, “Terra Australis,” *The Australian Legend: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Carver, class material for The Australian Legend course at Durham University (October 2013) 4.

and contradictions, and incredibilities; but they are all true, they all happened.³

What Twain seems to be describing is not only Australia's history, but the country itself, the nature of which has shaped that history. The settlement of Australia was in many ways a one of a kind experiment – a populating a continent almost entirely with convicts whose descendants would become the founders of a new nation. That 'passing convict' was given the opportunity to leave his history behind, while writing a new one – a paradox in a country which itself abounds in paradoxes, be it of nature, or history itself. Paradoxes at times so incredible they seem like "the most beautiful lies". Such peculiar continent then demands the use of equally peculiar narrative strategies to convey its idiosyncrasies.

3. 1. Peter Carey's Play with History

Mark Twain's comment on the nature of Australian history also seems to be the perfect description of Peter Carey's historical novels, which is enhanced by the fact that Carey uses this very quotation as an epigraph to his first historical novel, *Illywhacker*, announcing his angle on Australian history and how to tell it – through lies and paradoxes so strange they seem real, defamiliarising the familiar and familiarising the unfamiliar, drawing on the cultural and literary capital of not just Australia, or the Anglophone literary tradition, but various other transnational influences, adapting them to the new environment in an act of "writing back to the Empire". All this is made possible thanks to the discourses of postcolonialism and postmodernism discussed earlier, which provide Carey with enough resources to create his playful narrative strategies with which to set down Australia's history, while simultaneously alerting to the fact that nothing is set in stone or produced in isolation.

The best way of describing Carey's narratives is perhaps as playful, as they play with history, the reader, the bounds of reality, and the conventions of the novel, offering the reader multiple possibilities and versions of history without sanctioning only one, leaving it up to the reader to decide. This is an inherently postmodern strategy, where the certainties of the Centre or the truth no longer exist. So, rather than reveal any profound truths about history, Carey's novels

³ Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World*, Chapter 16 (Project Gutenberg: 2006) Project Gutenberg Ebook, 18 August 2006, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2895/2895-h/2895-h.htm>> 20 Oct. 2017.

show how history, or rather histories, are constructed. Brian Edwards links Carey's narrative strategies with Roland Barthes' concept of "bricolage" in analysing *Illywhacker*, where Herbert Badgery's obsession with building houses is analogous to his ability to spin yarns,⁴ but his claims can be applied to all novels discussed here, where similar yarn-spinners/bricoleurs are to be found; and of course, Carey himself is one such bricoleur. Edwards asserts that

Carey's work, his inventive bricolage, refigures *the* Australian experience as an open site for further constructions. (...) In the processes of their artful play with 'national' constructions, Carey's texts disassemble the past as a reliable concept; they offer the attractions of new building permits unconstrained by regulations that limit the play of signification to measuring a construction's strength according to the quality of its truth-claim.⁵

Carey's novels thus provide the reader with bricks and mortar, as well as several blueprints, but it is up to the reader to choose the final construction, signifying that Australianness is a concept still in the making.

Carey's building material draws on many different sources to construct Australia's past. As Linda Hutcheon asserts, "the past really did exist, but we can 'know' it only through its texts, and therein lies its connection to the literary."⁶ Since the line between history and fiction is rather blurry, both serve as Carey's sources, and both are ultimately a human construct. Historiographic metafiction, a distinctly postmodern genre mentioned in 2.7., highlights this peculiar nature of historical knowledge, as it "represents a challenging of the (related) conventional forms of fiction and history writing through its acknowledgement of their inescapable textuality".⁷ *Illywhacker*, *Oscar and Lucinda*, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, and *My Life as a Fake* all have elements of this genre that Carey uses to bring Australian history alive.

One narrative strategy that Carey employs in his histories is intertextuality, which Hutcheon considers the genre's essential ingredient, which "replaces the challenged author-text relationship with one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself".⁸ The use of intertextual references in postmodern texts calls attention to the textuality of our knowledge by being in dialogue with the texts of the past, acknowledging

⁴ See Brian Edwards, "Deceptive Constructions: The Art of Building in Peter Carey's *Illywhacker*," *Fabulating Beauty*, ed. Andreas Gaile (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 150.

⁵ Edwards, 168.

⁶ Hutcheon, 128.

⁷ Hutcheon, 129.

⁸ Hutcheon, 126.

how they have shaped our notion of the past, the present, and the reader's response to a text. As Hutcheon asserts

Postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context. (...) It is not an attempt to void or avoid history. Instead it directly confronts the past of literature—and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts (documents). It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony.⁹

Ultimately, both history and fiction are produced by already existing discourses, which in new texts are reconfigured differently and put into different contexts, to produce different effects. Carey's novels call attention to this process of creating new stories and histories and exploit the possibilities of intertextuality to its fullest, as intertextuality is a particularly important force both in Australian fiction and history, both having been shaped by frequently opposing discourses of the colonisers and the colonised, attempting to reconcile the cultural, geographical and environmental differences. By making claims to the past and the literary traditions that stretch past the official beginning of Australia's history, Carey defies the simplistic views of history and proposes a new, transnational Australia, highlighting all the forces that contributed to Australian culture of today.

3. 2. Historical Intertexts

To show that the past shapes the future, as well as to provide historical context, Carey creatively uses historical documents and personages. Drawing on readers' existing knowledge of the past, he produces new versions of history, inviting consideration of the multiplicity of possibilities and alerting to the absence of absolute truths. *True History of the Kelly Gang* makes the most persistent claims to representing history, recounting the life of the famous Australian bushranger turned national icon. Populated with real historical personages and events, it looks like another textual record of the past. Ned Kelly is a well-known figure in Australia, but his story is more of a folk legend, passed down from generation to generation, which often obscures the more violent aspects of his bushranging career, celebrating his anti-imperial anti-authoritarianism, and seeing him as a "noble convict" or a "noble bushranger" – concepts dating back to the 19th century nationalism.¹⁰ As an Irish-Australian,

⁹ Hutcheon, 118.

¹⁰ See Huggan, "Cultural Memory in Postcolonial Fiction," 132.

whose father was transported to Australia for stealing a pig,¹¹ he came from a poor family who was constantly subject to “injustices dealt out to his kind by the Anglican political and social ascendancy in the colonies”¹² and felt these drove him to the crimes he later committed.¹³ These are set down in written historical records available to the public, such as contemporary news reports, police reports, and also *The Cameron Letter* (1898), later expanded into *The Jerilderie Letter* (1879), which gives Kelly’s view of events, which he presumably dictated to fellow gang member Joe Byrne.¹⁴ All of these sources provide competing versions of the Kelly legend, and Carey puts them to good use.

Inevitably, the sources at Carey’s disposal are of opposing nature – on the one hand, there are Kelly’s letters defending his actions, on the other hand there are condemning police reports, and news reports oscillating between the two views, each pursuing their agenda. In the middle, there is a grey area, and that is what Carey imaginatively exploits:

[T]he story of Ned Kelly is filled with unmapped and unrecorded time. So much is based on our limited understanding of dialogue recorded by courts and policemen. And there are so many different ways the evidence on record might be interpreted. So I’m having fun, I’m being mischievous.¹⁵

Arguably, his most important source is *The Jerilderie Letter*, from which Carey took the accounts of all major events of Kelly’s life, even though he dramatises them with artistic licence, occasionally changing the circumstances of certain events, such as Ned’s friendship with Constable Fitzpatrick and his attraction to Ned’s sister. The letter perhaps also serves as the premise of the novel, presented as a collection of Kelly’s letters.

More importantly, however, from the voice of *The Jerilderie Letter* Carey crafted the unique voice of the bushranger in the novel. The original letter, available in John Hanlon’s transcription through the National Museum of Australia, is written in quite a purposeful and indignant tone, recounting Kelly’s hardships, yet the syntax is difficult, punctuation very sparse, and episodes follow episodes without obvious links, making the letter hard to follow, although the

¹¹ See “John Kelly,” *Convict Records*, State Library of Queensland <<https://convictrecords.com.au/convicts/kelly/john/128597>> 16 July 2017.

¹² Paul Eggert, “The Bushranger’s Voice: Peter Carey’s *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) and Ned Kelly’s *Jerilderie Letter* (1879),” *College Literature* 34.3 (Summer 2007): 120.

¹³ See Eggert, 120.

¹⁴ See Eggert, 129.

¹⁵ Carey, “The ‘Contrarian Streak’,” *Fabulating Beauty*, 8.

rough writing style adds to the text's credibility.¹⁶ Carey mimics it well, reflecting the sparse punctuation in the absence of commas or semi-colons, including narrative leaps, while reining in the syntax for the sake of readability and tempering Kelly's anger in view of to whom the narrative is addressed:

[My] dear daughter you are presently too young to understand a word I write but (...) God willing I shall live to see you read these words to witness your astonishment and see your dark eyes widen and your jaw drop when you finally comprehend the injustice we poor Irish have suffered in this present age. How queer and foreign it must seem to you and all the coarse words and cruelty which I now relate are far away in ancient time. (*TH* 7)

While the purpose of the original letter was to publicly justify his actions in print,¹⁷ the fictional letters justify it in front of Kelly's daughter, which requires a different tone and focus, producing a different picture of Kelly. The narrative frame, coupled with Carey's emphasis on Kelly's emotional life, his complex family relationships, and the invented passionate relationship with Mary Hearn, leading to the equally fictional birth of his daughter, present Kelly as a family man first, who by virtue of necessity becomes an outlaw. Yet the real Kelly is less endearing, enforcing his authority as a "Widow's Son outlawed (...) [whose] orders must be obeyed":¹⁸

I have never interfered with any person unless they deserved it and yet there are civilians who take arms against me for what reason I do not know unless they want me to turn on them and exterminate them with out medicine I shall be compelled to make an example of some of them if they cannot find no other employment (...).¹⁹

While Carey's novel echoes these threats, and even keeps some of the lines from the letter,²⁰ his portrait of Kelly is tempered by the focus on his emotional and personal life.

By working with his sources so seamlessly, weaving in circulating historical knowledge with his imagination, Carey constructs an account which almost appears authentic, having led Graham Huggan to call the novel a "remarkable act of sustained ventriloquism"²¹. Xavier Pons even claims that

¹⁶ See John Hanlon, ed., "Ned Kelly's Jerilderie Letter," *The National Museum of Australia*, The National Museum of Australia <<http://www.nma.gov.au/interactives/jerilderie/home.html>> 16 July 2017.

¹⁷ See Hanlon, ed.

¹⁸ Hanlon, ed., page 39 of the letter.

¹⁹ Hanlon, ed., page 33 of the letter.

²⁰ For example Kelly being "compelled to show some colonial stratagem" (page 26 in Hanlon, ed.) appears in the novel as "provoked to show some colonial stratagem" (*TH* 388).

²¹ Huggan, "Cultural Memory", 137.

“[t]here is no hint of the status of the book as a work of fiction”.²² *True History of the Kelly Gang* is Carey’s contribution to the Kelly mythology, which has been in the making since even before his capture, as Nathanael O’Reilly notes, recounting plays, films, musicals, paintings, and folksongs as evidence of Kelly’s presence in popular culture since the end of the 19th century.²³ By adding his novel into the mix, Carey calls for a re-evaluation of the Ned Kelly history and myth, and by mimicking and incorporating the available historical sources he prompts the reader to consider how such sources are produced and passed on.

Real historical figures and events also serve as a basis of *My Life as a Fake*, which is Carey’s take on the Ern Malley Affair, a famous literary hoax of 1943, when the poets James McAuley and Harold Steward composed poems parodying the pretentiousness of modernist verse to hoax Max Harris, the editor of the modernist magazine *Angry Penguins*. Along with the poems, they invented the persona of the poet, Ern Malley, complete with a biography, and his sister, in whose name McAuley and Steward sent the poems and Malley’s life story to the editor. The revelation of the hoax caused a huge scandal, but *The Darkening Ecliptic* – the collection of Malley’s poems – has established itself in the Australian literary canon.²⁴ Michael Heyward notes that the whole affair “took on a wild life of its own and has tricked everybody by proving so durable, so puzzling, so arguable”.²⁵

Carey takes much more liberty with this story than with Ned Kelly, leaving no doubt about the status of the novel as fiction, contributing to the “wild life” of the affair. He invents new characters, such as the narrator Sarah Wode-Douglas, moves the story to the late 1940s, changes the names of real people, condenses the two hoaxers into the figure of Christopher Chubb, and adds elements of fantasy into the story. Much like *True History of the Kelly Gang*, Carey draws on authentic historical evidence, using the original poems published in *Angry Penguins*, along with the accompanying letters by Steward and McAuley, as well as the transcripts of the trial of Max Harris (Carey’s David

²² Xavier Pons quoted in Eggert, 123.

²³ See Nathanael O’Reilly, “The Influence of Peter Carey’s *True History of the Kelly Gang*: Repositioning the Ned Kelly Narrative in Australian Popular Culture,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* Vol. 40, No. 3 (2007): 491.

²⁴ For a thorough account of the event see Michael Heyward, *The Ern Malley Affair* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003).

²⁵ Michael Heyward, “Introduction,” *The Ern Malley Affair* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003) xv.

Weiss), as Carey admits in his “Author’s Note” (*MLF* 273). Here he also suggests that what intrigued him most about the affair was Ern Malley’s life:

Most of you probably didn’t think about the story of Ern Malley’s life. It got lost in the explosive revelation of the hoax. In the holocaust of argument and policemen, meaning versus nonsense, it was not likely you closed your eyes and tried to conjure up such a person as the mythical Ern Malley ... a garage mechanic suffering from the onset of Grave’s Disease (...) For me Ern Malley embodies the true sorrow and pathos of our time. One had felt that somewhere in the streets of every city was an Ern Malley ... a living person, alone, outside literary cliques, outside print, dying outside humanity but of it. (*MLF* 274)

In breathing life to Ern Malley through Bob McCorkle, Carey puts him into print, as it were, inscribing this outsider into history.

Much like in reality, the imagined poet only appears in the accounts of others, never in control of his own fate – in the novel his story is narrated retrospectively by Sarah Wode-Douglas, who had heard it from Christopher Chubb, McCorkle’s creator, similar to Steward and McAuley narrating the life of Ern Malley. Yet the switch from letters to dramatic retellings of events, filling in the details and episodes of McCorkle’s life adds to the vividness of the tale, almost convincing the reader of his existence despite the ludicrousness of it, while at the same time leaving the reader in doubt precisely because of the third-hand narrative and the narrator’s mental health issues revealed at the novel’s end. Carey also breathes new life into Ern Malley’s poetry, recasting what was intended as a parody of the pretentious modernist style as authentic Australian poetry with a distinct voice, as is apparent from Chubb’s reaction to McCorkle reciting his/Malley’s “Dürer: Innsbruck, 1495”:

Chubb knew the poem, of course, but nothing had prepared him for this performance of it, the strange and passionate waving of his free arm, the twisting of the head, the eyes rolled back like a blind man playing jazz piano. And the voice, which its original author had always imagined to be some variation of standard BBC English, was here so fierce and nasal, hoarse, ravaged by failure and regret. (...)

*I had often, cowered in the slumberous heavy air,
Closed my inanimate lids to find it real,
As I knew it would be, the colourful spires
And painted roofs, the high snows glimpsed at the back,
All reversed in the quiet reflecting waters —
Not knowing then that Dürer perceived it too.
Now I find that once more I have shrunk
To an interloper, robber of dead men’s dream,
I had read in books that art is not easy
But no one warned that the mind repeats
In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still*

the black swan of trespass on alien waters.

This was and was not the poem Chubb had written. It had been conceived as a parody and the first key to the puzzle of the hoax, but this lunatic had somehow recast it without altering a word. What had been clever had now become true, the song of the autodidact, the colonial, the damaged beast of the antipodes. (MLF 84)

Instead of the nonsense the authors intended it to be, the poem becomes a lament on the artist's plight, destined to recycle the ideas of others, echoing the postmodern idea of the writer using material from previously published texts. This is doubly true of the marginalised colonised subjects, consciously or unconsciously looking to the coloniser's culture they are being fed in producing their work, like McCorkle. Yet he manages to appropriate the language of the poem to make it sound Australian, staking a claim on an authentic voice in the modernist tradition. In this way Carey echoes the life of their own the poems have taken, despite the authorial intentions and proclamations of a lack of literary merit, but also the fate of Australian literature as a whole, which needs to find authenticity despite being based on British traditions. As David Lehman points out, "Malley's poems hold up to this day, eclipsing anything produced by any of the story's main protagonists *in propria persona*," some having been included in the *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* (1992), taught in Australian literature classes, and being lauded by, among others, the New York School of poetry.²⁶ Carey's McCorkle drives this point home.

By letting the imagined poet Bob McCorkle come to life to haunt his creator, Carey demonstrates the life-giving, creative power of the written word, alluding to past (hi)stories coming to haunt Australians. Andreas Gaile sees McCorkle as a metaphor for Australia, his unnatural birth at 24 years of age as "an allegory on Australia's unnatural birth as a prison colony and on its denied childhood".²⁷ In a similar vein, McCorkle's fabricated life, and the suffering he and his creator endure because of it can then be read as an allegory on the lies permeating Australian history that Australians have had to live with, and the problems that these continue to cause, haunting Australia as much as McCorkle haunts Chubb.

Oscar and Lucinda and *Illywhacker*, while relying on historical context, do not rewrite the past to the extent of *True History of a Kelly Gang* and *My Life as a*

²⁶ See David Lehman, "The Ern Malley Poetry Hoax - Introduction," *Jacket* No.17 (June 2002), <<http://jacketmagazine.com/17/ern-dl.html>> 29 June 2017.

²⁷ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 26.

Fake. Here, the past provides a convenient setting for a new retelling of historical periods – mid-19th century England and Australia in *Oscar and Lucinda*, and mainly 20th century Australia in *Illywhacker*, focusing on those usually exempt from historical accounts, and therein lies its strength. Lucinda represents the women conspicuously missing from most of history, while Oscar and Herbert Badgery represent men who are far from heroic or significant in the grand scheme of things. In these two novels the allusion to real historical events, documents, and personages are meant to add authenticity to the historical account, obscuring the lines between reality and fiction.

Thus in *Oscar and Lucinda* we find mentions of Thomas Carlyle’s correspondence talking about Lucinda’s mother Elizabeth (*OL* 83) and, to foster the context of the women’s liberation movement, George Eliot appears as Elizabeth’s friend, who disapproves of Lucinda when they meet in London, compelling Lucinda to think of her as a snob, who is not as rebellious as one might think, unlike Lucinda herself: “Even George Eliot, no matter what her fiction might suggest, was used to young ladies who lowered their eyes in deference to her own. Lucinda did not do so” (*OL* 200-202). While obviously fictional, Jessica Leader notes that “nothing Carey has written about Eliot or Carlyle contradicts any historical record”.²⁸ Thus such inclusions foster the novel’s aura of historical authenticity despite its status as fiction, prompting the reader to consider how and why particular versions of history are taken as truthful, while others are not. The mentions of entries for Abel Leplastier, Lucinda’s father, and Theophilus Hopkins, Oscar’s father, in *Encyclopedia Britannica* work in a similar way, as do allusions to the Great Depression, Eureka Stockade, or the anti-Chinese riots at Lambing Flat in *Illywhacker*. By using historical events and characters, Carey anchors his readers in reality, while submerging them in his fictions, offering an alternative version of history.

3. 3. Literary Intertexts

Carey’s novels engage in dialogue not only with history, but also with literature, by which Carey makes claims to the global, not just national, literary tradition and sets up new contexts for his works. In *True History of the Kelly*

²⁸ Jessica Leader, “‘New Mechanistic Analyses’: Postmodern Strategies in *Oscar and Lucinda*,” *English* 168 (1996), accessed via *The Victorian Web*, The Victorian Web <<http://www.victorianweb.org/neovictorian/carey/oscar/jlpomo.html>> 29 July 2017.

Gang, Carey uses literary allusions to create a kinship between the Australian bushranger and other famous heroes. Richard Blackmore's historical romance *Lorna Doone* (1869) permeates the text as Kelly's favourite book, as Kelly strongly relates to the hero John Ridd, who has to fight against powerful enemies and overcome unjust circumstances, and whose family situation is similar to Kelly's (TH 218). As Gaile points out, the real Kelly is known to have enjoyed the novel, and in Carey's retelling it serves to "endow his struggle with dimensions larger than life. Ned Kelly sees himself in line with historical and fictional personages who, like him, have fought a desperate and officially unsanctioned battle against injustice and unfairness".²⁹ Carey further underlines this point by namedropping Rob Roy and Robin Hood (TH 343), romanticised highwaymen fighting against social injustice.

Whether Kelly lives up to the heroes he aligns himself with is questionable, and the intertexts Carey introduces can both support his heroic status, as well as challenge it. The Glenrowan schoolmaster Thomas Curnow's reciting of the St. Crispin's Day speech from *Henry V* before the battle of Glenrowan is certainly not a sincere comparison of Kelly to Henry V, but Curnow's attempt at flattery to make Kelly give up his manuscript. Yet the novel manipulates the reader's sympathies to lie with Kelly, so it is not difficult, in that moment, to see his gang as a "band of brothers" (TH 408) "noble of true Australian coin" (TH 407). While Gaile criticises Kelly for ultimately aligning himself with the English by identifying with the speech despite his hatred of them, and points out that the irony of it, as well as the inadequacy of the comparison between the two battles escapes Kelly,³⁰ it is important to remember that it is Curnow who suggests this comparison, not Kelly, who would be easily swayed by the motivational speech, which has long ago transcended the English borders. So rather than seeing it as a misunderstanding on Kelly's part and the novel's abandonment of his protagonist,³¹ Kelly's use of the speech can be seen as an appropriation of the English literary legacy for the Australian context, where Kelly is the underdog, just as the English were at Agincourt, which reinforces the reader's sympathies, despite the negative outcome of the battle.

²⁹ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 100.

³⁰ See Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 99.

³¹ Andreas Gaile says that "the novel denounces Kelly when he metaphorically becomes a liege to the English King" (*Rewriting History*, 101).

My Life as a Fake is, more than any other novel of Carey's, permeated with intertexts, more overtly metafictional than any other, being a novel about the publishing world and an artistic creation literally coming to life. Apart from Ern Malley's *Darkening Ecliptic*, covered earlier, the novel is loosely based around Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as the epigraph from the eponymous novel suggests: "I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me."³² As Chubb's creation, Bob McCorkle resembles Frankenstein's monster, both physically and in character. He is described as "although not technically a giant, he was very close to seven feet in height," (*MLF* 76) similarly demanding his creator and his publisher hear him out and allow him some happiness, quoting Milton's *Paradise Lost* (which also appears in *Frankenstein*) when petitioning Chubb for a birth certificate: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man, Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me?' Give me my bloody birth certificate" (*MLF* 97). And much like in *Frankenstein*, Chubb ends up following his creation around the world, and ultimately meets his death. However, the fact that in *My Life as a Fake* the Monster comes into being through the sheer power of the written word is a radical rewriting of the science experiment in *Frankenstein*, and a great example of what Ashcroft et al. define as the postcolonial subject "writing back to the Empire", not only on Carey's part, rewriting one of the classics of English literature, but also on McCorkle's part, who is trying to take control of his fate, much like Australia itself. Andreas Gaile notes that "McCorkle embodies what Australians tend to see as their unnatural birth and the repercussions this has had for the nation's collective consciousness".³³ People's uncertainty about McCorkle's authenticity mirrors the uncertainty of some Australians about their culture's authenticity.

To firmly ground the novel in the cultural context of modernism, *My Life as a Fake* contains multiple allusions to modernist authors, such as Ezra Pound (e.g. *MLF* 32, 40, 112), T. S. Eliot and *The Waste Land* (*MLF* 19, 32, 136), as well as other modern writers such as Franz Kafka (*MLF* 75, 143) Rainer Maria Rilke (*MLF* 31, 86), the symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé (*MLF* 31, 86), or the Dadaist Tristan Tzara (*MLF* 27). Such references firmly steep the novel in the

³² Mary Shelley in Carey, *My Life as a Fake*, no page number.

³³ Gaile, *Fabulating Beauty*, 45.

world of literature and foreground the topic of literary creation. The connection to modernism is particularly relevant, as one of the prominent features of modernist texts is allusion, especially classical allusion, linking the text to the wealth of cultural knowledge accumulated over time. This is exactly what Chubb detests and parodies in his McCorkle poems without Max Harris noticing, as Chubb points out: “Send him a poem with the line ‘Look, my Anopheles’ as if it were some classical allusion and he would never admit he did not know Anopheles” (*MLF* 32). Anopheles is a type of mosquito, but the sound of the name maintains the pretence it is a classical allusion, but other poems of *The Darkening Ecliptic* contain genuine allusions.³⁴ Yet despite Chubb’s intention, it is his/McCorkle’s pretentious modernist poems that are etched in Australia’s literary history, not his own “serious” poetry. This demonstrates not only the life of their own literary creations can take irrespective of their author’s intentions, but also the fact that intertextual texts that build on literary and cultural capital are appealing. Just like *The Darkening Ecliptic* put a new, uniquely Australian spin on modernism, so does *My Life as a Fake* put a new spin on the whole scandal by taking bits and pieces of history and literary works and mixing them with fantasy. The boundaries between authenticity and fakery, history and fiction, and national literatures, are dissolved in Carey’s amalgam which makes the point that art is rarely solely the product of the creator’s imagination, always drawing on the existing cultural wealth – something Carey embraces wholeheartedly.

In *Oscar and Lucinda* literary references are not as prominent, yet still significant. The references to Victorian authors create historical context and authenticity with the novel’s characters interacting with George Eliot or Dante Gabriel Rossetti, or reading Dickens’s *Bleak House*. Gaile and other critics further note that Oscar and his father have been inspired by *Father and Son* (1907), a memoir by the English poet and critic Edmund Gosse about his childhood.³⁵ Carey acknowledges the source in “Acknowledgements” to the novel, thanking “Edmund Gosse from whose life [he] borrowed Plymouth Brethren, a Christmas Pudding and a father who was proud of never having read Shakespeare”. While not all readers may pick up on this reference, it showcases how Carey

³⁴ E.g. to Dürer’s paintings in “Dürer: Innsbruck, 1495” and “Documentary Film”, to Pericles in “Young Prince of Tyre”, or Hyperion in “Colloquy with John Keats”. See Ern Malley, *The Darkening Ecliptic* in *Jacket* No. 17 (June 2002), <<http://jacketmagazine.com/17/ern-poems.html>> 29 July 2017.

³⁵ See e.g. Gaile, *Fabulating Beauty*, 57.

appropriates material on which he builds his novels – in this case building an Australian historical novel on English traditions, firmly inscribing it in the context of the Victorian novel by not only namedropping Victorian writers and setting it in the Victorian period, but by drawing on the conventions of the Victorian novel, only to subvert them.

Sue Ryan-Fazilleau also notes this resemblance to Victorian novels which she characterises as long, employing realist and didactic narrative techniques, common themes such as orphans, inheritance, gambling, and chance, often ending in marriage of the protagonists, and with the colonies as a “liminal presence haunt[ing] the periphery of imperial awareness”.³⁶ Like the Victorian masterpieces, *Oscar and Lucinda* is an extensive novel with a complicated plot with many subplots, told in a realist didactic mode, covering an extended period of time, incorporating the themes mentioned by Ryan-Fazilleau, and representing a society which has the prudishness and outward obsession with propriety typical of the Victorian era. Yet the two heroes – an effeminate priest with a gambling problem, and an independent woman fighting social conventions – are far from the typical Victorian male and female, showing a different side of Victorian society. Moreover, while the relationship of the narrator to Oscar and Lucinda appears clear from the start, letting the reader assume the two heroes are the narrator’s great-grandparents, the ending subverts this assumption, defying the conventional ending of many a Victorian novel. A further subversion is the prominence of the goings-on in the colony over the Centre, again, giving voice to the marginalised. Through these acts of subversion of the familiar Carey emphasises the point all his historical novels make – that there are alternative versions of history previously underrepresented, and that the English literary traditions are not solely the property of the English.³⁷

Illywhacker relies mainly on historical intertexts, rather than the literary, but similarly to *Oscar and Lucinda* its structure references a specific type of novel, the picaresque, which originated in Spain in the 16th century and spread to other national literatures. W. M. Frohock explains that the term “picaresque novel” usually refers to “a kind of pseudo-autobiography of a special kind of

³⁶ Sue Ryan-Fazilleau, “Bob’s Dreaming: Playing with Reader Expectations in Peter Carey’s *Oscar and Lucinda*,” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* Vol. 59, No. 1 (2005): 11-12, 24.

³⁷ For an even more subversive Australian take on the Victorian novel see Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs*, a rewriting of Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*.

miscreant hero, a simple episodic form, a perspective that s[ees] society from the bottom up, and a report on life that record[s] many adventures and rapid changes of fortune in a wryly ironic style full of satirical overtones”.³⁸ *Illywhacker* fits this description perfectly, with its lower-class eccentric hero spinning yarns about his life interspersed with random episodes about equally random things, and its satirical tone ultimately comparing Australia to a pet shop. By working within the frame of a picaresque novel, Carey again makes claims to the European literary tradition, drawing on a long line of predecessors, from *Lazarillo de Tormes*, a novella published anonymously in 1554 that is usually considered the first example of the genre, followed by Mateo Alemán’s *Guzmán Alfarache*,³⁹ via Cervantes, to the stepping stones of the English novel by Fielding or Sterne, which also incorporate elements of the picaresque. Luc Herman even calls *Illywhacker* “an example of the Dickensian picaresque”,⁴⁰ detecting a Dickensian influence even prior to *Oscar and Lucinda*.

While the themes of trickery, history, the telling of history, and the trustworthiness of sources are clearly meant to undermine the traditional colonial discourse, the fact that Carey uses such a traditional type of novel as a model can be seen not only as subversive, altering the tradition of the British/European novel from the inside and inscribing Australia into its history, but on the other hand, as Karen Lamb proposes, it can also be seen as conforming to the British standards in writing and notions of Australia:

In English reviews a cultural comfort-zone was well mapped-out, with comparisons to Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* appearing frequently. (...) Carey was writing ‘bush Gothic’ in a way that returned Australia to the past glories of the bush tale, to a version of itself – one that was also a cultural projection.⁴¹

Yet such duality of interpretation is typical for any Carey novel, being part of its charm as well as aim, lulling the reader into a sense of familiarity, only to surprise him with unexpected twists and turns. Rewriting of familiar stories, genre conventions, lives of famous popular figures, or history, alert the reader to the

³⁸ W. M. Frohock, “The Falling Center: Recent Fiction and the Picaresque Tradition,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn, 1969): 62.

³⁹ See Anthony J. Close, “The Legacy of Don Quijote and the Picaresque Novel,” ed. by Harriet Turner and Adelaida Lopez de Martinez, *The Cambridge Companion to the Spanish Novel: From 1600 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 15.

⁴⁰ Luc Herman, “Canonizing Australia: The Case of Peter Carey,” *Shades of Empire in Colonial and Post-colonial Literatures*, eds. C.C. Barfoot and Theo D’Haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993) 110.

⁴¹ Karen Lamb, “Bringing Australia Home: Peter Carey, the Booker, and the Repatriation of Australian Culture,” *Fabulating Beauty*, ed. Andreas Gaile (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 24.

power of the written word, and to the fact that that is how most of our knowledge about the past is gained. So rather than being a sign of cultural cringe, the use of literary intertexts makes confident claims on older literary traditions which gain new meaning in the Australian context.

3. 4. Narrative Frames: Destabilising the Boundaries between Lies and Truths

To emphasise the unreliability of textual evidence, Carey takes pains to create narrative frames for his novels which both claim historical authenticity, yet also outwardly display the lack of it. While the historical and literary intertexts discussed above create the illusion of veracity and foster the connection to the past, the way Carey plays with them and the way he presents the events in the novels signifies all is not as it seems. Deceptive titles, outward claims to authenticity or inauthenticity, elements of the fantastic, and unreliable narrators serve to destabilise Carey's narratives. Andreas Gaile aptly identifies Carey's deceptions as strategies of "postmodern resistances against essentialism [which are] ideally suited for the task of unmaking history and for testing the boundaries between fact and fiction, reality and illusion, history and story".⁴² All four novels explore how Australian stories are forged, passed down, and altered, and because deception and lies play such an essential role in the process, they become Carey's ultimate building block.

First hint of Carey's trickery can be detected in the novels' titles. *Illywhacker* directly announces that it is a novel about "a professional trickster", which is a definition of the term that Carey includes as another epigraph to the novel. *Oscar and Lucinda* perhaps seems the most innocent of the titles, yet it is all the more deceptive. A male and female name in the title connected only by "and" promises a romantic story (recalling titles such as *Romeo and Juliet*, or *Tristan and Iseult*), leading the reader to believe Oscar and Lucinda are indeed the narrator's great-grandparents, only to disappoint them. Like *Illywhacker*, *My Life as a Fake* outwardly suggests there are falsifications involved, but it can be interpreted in various senses. As the novel is constructed as the diary of Sarah Wode-Douglas, it may be her admission of deception or simply refer to her realisation that her life was built on a lie about her mother's death. But it also

⁴² Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 45.

refers to the life of the invented Bob McCorkle, whose manuscript is titled thus, and perhaps even Chubb's life, as it is also interspersed with lies and falsifications. *True History of the Kelly Gang* does the reverse of *Illywhacker* and *My Life as a Fake* and deliberately misleads the reader into believing in the story's authenticity. The absence of either a definite or an indefinite article, however, makes it instantly suspect. Carolyn Bliss notes on this subject that "the novel is not *a* or *the* true history, because it is only *Ned's* true history: his sad and ultimately futile attempt to find the truth, the heart, the authenticity in his life",⁴³ and her analysis corresponds with Carey's mode of historiography that alerts readers to the impossibility of absolute truth.

The title of *True History of the Kelly Gang* is perhaps the most interesting of all four, in that it announces and simultaneously denies its claim to authenticity, if one makes a connection with similar texts. Bruce Woodcock observes that Carey's choice of title draws inspiration from history, or more precisely, from the history of historiography: "The title (...) invokes the flavour of the authentic eyewitness narrative testimonies or memoirs, such as became common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A 'true history' was a reliable chronicle, asserting its authenticity against fable and myth."⁴⁴ As discussed in section 2. 5., the historian's work must have allowed for more creativity than today, obscuring the distinction between a history and what we today call a novel. The tradition Woodcock speaks of dates back to the rhetorician and satirist Lucian of Samosata,⁴⁵ of whose *True Historie* (or *True Story*) the title of Carey's novel is highly reminiscent.

At the beginning of his *True Story*, Lucian admits:

I tell all kinds of lies in a plausible and specious way, but also because everything in my story is a more or less comical parody of one or another of the poets, historians and philosophers of old, who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables. [...] as I had nothing true to tell, not having had any adventures of significance, I took to lying. But my lying is far more honest than theirs, for though I tell the truth in nothing else, I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar.⁴⁶

⁴³ Carolyn Bliss, "'Lies and Silences': Cultural Masterplots and Existential Authenticity in Peter Carey's *True History*," *Fabulating Beauty*, ed. Andreas Gaile (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 291.

⁴⁴ Woodcock, 145.

⁴⁵ See Woodcock, 145.

⁴⁶ Lucian, *True Story*, *Internet Sacred Text Archive* <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/true/tru01.htm>> 30 July 2017.

His fantastical account of a traveller who visits the Sun, the Moon, the inside of whale, who runs errands for Odysseus and chats with Homer, is thus denounced as an outrageous lie at the beginning, but the narrative itself takes pains to claim it is all true, like the texts it parodies. When in the land of the blessed, he sees writers punished for telling lies, amongst them the historian Herodotus, he remarks: “On seeing them, I had good hopes for the future, for I have never told a lie that I know of.”⁴⁷ This tension between the title and the main content asserting it is all true, and the author’s acknowledgement it is all lies produces the desired effect of parody and, like Carey’s novel, draws attention to the unreliable nature of historical accounts.

However, Carey nowhere in the book openly acknowledges the status of the story as fiction, but that is implied by its nature of being a novel, and by the title’s relationship to the “true history” literary tradition and especially Lucian’s book. Like in Lucian’s account, the narrator – Ned Kelly himself – opens the book by saying “this history (...) will contain no single lie may I burn in Hell if I speak false” (*TH* 7). This formulation is reminiscent of the assertions of truth of Lucian’s narrator, the punishment of Herodotus for telling lies, and Lucien’s indictment of false accounts. With no such indictment present in Carey’s novel, it happily fosters an illusion of authenticity.

Not only does the title assert the story’s genuineness, Carey also takes pains to make it appear as a historical document. While *Illywhacker*, *Oscar and Lucinda*, and *My Life as a Fake* are also first-person narratives, presented as memoirs of sorts, with claims to being historical, none go as far as *True History*. Ned Kelly’s history is presented in 13 “parcels”, each prefaced with a short commentary, including a description of the paper on which the original was written. “Parcel 1” is introduced thus: “National Bank letterhead. Almost certainly taken from the Euroa Branch of the National Bank in December 1878. There are 45 sheets of medium stock (8” x 10” approx.) with stabholes near the top where at one time they were crudely bound. Heavily soiled” (*TH* 5). This amount of detailed information about the original resembles the work of an archivist assessing an artefact. Furthermore, the circumstances of Kelly’s death are imparted in two short accounts opening and closing the novel, appearing to have

⁴⁷ Lucian, *True Story*.

been written by a historian, even their shelf mark in the Melbourne Public Library is included (even though no library of that name exists).

The carefully constructed premise of a historical document with an authentic voice of Kelly disintegrates when at the end of the novel, the letters are revealed to have fallen into the hands of Curnow, whose betrayal leads to the defeat of the Kelly Gang, leaving Curnow the custodian of Kelly's written legacy, as the archivist's commentary reports: "The evidence provided by the manuscript suggests that in the years after the Siege of Glenrowan he continued to labour obsessively over the construction of the dead man's sentences" (*TH* 419). How can the reader know to what extent did his editorial interventions alter Ned's voice? Carolyn Bliss seems to agree with Graham Huggan in thinking that the voice we hear is "never Kelly's own"⁴⁸ and takes the "extradiegetic framing" as proof that

Ned is ambushed from all sides by masterplots. He desperately wants to construct his own narrative, (...) [b]ut he is hedged around by people who want to write him into metanarratives of their own choosing. To Mary, he must be a knight errant, to Curnow a dastardly villain, to some of the reporters a savage beast who must be brought to bay, to many of his compatriots a kind of hounded Robin Hood.⁴⁹

Like Ned, not even Carey can then tell Carey's true history, which died with him, so instead he showcases how that history was seized and appropriated for various purposes, whether to show and Australian hero of the people, or a vicious criminal. *True History of the Kelly Gang* thus portrays "mythistory" in the making (see 2. 6.) while contributing to it, leaning more towards the heroic interpretation of Kelly. As far as the narrative can be trusted, Kelly is very much aware that there is a different Kelly the newspapers and the police have created, as he sums up upon reading one such article: "[the] true & secret part of history is left to me" (*TH* 240). This statement illustrates that no matter where a story comes from, some aspects of it will always be lost. The sheer insecurity over what is and is not true the reader is left with at the novel's end not only results in questioning the credibility of this particular account, but of any historical account.

The novel's narrator therefore becomes unreliable, which is a device Carey employs in all four novels to further blur the boundary between truth and fiction. Kelly's narration is unreliable not only because of Curnow's editing, but also

⁴⁸ Graham Huggan quoted in Carolyn Bliss, 293.

⁴⁹ Bliss, 293.

because of his personal agenda. Despite his promise to tell nothing but the truth, as the letters are meant to prove to his daughter what injustices her father suffered (as discussed in 2. 5.), they are likely to skip over events that may hinder his efforts. While he may not be guilty of lying, it is possible he is guilty of omissions. That is Carey's way of demonstrating in practise Hayden White's assessment of history accounts as essentially a literary genre, inflected by the author's point of view, ideology, and intentions.⁵⁰

While Kelly is a self-proclaimed truth-teller, *Illywhacker's* Herbert Badgery is a self-proclaimed liar, who announces on the first page that "lying is [his] main subject, [his] speciality, [his] skill" (*IL* 3), encouraging the reader to forego trying to dismantle his lies and just "relax and enjoy the show" (*IL* 3). Such disclaimer gives Carey free reign and perhaps lulls the reader into thinking the novel is more of a fantasy distant from the world of realism, as one might assume with an allegedly 139-year-old narrator. Yet as demonstrated above, there are plenty of allusions to historical events and contexts, as well as Badgery's occasional claims to be telling the truth, that the reader can never simply "relax". As a self-proclaimed liar, Herbert cannot be trusted even to be telling lies.

Helen Daniel explains the problem of Herbert's admission in her inventive study *Liars: New Australian Novelists*, where she discusses "the liar's paradox" (or Epimenides paradox) which reads "All Cretans are liars". Daniel observes that this statement "rudely violates the accepted dichotomy of true/false, [so] [i]f you tentatively think it is true, it immediately backfires and makes you think it is false," which is exactly how Herbert's statement that he is a liar works.⁵¹ She talks about the lie as an organising principle common to modern Australian novelists like Carey, but also Murray Bail or Peter Mathers:

[T]he Lie of Fiction is built on paradoxes, always dialectic in nature, always two-faced, containing the doubleness of truth and falsity. All fiction is invention. Sometimes the realism persuades us of its truth. Sometimes we are doped by its untruth. Some writers play on our disbelief. These are the Liars, celebrating the artifice of fiction. The Liars are flaunting the Lie.⁵²

Carey's *Illywhacker* is a masterful example of "flaunting the Lie," always keeping the reader on his toes, no matter how entertaining the show. When he claims that his age is "the one fact you can rely on (...) because it has been publicly

⁵⁰ See section 2.5.

⁵¹ Helen Daniel, *Liars: Australian New Novelists* (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1988) 3.

⁵² Daniel, 4.

authenticated” (*IL* 3), he essentially proves nothing he says can be believed, since he can hardly be that old. His whole almost 600-page yarn then appears to be indeed for show, full of strange things and incredibilities, just as Mark Twain’s impressions, though Carey’s agenda is more elaborate, as through such a narrator he explores the very process of (hi)story-telling.

Herbert’s unreliability is demonstrated not only by his admission of being a liar, but also by his self-consciousness about how his narrative is constructed. Frequently even he does not know what the truth is: “As it happened, I had known Charles Ulm. Possibly I had known Charles Ulm. To tell you the truth I can’t remember whether I really did know or if I claimed it so often I came to believe it myself” (*IL* 27). Also, he often talks of himself both in the first and the third person in recounting the same story: “I heard the twang of wire and turned. I saw the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life. (...) Herbert Badgery stood there staring at her. I can see him. He is almost as much a stranger to me as he is to her” (*IL* 17). Both of these aspects of his narration put in question his mental state. While this split self may simply signify that Herbert can now hardly recall his young self, it could also be his admission of no longer knowing his true self after changing his personality so much due to his tricks. While the reader knows from the start that the story is told in retrospect, at the end of the novel it is also revealed Herbert has been spinning his yarns from his cage in the Best Pet Shop in the World to entertain visitors. He is old and plagued with physical ailments, with an allegedly damaged brain – he could hardly be more unreliable. Yet since the readers are prepared for his unreliability, Herman notes that “it paves the way for an easy acceptance on the part of the reader of the fantastic stories he will be confronted with all through the text”.⁵³ However, although his stories are full of lies, some of those lies turn out to be true in terms of Australian history.

What better way of pointing to the lies of Australian history than through a narrative told by a notorious liar, a trickster, an aviator and a car salesman, who incidentally also has a degree in history. Carey could hardly have hinted more obviously at what he thinks of presumably impartial history accounts than by making his illywhacker an academically sanctioned historian, who is always in “a hurry to find some little snippet, some picturesque fact that would serve to impress” (*IL* 429), rather than attempting to find the truth. His former lover Leah

⁵³ Herman, 112.

Goldstein describes Herbert's dubious work ethic, accusing him of stealing her work, after reading his notebooks: "And even then you have not done me the honour of thieving things whole but have taken a bit here, a bit there, snipped, altered, and so on. You have stolen like a barbarian, slashing a bunch of grapes from the middle of a canvas" (*IL* 518). Her comments, coming at the end of the novel as they do, only confirm what the reader already knows (while also being a fitting description of Carey himself). Herbert asserts he has a "salesman's sense of history" (*IL* 321), suggesting that history is a commodity to be marketed and sold, which is presumably why it sometimes gets embellished and altered. Daniel picks up on this in the "Dialogue" of her Reader and Liar preceding her chapter on Carey, where the Liar asserts: "All liars are salesman. Selling a different way of seeing things. Selling corrective lens. You only buy if you want to see."⁵⁴ Badgery does exactly that – selling his lies to a willing audience, not only to impress, but also to comfort, because sometimes lies are easier to swallow, as he asserts: "There is a part of us that knows the thing is not true, and we hold it closer to ourselves because of it, refusing to hold it out at arm's length or examine it against the light" (*IL* 171). Yet what Daniel's Liar mainly refers to is Carey providing an alternative viewpoint on Australian history, wrapped in the shiny package full of Herbert's lies.

This topic is at the heart of *Illywhacker's* larger aim – to alert the reader to the lies Australian history is based on. While Herbert's yarning is about his personal history, he recounts it in the context of the national history, his lies about his personal life reflect those pertaining to the life of the nation. As an admirer of a great lie, like the fictional historian M. V. Anderson whom he studied in his history course, he subscribes to Anderson's statement:

'Our forefathers were all great liars. They lied about the lands they selected and the cattle they owned. They lied about their backgrounds and the parentage of their wives. However it is their first lie that is the most impressive for being so monumental, i.e., that the continent, at the time of the first settlement, was said to be occupied but not cultivated and by that simple device they were able to give the legal owners short shrift and, when they objected, to use the musket or poison flour, and to do so with a clear conscience. It is in the context of this great foundation stone that we must begin our study of Australian history.' (*IL* 429)

It seems only natural then that Herbert is a notorious liar, as lying seems to be the national trait. Instead of being ashamed of these lies, however, he is convinced by

⁵⁴ Daniel, 144.

Anderson that “a liar might be a patriot” (*IL* 429), that by not countering those lies he is keeping the foundations of his nation safe. So while the topic of *terra nullius* is touched upon frequently, it is always Leah Goldstein who voices the truth: “The land is stolen. The whole country is stolen. The whole nation is based on a lie which is that it was already occupied when the British came here. If it is anybody’s place it is the blacks” (*IL* 286). The liar conjuring up his world from the inside of a cage thus lends itself as the metaphor of the convicts and their minders, essentially also trapped on the island, claiming the island for themselves by adopting the lie of *terra nullius*. Thus

Herbert’s story is an Australian family saga, with the family legacy of lies bequeathed to his children and to theirs. (...) their family history is the Australian history of lies, of self-deception, of dreams and visions preferred to truth – the calibrations of self-deception which leaves Australia a human museum, a pet shop,⁵⁵

as Helen Daniel sums up. In his sprawling novel, Carey lays bare the core of Australian history, the essence of which lurks in all the other novels discussed here.

Oscar and Lucinda touches the root of the great Australian lie by portraying the colonial arrogance and superiority of white Australians, especially in the figure of Mr Jeffries who leads Oscar’s expedition to the Outback, acting like a great explorer. This topic will be explored more in the next chapter, however, like in *Illywhacker* and *True History*, the unreliable narrator mimics the unreliability of the foundational narrative of Australia. Unlike all the other novels, *Oscar and Lucinda* has a narrator who does not take an active part in the story, only the story-telling as an omniscient voice who comments on it from a late 20th century perspective. On the first page we learn the narrator is Oscar’s great-grandson, which means this is at best a second-hand or a third-hand account. He has been raised on stories by his bullying mother who idolises Oscar as the exemplary churchman who brought Christianity to Bellingen (*OL* 1-2), which he dismisses because he has “learned long ago to distrust local history” (*OL* 2) issued by the Historical Society for the lies it entails, concealing uncomfortable truths, like the murder of Aborigines at Darkies’ Point, now renamed Darkwood to erase its trace (*OL* 2). Presumably then, the narrator wishes to provide a more accurate account of events, yet due to his not being there, and the impossibility to verify his sources and gauge his own omissions and additions, as well as the tricks he

⁵⁵ Daniel, 177.

plays on the reader, he cannot be trusted either. Like all the other narrators, he dismisses official history, and instead compiles his own.

Half-way through the novel, the narrator reveals the key event his narrative evolves from: “In order that I exist, two gamblers, one Obsessive, the other Compulsive, must meet” (*OL* 224). That meeting, however, is revealed to be heavily dependent on chance, the narrator revealing that to arrive at this “conclusion[, it] requires, of the active party, a journey as complex as that of a stainless steel Pachinko ball (rolling along grooved metal tunnels, sloping down, twisting sideways, down into the belly of Leviathan,⁵⁶ up, sideways, up, up, and out of the door to face the red settee)” (*OL* 224). This is a fitting description of the series of convoluted events that characterise the narrative, and Susan Ryan-Fazilleau perceives this statement as an admission that “all of the ‘coincidences’ which change the course of the story are narrative manoeuvres by an author who began with the end of his story and then worked backwards”.⁵⁷ The end – his existence – thus dictates how the events preceding and following this chapter unfold, as illustrated by the use of words like “must” and “requires”, suggesting that the grey area of events unknown to the narrator was filled with plot twists leading to the desired end. This sentence also supports what the titles seems to promise, that Oscar and Lucinda are the narrators great-grandparents.

Until the very end, the whole narrative seems to support this, which leaves the reader extremely disappointed when Miriam Chadwick is revealed to be the great-grandmother, who seduces and marries Oscar when he delivers the glass church to Bellingen. This further damages the narrator’s credibility as, as Sigrun Meinig points out, “there is not enough time for [Oscar] to recount his atrocious adventures to Miriam, who in the logic of the narrative is the only person who could possibly have known about them and passed them on”.⁵⁸ This puts the whole narrative in jeopardy, despite the fact that the narrator includes hints throughout the novel, such as when we meet Lucinda for the first time, as a child who has just damaged her birthday present: “the air was filled with violence whose roots she would only glimpse years later when she lost her fortune to my great-grandmother and was made poor overnight” (*OL* 79). By the time Oscar and

⁵⁶ The ship Oscar and Lucinda travel on to Australia.

⁵⁷ Ryan-Fazilleau, 18.

⁵⁸ Sigrun Meinig, *Witnessing the Past: History and Post-Colonialism in Australian Historical Novels* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 2004) 148.

Lucinda meet, and a blossoming relationship has been suggested, the reader has forgotten all about this, especially since Miriam only appears – apart from the end – in one seemingly random chapter, directly following Oscar and Lucinda’s bet and Lucinda’s secret admission that she “could marry this man” (*OL* 395). The significance of the chapter outlining Miriam’s life and its placement only becomes clear at the novel’s end.

Everything the reader comes to believe about *Oscar and Lucinda* explodes like a Prince Rupert’s drop, which the narrator holds in the palm of his left hand while writing (*OL* 128), as if to suggest the fate of his narrative. While seemingly strong and unbreakable,

if you put down your hammer and take down your pliers instead (...), you will soon see that this is not the fabled glass stone of the alchemists, but something almost as magical. For although it is strong enough to withstand a sledgehammer, the tail can be nipped with a pair of blunt-nosed pliers. (...) And once it is done it is as if you have taken out the keystone, removed the linchpin, kicked out the foundations. (*OL* 129)

The final revelation removes that keystone and lays bare the deceptive construction of the narrative. The lies the reader has come to believe are exploded, like all lies must be, in another masterful deconstruction of the history-writing process Carey offers in *Oscar and Lucinda* as another attempt at writing back to the Empire. As Ryan-Fazilleau notes,

[h]e implicitly invites us to identify with Oscar and Lucinda and uses his narrative authority to make us believe that they/we represent the centre. Our expectations are therefore frustrated when they/we are abruptly written into silence and pushed out to the periphery of the story at the end. The experience is not a pleasant one. But learning by vicarious experience through role-play is a far more effective way of appreciating the depth of this injustice than just reading about it in abstract terms (...).⁵⁹

The reader has been thoroughly schooled in the practises of history-writing, with all its omissions, twists, and turns, which correspond to the writer’s agenda.

Unlike *Oscar and Lucinda*, the narrator of *My Life as a Fake* is not playing games with the reader. However, Sarah’s account of her time in Kuala Lumpur, which incorporates both her family history and the story of the hoax, is no more trustworthy. Carey attempts to give her account authenticity by trying to pass it off as a diary, composed at “The Old Rectory, Thornton, Berkshire. August 1985” (*MLF* 3), yet the absence of quotation marks in the narrative at times makes it

⁵⁹ Ryan-Fazilleau, 27.

difficult to distinguish between the speakers, and sometimes Sarah's accounts are second- or even third-hand, as she recounts versions of the past by Chubb and Slater in their own voice. This results in Chubb and occasionally Slater becoming narrators too, and Chubb's narrative is especially suspect, since one of his lies already allegedly came true in the existence of McCorkle, yet he proclaims he "[does] not lie" (*MLF* 47), even though his "lie" chased him around the world. That, along with Sarah's admission of having had a nervous breakdown at the end of the novel complicates the novel's relationship between fiction and reality. Sarah's past proves to be more of an imagination than the truth, when Chubb clarifies the circumstances of her mother's death, which has defined her life. Only then does she realise that "[she] couldn't remember who told [her]. It was just something [she] had always known" (*MLF* 133). Mentally unstable, and prone to reimagining her own past, her account is dubious at best.

What makes *My Life as a Fake* even less trustworthy, disrupting the illusion of a historically accurate reality, is the existence of Bob McCorkle which, despite the initial incredulity of the characters, is portrayed with such conviction that the reader is forced to believe it. This is Carey's mythistory at its best, portraying Twain's "curious", "strange", incredible history of Australia that is nonetheless all true, denying the basic principles of Western epistemology. As Bruce Woodcock notes, "the point at which a realist storyteller would stop is the point at which for Carey a scenario becomes interesting – the moment when it becomes bizarre".⁶⁰ By including the fantastical in his novels, Carey asserts Australia's difference from the rest of the world, especially the former colonial Centre, while also pointing back to the folklore traditions full of myths and fantastical stories which are often the foundations of a national culture. From the novels discussed here, the fantastical features in *Illywhacker* and *True History of the Kelly Gang*,⁶¹ but *My Life as a Fake* transgresses the bounds of reality most

⁶⁰ Woodcock, 13.

⁶¹ *Illywhacker* features a number of episodes where magic, myth, and mystification are prominent, yet in the context of Herbert's playful narration, which from the start begs not to be trusted, they are more of an embellishment than subversion, serving to entertain rather than puzzle the reader. Herbert's age, his androgynisation ("growing tits" and breastfeeding), Chinese magic of disappearing and conjuring dragons (202-3), Goon's finger in a Vegemite jar, which – Emma claims – is Hissao's half-human-half-goanna brother (406), Hissao's mysterious Japanese features (406), or the bizarre Pet Emporium which displays prototypical Australians in cages (567) are presented as almost normal in the fabric of Australian reality, thus questioning the notion of Australian identity itself - a topic discussed in the next chapter. In *True History of the Kelly Gang* these elements are much subtler, confined to mentions of Irish mythology such as the Banshee

forcefully, and will therefore serve as an example of this narrative strategy. For this reason, Carey has often been called a magic realist,⁶² yet his label is not without its problems.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out that the term developed in the 1950s to characterise Caribbean literature and was popularised in the 1960s and 1970s in connection with Latin American literature, where

mythic and magical traditions (...) were the collective forms by which they gave expression to their identity and articulated their difference from the dominant colonial and racial oppressors. They were, in other words, the modes of expression of that culture's reality.⁶³

Such narratives are then employed to question Western thought and realist narratives – to write back to the Empire. However, as Ashcroft et al. note the term has since been used to describe nearly all narratives with a fabulist element, which is diminishing its usefulness for certain critics.⁶⁴ While Gaile also acknowledges this problem, he still finds it useful in connection to Carey, drawing parallels between Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and noting that Carey employs some of the typical magic realist techniques and themes, such as “‘living on the margins’; the processing of colonial as well as postcolonial history; the use of magic as an antidote against doctrinal realism and the general insufficiency of metropolitan forms of discourse; and the employment of narrative trickery and self-reflexivity”.⁶⁵ Even Carey himself has acknowledged his debt to magic realism, especially to Gabriel Garcia Marquez: “Garcia Marquez changed the way I wrote. He opened a door that I had just been hammering on. He wrote about his place in a way that was new and fresh and completely different. I was struggling to do the same thing about my own country and he was completely inspirational.”⁶⁶ This fresh perspective created with the magic realist strategies is not only common to Carey, but

(108), where it serves to differentiate the poor Irish like Kelly from the English squattocracy, placing their rich spiritual and cultural life against the materialistic values of the English, emphasising the importance of myths for a culture and thus echoing the main concern of the novel itself – the importance of the Kelly myth for Australian culture. For a detailed discussion of magic realist elements in these two novels see Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 75-82.

⁶² See for example Woodcock, 11, or Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 61-71, where he discusses other similar labels as well.

⁶³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000) 119.

⁶⁴ Ashcroft et al., *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 119.

⁶⁵ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 66.

⁶⁶ Jason Steger, “‘Garcia Marquez Changed the Way I Wrote’,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Fairfax Media, 18 Apr. 2014 <<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/garcia-marquez-changed-the-way-i-wrote-20140418-36w2u.html>> 20 Oct 2017.

influenced all Australian writing in the way it approached the adaptation of the European and North American novel tradition to the markedly different experience in Latin America. Richard Flanagan saw it as a “liberation,” and admits that it was in Marquez’s *Macondo* that he “saw [his] Tasmania,”⁶⁷ identifying with the fresh worldview. Without Marquez’s revolution of the novel, he claims, there would be no great novels of Carey’s or himself.⁶⁸

My Life as a Fake ticks all that Gaile names as magic realist strategies. With its concerns of literature, fakery, authenticity, and creation, it is extremely self-reflexive, it explores life on the margins in the characters of Chubb, who is scraping along in a bike repair shop in Malaysia, and McCorkle who – sprung up from Chubb’s imagination as he is – legally has no tangible presence. It tackles colonial and postcolonial history by juxtaposing Britain and Australia, the implications of which will be discussed in the next chapter, and it incorporates fantastic elements to disrupt the realist narrative. Carey portrays the Asian setting as a mystical place where people believe in ghosts (*MLF* 121), and lets a fabricated poet figure come alive, haunt its creator, steal his child, and let him live the life he had in mind for his creation. While Chubb’s initial incredulity over McCorkle’s existence is apparent, he tells his story with such conviction and passion, it is hard to discard as delusional, even more so because he still lives in McCorkle’s thrall, languishing in Malaysia with his estranged daughter and Mrs Lim, who eventually kill him to protect McCorkle’s work.

The magic realist elements complement Carey’s subversive narrators, maintaining a steady tension between the immediacy of the narrative which gives the impression of authenticity, and the unbelievable content, without any clues for the reader of how to resolve it, even though McCorkle is long dead by the time Sarah hears Chubb’s story, and thus has to take his word for it. Carey maintains this pretence even in the “Author’s Note”, where he quotes Max Harris: “I still believe in Ern Malley. (...) And I believe he really walked down Princess Street somewhere in Melbourne” (*MLF* 273-4), as if identifying himself with Harris’s view, asserting the power of imagination. With this quote Carey summarises his own approach to textuality, knowledge, and history, where the boundaries between true and fiction, history and story, and Australian and world literature,

⁶⁷ Steger.

⁶⁸ Steger.

are never clear. In *My Life as a Fake* he thus offers different perceptions of reality, not discarding any as more or less truthful, and highlights the role imagination plays in all storytelling, including history – both national and personal.

3. 5. Lies, Their Propagators and Their Victims: The Psychology of the Lie

The reason why Carey chooses such narrative strategies is to counter the idea of history as something given and unchanging, and to enforce this point, his deceitful narrators are joined by a cast of deceitful characters. The fact that lies, lying, selective truths, and official versus unofficial versions of events are Carey's central concern in his treatment of history allows the classification of the main characters in relation to the practise of lying – on liars and the victims of lies. Carey's novels are a thorough examination of the psychology of lying, which has been one of the chief ingredients in official imperial history. By adopting it as his chief strategy, Carey turns the tables and uses the same imperial strategy of lying to subvert the lies of the past, by exposing how and why lies are manufactured and what impact they have. As Helen Daniel notes, "in the end the lies we tell define us. So do the lies we believe".⁶⁹ Carey's characters demonstrate this.

The typical character in a Carey novel is a liar-opportunist lying for personal gain. By including such liars in his novels, Carey alerts the readers to the motivations behind some rewritings of history. The idea of *terra nullius* is a prime example of a lie created by an opportunistic liar, the British Empire, denying land ownership to the local inhabitants who had incontrovertible claims on the territory, to gain new land for the Empire for free. The consequences of this lie are still felt in today's Australia, as the next chapter explores.

The most skilled liars in Carey fall under this group – Herbert Badgery and Leah Goldstein, who both perceive lying as a strategy for getting ahead in the world, making a living. Herbert builds his life on his ability to deceive - a universal strategy of procuring shelter for the night, a wife for a couple of years, or a new business opportunity. It appears that for him it is as much a game as a necessity to play into people's wishes, since he would not be accepted otherwise:

It was the trouble with the world that it would never permit me to be what I was. Everyone loved me when I appeared in a cloak, and swirled and laughed and told them lies. They applauded. They wanted

⁶⁹ Daniel, 5.

my friendship. But when I took off my cloak they did not like me. They clucked their tongues and turned away (...) [they] could only like the bullshit version of me. (*IL* 68)

This could be read as applying not only to Herbert, but to all Australia which may also disappoint when not conforming to the description produced by the Centre.

Similarly to Herbert, Leah is a skilled liar and performer. Together with Herbert they set up a joint venture Badgery & Goldstein (Theatricals), earning money by putting on travelling shows of snake dances, emu dances, or catching snakes they themselves sneak into bars in a coordinated act. While Leah might have been averse to using deception in their shows, the description that follows their first performance demonstrates she succumbs: “We were magicians that night. We made futures and summoned up pasts. We sent up flares loaded with words that spewed like broken glass across the sky, (...). It was, my God, like Halley’s Comet – for Leah to loosen her tongue and talk for the pleasure of it” (*IL* 281). A few years after they have met, Herbert reports, Leah is “addicted to telling lies” (*IL* 371), sending him letters full of fabrications about her life, not only for Herbert’s benefit, but also hers, to make something more of her dreary life in someone else’s eyes. Leah’s claims about Herbert stealing her work are then problematised, as mentioned above, when a liar accuses another liar.

Oscar and Lucinda also count as liars-opportunists, lying to satisfy their gambling urges, but also to win each other’s affections. While they are successful at the former, they are less successful at the latter. The turning point in the novel is their bet that Oscar will transport the glass church to Bellingen. Oscar is in love with Lucinda, but she “had done everything possible to make the idea stick” (*OL* 385) that she is in love with Denis Hasset, the Bellingen priest, even though she loves Oscar, because “the misunderstanding allowed them to share the house” (*OL* 367) in all propriety. So Oscar proposes to give Hasset a church as a gift, proclaiming it is “not personal” (*OL* 390). Yet the opposite is true, and Oscar takes on the bet to win Lucinda’s affection, not knowing he already has them, and Lucinda hopes he wins and marries her. However, thanks to their small lies and the resulting misunderstanding, Oscar goes on his nightmarish mission through the countryside, delivers the church, marries Miriam, and dies, meaning that Lucinda loses not only Oscar but her fortune too. Even small lies can have fatal consequences, from which a third party can profit, as Carey’s tale cautions.

The most dangerous liars-opportunists are those lying to gain power, such as the police and Curnow in *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Lying to maintain power over the poor Irish population is the modus operandi of the police, whether it is jailing people with little or no evidence, or dismissing true charges to gain cooperation, as they tried with Ned to get him to give up the bushranger Harry Power: “I watched in astonishment as the squatter swore on the Bible I were on no account the boy that robbed him” (TH 168). While Ned provides some information, it is all inconsequential, yet the police spreads around the county that he dobbed Harry in, to set the people against Ned, and to assert their authority. When Ned’s gang is on the run, they punish people connected to him for the same reason, but they only make them sympathise with Ned more: “The British Empire had supplied me with no shortage of candidates these was men who had had their leases denied for no other crime than being our friends (...) men perjured against and falsely gaoled men weary of constant impounding on & on each day without relent” (TH 393). The schoolteacher Curnow also lies to gain power and prove his superiority over Ned, flattering him and promising to read his manuscript. Once he tricks Ned into giving it to him, he alerts the police to the trap the Kelly gang had set: “He had danced with the devil himself and he had flattered him and out-witted him as successfully as a hero of any fairy tale,” (TH 411) the report of the Siege of Glenrowan reads. Once again, Carey shows how a small lie of one man changes the course of history, as Curnow is aware: “And he had done it. It was history now” (TH 412).

Those on the receiving end of such lies often become their victims, having their lives turned upside down. Ned Kelly is from a young age a victim of lies, being falsely accused by the police or by other powerful people, which sets him on the path of a bushranger. Ultimately it is the lies of others that shape his public image, as he realises upon reading newspaper reports about his exploits:

I don’t know who wrote it but he made us Irish Madmen. I had mutilated Sergeant Kennedy he claimed I had cut off his ear with my knife before murdering him. Moreover I had forced my 3 mates to discharge their pistols into the bodies of the police so all would be guilty of the crime the same as me. (TH 313)

The sense that his and his “gang’s” identity is being stolen from them is clear from Kelly’s disillusionment, and it is lies like this that inspire him to write his letters, first to the government, then to his daughter, so that she “will always know the proper story of her da and who he is and what he suffered” (TH 318), while

Mary labours over the newspaper clippings, correcting the lies and omissions in the margins (*TH* 349-356). Though some are rather trivial, like the details of Kelly's outfits, others are important corrections, such as details of the bank robbery. This is a symbolic gesture which demonstrates how history can easily be manipulated to suit the author's ends, and no corrections in the margins will change that.

All of the novels are populated with victims of lies, and sometimes it is the liars themselves who become their victims, like Oscar and Lucinda, whose relationship never reaches the climax the readers expect, or Christopher Chubb, whose lie – in the form of Bob McCorkle – turns against him and forces him to live the miserable life he imagined for his fictitious poet. Herbert Badgery likewise pays for his lies by being caged in his grandson's pet shop as an exhibit of a true Australian illywhacker.

Yet lies do not always destroy, they can also be a powerful creative force, as the liars-creators demonstrate. The most prominent one is Christopher Chubb, who creates McCorkle by sheer imagination, to his own astonishment: "How would I know where I brought him forth from? I imagined someone and he came into being" (*MLF* 100). A lie thus becomes quite literally a living, breathing thing – Carey could hardly have been more forceful in asserting the power of the lie, especially in combination with the consequences this has for Chubb. Not only does Chubb become what he envisioned McCorkle to be in the end, but also the poems he wrote under McCorkle's name really become McCorkle's work, as his life-story shapes their reading, divorcing the real author from his creation.

Liars-creators can also give rise to something less tangible, such as an alternate reality. While Leah Goldstein knowingly lies in her letters to Herbert to give him the illusion that she is living a better life, creating a little bubble for both her and Herbert, Sarah Wode-Douglas has unconsciously forged a different past for herself by altering in her mind the events of her mother's death to the extent that her memory has been completely rewritten. Her false memories define at least partially her present behaviour, especially towards Slater, whom she blames, thinking he had an affair with her only to break up with her. Sarah thinks her mother drowned herself because of him, but instead Slater reveals that the first attempt was unsuccessful and she cut her own throat, while Sarah was hiding under the table, and that it was more due to Sarah's father paying attention to his

male friends. The revelation shakes Sarah to the core: “I went to bed with the disconcerting knowledge that almost everything I had assumed about my life was incorrect, that I had been baptised in blood and raised on secrets and misconstructions which had, obviously, made me who I was” (*MLF* 136).

Sarah’s comment is a poignant summary of Australia’s history, which has for a long time been suppressing some of its traumatic aspects. This has been changing in recent decades, yet people are still finding it hard coming to terms with, even though the past is such a formative aspect of one’s identity and the national identity. By exploring the manufacture of lies, misconceptions, and (hi)stories through deceitful narrators, characters, and by adding transnational historical and literary intertexts, Carey has created the perfect platform for examining the formation of Australian identity through time and the role that lies and lying have played and still play in it, which the following chapter explores.

4. FROM CONVICTS TO MYTHMAKERS: THE LEGACY OF LIES AND THE NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Australian cultural critic Richard White famously stated that Australia “exists pre-eminently as an idea. While it has a real existence as a geographical space with defined boundaries, and as a ‘political entity’, a nation-state organised for the pursuit of political power, ‘Australia’ for the most part is something we carry around in our heads.”¹ Peter Carey’s novels and the lies and liars that populate them demonstrate the process of how these ideas are conceived and promoted. Their inventions of the self as well as of alternative realities are thus metonymic for the inception of the concept of the Australian nation and the shaky foundations it was built on. Carey’s deceitful characters reveal that identity – both personal and national – is a construct, fabricated by individuals according to what they want their surroundings to think about them. The creation of an identity is thus a deeply creative process with a specific agenda, and so was the creation of Australian identity throughout time. Before delving into how Carey portrays Australian identity, it is necessary to point out some issues that arose in its construction.

White’s assertion corresponds to Benedict Anderson’s description of a nation as “imagined political community” established on the basis of shared values and attributes, which was discussed in section 2. 1. in relation to the persistent confusion about Australian values today, which is a reflection of the fluidity of the whole concept of Australianness. Those shared elements were particularly hard to define in the Australian context, especially since the legitimacy of what would later become a nation depends on the lie of *terra nullius*, by which the British appropriated the land, ignoring the local population on the basis of false claims that denied evidence of Aboriginal ties to and cultivation of the land, which has long ago been disproved.² However, the invaded foreign land was only one obstacle in forming a unified community.

¹ Richard White, “Inventing Australia revisited,” *Creating Australia: Changing Australian History*, eds. Wayne Hudson, Geoffrey Bolton (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997) 13.

²² See for example Stuart Macintyre, “Počátky,” *Dějiny Austrálie* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2013) 7-18.

An important difference from other settler colonies is that Australia was founded as a penal colony, where Britain offloaded its prisoners,³ who then came to constitute, together with the supervising officers, what would later be the Australian nation. Most were forcefully displaced into a foreign environment, their position thus very different from most of the Americans or Canadians, who came of their own free will. Also, those who came to America had to have sufficient means for the passage, so the majority therefore were of a higher class, whereas the prisoners transported to Australia represented the other end of the social spectrum. In its beginnings Australia was in fact a prison continent. The prisoners, although white Brits, would have had little interest in building a prosperous new colony for the Crown who put them in the hostile environment in the first place; they merely wanted to survive and probably had little loyalty to the Empire. Their distrust in and dislike of authority is a trait passed on to further generations of Australians. As the local white population grew, Australia came to occupy a double position in the colonial business, as the white locals were at the same time in the position of the colonised, subjugated by Britain, as well as the coloniser, with respect to the Aboriginal people. This almost schizophrenic position and the fact that they did not readily fit into either group is perhaps one of the reasons why Australian identity is still a fuzzy concept. While grappling with the feelings of marginalisation and oppression by their mother country, they are also dealing with the guilt of mimicking the coloniser's attitudes in regards to the Aborigines.

Moreover, it is not only the Aborigines that were marginalised in Australia. Since all that the first European inhabitants of Australia had in common was their Anglo-Celtic heritage, and since the concept of "nation" in the 19th century "was almost always understood in racial terms",⁴ as David Carter notes, whiteness was seen as one of the defining characteristics of an Australian. Moreover, during the colonial period most settlers identified as British, recognising the heritage of the motherland, or as both British and Australian,⁵ and it was not until the late 19th century that the desire for self-government produced the national type which, however, was based on the "Coming Man", an imperial

³ Some convicts were transported to colonies in North America as well, but not in such huge numbers and they never constituted the majority of the population there.

⁴ David Carter, *Dispossession, Dreams & Diversity: Issues in Australian Studies* (Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson Education Australia, 2006) 45.

⁵ See Carter, *Dispossession*, 44.

type subsuming the young hardened colonials helping to build the Empire.⁶ This type was reformulated for the Australian context in what is today known as the Australian Legend, (named after the historian Russel Ward's eponymous book), which firmly entrenched the typical Australian in the local distinctive landscape – the bush – which produced a “practical man, rough and ready in his manners, (...) a great improviser, ever willing to ‘have a go’ at anything, (...) a ‘hard case’ sceptical about the value of religion and intellectual and cultural pursuits generally.”⁷ Extensively promoted in the literature of the period, the typical Australian was always a white Anglo-Celtic male, thus excluding a significant portion of the population. So for all its values of egalitarianism and mateship, the fierce nationalism of the 19th century gave rise to racism, manifest particularly in the White Australia Policy, a name subsuming the set of policies regulating immigration of non-white people, which officially started halfway through the 19th century during the Gold Rush era, limiting Chinese immigration, and was not removed until 1973.⁸ While since then many non-white immigrants arrived to Australia, which prides itself on being multicultural, the country's current policies regarding immigrants and especially illegal immigrants and refugees are fierce.⁹ So despite Australia's image as tolerant and open to strangers, nationalism and racism are still a big part of Australian culture.

The dubious claims on ownership of the land, the legacy of the Australian Legend and the schizophrenic position of the colonised as well as the coloniser complicate the definition of Australianness to this day, and as manifest in the discussion of Australian values in the first chapter, the nation still has not found an answer to including its multicultural reality in its concept of national identity. Peter Carey's novels are ultimately an exploration of the process of identity construction and the sample of the Australian nation that they present differs greatly from the established notions of Australianness produced by the Australian Legend, giving an alternative view of how Australia grew into the nation it is today and what characterises it.

⁶ See Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen&Unwin, 1981) 76-79.

⁷ Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, quoted in Carter, *Dispossession*, 150.

⁸ “End of White Australia Policy,” *ABC*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 19 Jan 2012 <<http://www.abc.net.au/archives/80days/stories/2012/01/19/3415230.htm>> 3 July 2016.

⁹ See for example Clare Higgins, “How Australia Turned Its Back on the World's Refugee Crisis,” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 1 July 2016 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/01/opinions/australia-refugee-policy-united-nations/>> 3 July 2016.

4. 1. Coming into Its Own: From Britishness to Australianness

Australia became a Federation in 1901, but it is hard to say when a feeling of Australianness as a nationality separate from Britishness arose in the colony. The first settlers found themselves in a completely alien environment, which required them to adapt to it and form ties to the new land, thus planting a seed of future Australian identity. Yet as an imperial mission to spread the glory of the Empire and cultivate the savage land, the inhabitants were also ambassadors and proud members of the British nation, as a way of declaring superiority from the inferior natives. While the birth of the Federation confirmed the existence of Australianness, it did not mean all inhabitants of Australia felt it that way. David Carter notes that

it was not as if Australians, once and for all, *had* a national identity. Although (...) Australia could plausibly, even powerfully, be imagined as a distinct nation, this did not mean the end of other and potentially conflicting kinds of identification (or the relative insignificance of this national identity in other circumstances). (...) [A]ppeals to Britishness and *whiteness* often had a more powerful unifying effect than the call to ‘Australianness’ alone. Britishness united English, Scots, Welsh, and (even) Irish, immigrant and Australian-born.¹⁰

Thus even in the 20th century, the relation between Australianness and Britishness was complicated, as evidenced for example in the results of the Australian republic referendum of 1999, with nearly 55% voting against becoming a republic.¹¹ Carey himself admits to growing up “thinking [his family] were English” with his grandfather “call[ing] England home”,¹² which is mirrored in Herbert Badgery’s father in *Illywhacker*, who “never missed a chance to say ‘I am an Englishman’” (*IL* 29), even though he was born in Australia, albeit pre-Federation. These strange dynamics between Englishness/Britishness and Australianness are very prominent in Carey’s novels.

Putting down roots in the new land proved difficult. The first attempts consisted of simply pretending the colony was just an extension of Britain. *Oscar and Lucinda* reaches deepest into the past out of the novels discussed here, into the middle of the 19th century, and while it is an Australian novel in its setting, its characters would for the most part identify as British. The inhabitants of Sydney

¹⁰ Carter, *Dispossession*, 60.

¹¹ See “1999 Referendum Reports and Statistics – Key Results,” *Australian Electoral Commission*, Australian Electoral Commission, 24 Jan. 2011 <http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/referendums/1999_Referendum_Reports_Statistics/Key_Result_s.htm> 15 Nov. 2017.

¹² Gaile, “The ‘Contrarian Streak’,” 7.

maintain all the conventions of polite English society, decorating their drawing rooms with engravings from the *London Illustrated News* and paintings of the achievements of the Empire (*OL* 157), observing and promoting Christianity, and generally identifying with the Empire and its superiority over the natives (*OL* 171). However, there is a sense that Britishness is not suited to the environment.

This is most apparent in the failure of Christianity in the novel. Mr Borrodale warns Oscar that it would be a waste of time trying to “convert the blacks” as “every other nation, no matter how savage, had some deities or idols of wood or stone, but the Australian blacks believed in nothing but a devil-devil which they thought would eat them” (*OL* 235). That is of course another lie, as the Aborigines are highly spiritual people, whose spirituality is encompassed in the concept of Dreamtime – mythological narratives encompassing the whole Aboriginal worldview based on ties to the land.¹³ The colonists perceive that their culture lacks this connection, but only Lucinda is aware of the local spirituality: “She felt ghosts here, but not Christian ghosts (...). There were other spirits, other stories, slippery as shadows” (*OL* 161). Yet others, including Oscar, fail to try to understand their different world view, and instead impose their own, which is symptomatic of the practises of the Empire. Oscar’s naming of a native girl after Mary Magdalene is proof of his ignorance, as the chapter narrated from a native’s perspective asserts: “It was a damn silly name for a Kumbaingiri and if you want my opinion (...), it was ignorant to talk to us Kooris in that way” (*OL* 496). Of course, their opinion was the last thing the settlers sought. Oscar in this act demonstrates the imperial strategy of assimilating the foreign land and its people to the British experience and claiming it as its own by applying names from the linguistic resources available. So while the Aboriginal Mary is different from the Biblical (or a British) Mary, Oscar’s naming strategy makes a certain claim on her for the Empire. For the same reason Aboriginal place names were replaced by English ones, even though “in this landscape every rock had a name, and most names had spirits, ghosts, meanings” already (*OL* 501). Elleke Boehmer notes that “it was by means of this carrier device therefore that colonialist discourse was able to reproduce itself from territory to territory, administration to

¹³ See for example John Rickard, “Aborigines,” *Images of Australia*, ed. Gillian Whitlock and David Carter (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992) 61-74.

administration”.¹⁴ The imposition of Christianity into the foreign landscape is a similar attempt at assimilation to the British experience.

Oscar’s journey through the Outback with the glass church is therefore metonymic for the journey of Christianity – even the whole of Western culture – into Australia, with dire consequences, as Andreas Gaile notes: “Representing European civilization and expansionism like nothing else, the church (...) is thus made to exemplify the destructive potential of the colonial enterprise”.¹⁵ Carey himself admits that the clash between the original and the new cultures’ spirituality served as his inspiration:

It was certainly Christian stories that had driven out the Aboriginal stories from the places I had lived, and one could look across the Promised Land and know that, two hundred years before, it had been filled with Aboriginal stories. The tribes who told them were all gone, but it was a safe bet that the Never Never river was a story, that the Dorrigo escarpment was a story, that the wedgetail eagle, soaring in the updraft on the cliff face, was a story too. (...) For the sake of the Christian stories, these other stories had been poisoned, shot and drowned.¹⁶

This is an apt description of the arduous expedition led by Jeffries, who ventures on it only for the glory of himself and the Empire, rejoicing in “put[ting] names to several largish creeks, (...) [and] having led his party through places inhabited by desperate blacks” (*OL* 480), whom he massacres, literally destroying their “story” in favour of making Christian history, acquiring new territory for the Empire.

The land itself seems opposed to Christianity: “The stories of the gospel lay across the harsh landscape like sheets of newspaper on a polished floor. They slid, slipped, did not connect to anything beneath them” (*OL* 307). Nor do they seem to connect with the congregation, who comes from a Christian culture, yet whom Hasset calls “godless” (*OL* 506). Ironically, even when the church reaches its destination, it sinks, glass breaking, and drowns Oscar. Although it is restored and relocated to another town, 120 years later it is torn down because “it was not of any use” (*OL* 516). Andreas Gaile aptly summarises that “at the bottom of the church’s failure lies the Christian’s fundamental inability to appreciate and respect their new environment in its otherness,” symbolised in the novel by glass, which is utterly unsuitable as building material in the Outback, turning the church into a

¹⁴ Boehmer, 18.

¹⁵ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 123.

¹⁶ Peter Carey, “Week Three: Peter Carey on the Origins of *Oscar and Lucinda*,” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 20 Feb. 2010
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/20/peter-carey-oscar-and-lucinda>> 16 Nov. 2017.

hothouse.¹⁷ The consequences of this failure are demonstrated by the destruction of the church in the novel, which in real life symbolises the rapidly decreasing numbers of religious people in Australia, as evidenced in the 2016 census.¹⁸ Carey's overarching message is that without honouring the original culture of the land, a new culture cannot take root – which is something that troubles Australia to this day.

The theme of foreign stories failing to take root is repeated in other novels as well. In *True History of the Kelly* gang, set a little closer to Federation, the Irish community has brought its mythology to the colony, but not all of it flourished. While the Banshee, a spirit and a herald of death, that “came on board the cursed convict ships” thrives “like a blackberry in the new climate” (*TH* 108), St. Brigit, a spirit with the “power to bring the milk down from the cow’s horn”, loses the power despite the people’s efforts to observe traditional customs, and “whiter[s] in Victoria, (...) slowly pass[ing] from (...) reckoning” (*TH* 108). The Banshee remains presumably because there is no shortage of death in the colony and because death, in one form or another, is common to all spiritualities, while St. Brigit’s role would have been foreign to the local culture, who had not seen a cow until the arrival of the first settlers and is thus incompatible with the new environment and its mythology.

The failure of Christian and Celtic stories to take root in the new colony results in the rootlessness of its inhabitants, as Carey’s characters reflect. When Ned Kelly describes the plight of his convict Irish ancestors, he aptly encompasses the violent and unnatural transplantation of all who came to the strange continent, stating they “were ripped from Ireland like teeth from the mouth of their own history and every dear familiar thing had been abandoned on the docks” (*TH* 108). With the unwelcoming landscape, mythology inapplicable to the new context, and an absence of shared history, they are left feeling like they do not belong, which Carey reflects in making his characters into misfits. Thus Lucinda, daughter of English parents living in Australia, feels no more at home in Sydney than in London. Due to her unorthodox upbringing by a feminist mother, she is scoffed at in Sydney for violating social conventions, and left feeling “a

¹⁷ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 127.

¹⁸ See for example Charis Chang, “‘No religion’ Tops Religion Question in Census,” *News.com.au*, News Life Media Pty Ltd, 17 Nov 2011 <<http://www.news.com.au/national/no-religion-tops-religion-question-in-census/news-story/a3b45e6b2e35df695932a83535078f51>> 28 June 2017.

foreigner, friendless, without a map” (OL 150). Yet she is not welcome in London either, with her “bits-and-pieces accent” and “unladylike way of blowing her nose” (OL 202): “Lucinda had come to London thinking of it as ‘Home’. It was soon clear that this great sooty machine was not home at all” (OL 201). Neither one nor the other, Lucinda remains an alien. Yet even the society of Sydney that does not accept her is out of place in New South Wales. Bishop Dancer thinks of it as “an orphan’s party with a dressing-up box. What a grotesque sight (...) – piemen affecting the dress of gentlemen, ladies’ maids with glass tiaras” (OL 321). This is the image of the colonial trying to imitate the Centre, but looking somehow fake and out of place. Similarly, Oscar with his effeminate gentle nature does not quite fit in. Nor does Christopher Chubb of *My Life as a Fake*, with his literary ambitions in the anti-intellectual space, or Bob McCorkle, due to his dubious origins, which is exemplified by their virtual exile from Australia.

Illywhacker is littered with misfits most notably, be it Herbert himself with his trickster tendencies, changing his identity every five minutes, the Chinese Mr Goon as a victim of racial prejudices, or Leah Goldstein, who roams the country and voices most forcefully Carey’s ideas about the land as stolen and therefore alien: “It is not a country where you can rest. It is a black man’s country (...). We can only move around like tourists” (IL 302), Leah asserts, echoing the ideas about the land from *Oscar and Lucinda*. Her Jewish heritage complicates matters similarly as in the case of the Irish, because the traditions of her culture likewise were lost in the transfer to Australia, which leaves her feeling “lonely, no longer joined to anything,” with what is seen as local culture in Australia “produc[ing] no echoes in her own experience” (IL 329). Leah’s rootlessness appears to be the result of her refusal to form ties to the land and subscribe to newly created shared values, because she cannot reconcile it with the fact that historically the land does not belong to her. Her feelings of alienation come long after the Federation, in the middle of the 20th century, serving as a reminder that something went wrong in the inception of Australia, as Gaile notes:

The process of cultural layering that in other corners of the world has – given the time – often enough resulted in transculturation or at least some sort of cultural interweaving, seems to have miscarried in Australia. White settlement harms the land, literally cuts it, as a result of which white Australia has trouble getting born.¹⁹

Yet Australia did get born, even though it is still haunted by its past.

¹⁹ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 118.

4. 2. Putting Down Roots in the Bush: Women, Aborigines, and the National Type

Carey demonstrates the birth of Australianness in *True History of the Kelly Gang*, where the identification as Irish changes to Australian for the first time. This comes about through the shared struggles of the Kelly Gang and its sympathisers and their bond to the land, in the spirit of 19th century nationalism, which, as David Carter notes, “was drawn to the idea of distinctive landscapes, local traditions, and histories forged through struggle with the land, and authentic folk cultures ‘rooted in the soil’”.²⁰ The Irish were an important minority in Australia, but as the novel demonstrates, they were still being harassed and marginalised by the English even in the new colony, which according to Carter resulted in their strong sense of distinctive identity defined in opposition to the English, even though they “sought to belong” to their new immigrant society.²¹ Carey emphasises this opposition by portraying the English as the corrupt tyrannical ruling class, and the Irish as the oppressed minority, the famous Australian underdog. There is a strong sense of Irishness in Kelly’s family, and a sense of injustice for being put into a “district of English snobs” (*TH* 23) full of “poisons of the Empire” (*TH* 41). The first mention of an “Australian” appears when the Kelly Gang is tried before “the jury of [their] peers” (*TH* 356), whose negative opinion of them is overturned upon hearing their “history”. Kelly, not yet including himself amongst them, characterises them thus:

And here is the thing about them men they was Australians they knew full well the terror of the unyielding law the historic memory of UNFAIRNESS were in their blood and a man might be a bank clerk or an overseer he might never have been lagged for nothing but still he knew in his heart what it were to be forced to wear the white hood in prison (...). (*TH* 360)

Kelly thus emphasises the convict past and its legacy of oppression. As Judith Kapferer points out, “[t]he surveillance of convict society by the military provided a framework for the foundation of a local constabulary, while the rules and regulations of the prison system were the foundation of the bureaucratic order of the State.”²² Kelly and his gang share this memory of unfairness with these Australians, both as Irish and as convict descendants, which gives them a reason

²⁰ Carter, *Dispossession*, 146.

²¹ See Carter, *Dispossession*, 55.

²² Judith Kapferer, *Being All Equal: Identity, Difference and Australian Cultural Practice* (Oxford: Berg, 1996) 50.

to unite against a common enemy, “building a world where we would be left alone” (*TH* 234) – a seed of a nation in the making. When Curnow appeals to Carey’s sense of heroism with the St Crispin’s Day speech at the novel’s end, it seems to inspire nationalist sentiments in Kelly, who refers to Dan and Joe, his fellow gang members, “those armour’d men”, as “boys (...) noble of true Australian coin” (*TH* 407), and there is a sense that he counts himself amongst them in the spirit of the preceding speech. As discussed earlier, even though it is a speech by an English king, Kelly makes it his own for the Australian context, and he and his gang do not fight the enemy in the name of oppressed Irishmen, but in the name of all wronged by the corrupt system – the Australians. Carey thus portrays the inception of a genuine “Australian” story that grew into a myth, becoming an integral part of the set of shared values and cultural heritage, which serve as the basis for identifying as Australian.

The developing Australianness is also subtly hinted at in the deepening relationship to the landscape itself, which is crucial for the gang’s successful avoidance of capture. While in *Oscar and Lucinda* the land is alien, unmapped, and hostile, in *True History* the bush is home to the bushranger, as the name itself suggests. Ned’s bushranger mentor teaches Ned “the secrets of the Strathbogies the Warbies & the Wombat Ranges,” (*TH* 343) which he believes are key to not getting caught, and even though Ned knows it rather depends on whether people betray you or not, rather than on the knowledge of the bush, it is apparent that Ned’s knowledge of the countryside is a great advantage. Moreover, the landscape is portrayed as sympathetic to Ned and the gang, so when he receives news about the birth of his daughter, people flock to his hiding place, alerted perhaps by “the bush telegraph,” which however does not extend to the police, because “the country were not theirs they had not the least notion of the celebration” (*TH* 387). The English ruling classes remain the alien, while the bush people are portrayed as being of the land. Notably, this novel ignores the question of Aboriginal land rights, unlike *Illywhacker* and *Oscar and Lucinda*, which is probably why the gang’s relation to the land is so straightforward. Unlike the expedition in *Oscar and Lucinda* they are not trying to colonise the land, nor do they try to exploit it like Herbert and Leah in *Illywhacker* – they simply adapt to their surroundings, which is another reason why the bush is sympathetic to their cause.

It is significant that it is the bush that Carey portrays as accepting the new inhabitants, because the 19th century nationalism was rooted there due to the “belief that it [was] in the bush that the authentic, distinctive, typical or essential Australia [would] be found,”²³ as David Carter asserts. *True History* is thus Carey’s take on the Australian Legend and the set of ideas and symbols associated with it, which White defines as “sunlight, wattle, the bush, the future, mateship and egalitarianism”,²⁴ most of which appear in the novel. However, Carey does not simply reproduce the Legend, his nuanced portrayal of colonial Australia offers a subtle questioning of its ethos by showing that egalitarianism is wishful thinking rather than the reality, mateship is sometimes foregone for money, the future is sometimes denied because of an unjust corrupt system, and most radically of all that women play a part in the legend as well. One of Gaile’s most pertinent points about Carey’s history of Australia is that his female characters enter “male-governed domains such as the bush, they refuse to resign themselves to their marginality and (...) jettison the principle of confinement that traditional conceptualizations of Australian identity had imposed on them.”²⁵ In the iconic bush legend literature by Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson the bush is almost always strictly a male environment, and if women are admitted, it usually leads to the loss of some of their femininity.²⁶ Carey revises this stereotype.

Ned’s mother Ellen Kelly is portrayed as the embodiment of Russell Ward’s definition of the Australian type mentioned above, as she metaphorically “wears the pants” in the family, procuring her own selection (*TH* 58), keeping everyone in line, more than holding her own against unwanted attentions from men (*TH* 50-51) and policemen (*TH* 271), and never giving up, as a true “Aussie battler”. As Gaile summarises, she “can cope only by virtue of traditionally male qualities.”²⁷ Yet it comes at the expense of traditional female qualities like affection and gentleness, as apparent from her giving Ned to Harry Power as a

²³ David Carter, “Bush Legends and Pastoral Landscapes.” *MLA Options for Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature*, eds. Birns, Moore & Shieff (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2017) 42-54. Accessed as an unpublished PDF with no page numbers on the *Learn.UQ* platform for the ENGL1100 course at the University of Queensland, 24 Oct. 2016.

²⁴ Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, 97.

²⁵ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 252.

²⁶ See for example Lawson’s short story “The Drover’s Wife,” where the loss of femininity is symbolised by her putting on “an old pair of her husband’s trousers” (Henry Lawson, “The Drover’s Wife,” *The Literature of Australia: An Anthology*, edited by Nicholas Jose (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 2009) 269.

²⁷ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 257.

bushranging apprentice to earn them money and refusing to take him back home when he escapes: “You can’t come home I paid the b-----d 15 quid to take you on,” (*TH* 111) she shouts at Ned, prioritising money over her son’s well-being. Yet her femininity is not all gone, as throughout the novel she charms lovers, bears children, and takes care of her appearance, especially her long hair, a typical sign of femininity (*TH* 105). What the bush seems to do then, is not obliterate all aspects of femininity, but toughen her up to ensure survival, just like with the typical tough Australian male. Mary Hearn is likewise portrayed as a tough independent woman who is not afraid to make her own decisions and is an equal to Ned. It is important to note that Ellen Kelly, Mary Hearn, and Kelly’s daughter are often the driving force of Kelly’s actions, thus playing a crucial role in his history, and therefore Australian history, into which they are rightfully written by Carey. In fact, strong female characters appear in all the novels. Leah of *Illywhacker* is another subversion of the Australian Legend with her resourcefulness and athomeness in the bush and Gaile even dubs her the “female version of Crocodile Dundee”.²⁸ Even outside the bush women hold their own against men, like Herbert’s wife Phoebe, who feels trapped in the cage of marriage to him, as she expresses in her poem “King Parrot,” so she leaves him upon bearing him his second child to pursue a creative career in Sydney with Annette (*IL* 189), getting Herbert’s plane – the symbol of freedom – as part of the deal. While her leaving her children behind is seen as selfish by Herbert (*IL* 189) and would be seen in the same way by today’s society, it is usually not condemned as strongly when men abandon their children. By reversing the gender roles, Carey calls attention to this double standard.

In *Oscar and Lucinda*, Elizabeth Leplastier comes to the colony with the intent of acquiring a factory, which “would provide her sex with the economic basis of their freedom” (*OL* 83), and Lucinda realises that dream by purchasing a factory as a strong independent woman, who despite the ultimate loss of her fortune becomes “famous” (*OL* 515) for her work with the Australian Labour Movement. In *My Life as a Fake*, Chubb’s daughter and Mrs Lim have essentially enslaved Chubb after the death of McCorkle, and when his actions threaten McCorkle’s legacy they murder Chubb only to protect it. While obviously mentally disturbed, they are another example of Carey’s powerful female

²⁸ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 256.

characters who had a part to play in history as much as men. The fact that they are often stronger and more resilient than men is also not lost on the attentive reader. Men seem to need women in Carey's novels – Herbert pining over Phoebe and Leah and generally longing for a stable family environment, Oscar secretly pining for Lucinda and crossing the Outback to prove his love, or Ned trying to please his mother and Mary, needing the support of both – yet the women seem to manage just fine without them, as Lucinda, Phoebe, Leah, Ellen Kelly and Mary demonstrate. Carey thus subverts the gender stereotypes connected to exclusively masculine Australian Legend and its various incarnations and promotes a female presence in the conceptions of the national type, which to this day is quite a gendered concept where the Legend and its ethos of mateship marginalise the role of women in the national narrative, and even though they are getting more recognition, as Fiona Gill observes: “the most frequently portrayed national figure is a male,”²⁹ whether it is the bush adventurer, the ANZAC soldier, the lifesaver, or the surfer. Carey's novels are writing against this stereotype.

Just like the Australian Legend was exclusive of women, so was it exclusive of Aborigines. While the term “Australian” originally referred to the natives, as Carter notes, “the process of naming and giving a distinct identity to the *white* Australian-born population occurred at the expense of the Indigenous population”.³⁰ With *terra nullius* they were written out of history as well as the national identity, becoming invisible. As White points out, they were neither included in the constitution of the new state, nor counted in the national census in 1901.³¹ It was not until 1967 that they were recognised as Australian citizens in the constitution. While the situation today is improving, and the Aborigines are given more recognition, they are still on the margins of the conception of Australianness. Carey's novels address the misrepresentation of Aboriginal culture and history by discussing at length the lie of *terra nullius*, as discussed earlier, emphasising how the past looms in the present. Andreas Gaile applauds Carey for thus writing the Aborigines back into Australian history.³² Yet while Carey certainly devotes a lot of time to highlighting the injustice of Aboriginal

²⁹ Fiona Gill, “‘Feminine Women’: Regional Australia and the Construction of Australian Femininity,” *New Voices, New Visions: Challenging Australian Identities and Legacies*, Eds. Catriona Elder and Keith Moore (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 277.

³⁰ Carter, *Dispossession*, 45.

³¹ Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, 112.

³² See for example Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 297.

dispossession and their mistreatment, especially in *Oscar and Lucinda*, *Illywhacker*, and *30 Days in Sydney*, the Aborigines themselves are, however, almost as invisible as in the early historical accounts. There are barely any Aboriginal characters at all, only cursory mentions. There are “vicious black[s]” (*TH* 17) who attack Ned Kelly’s father and the “black trackers” (*TH* 321) who help the police follow Ned’s tracks in *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Nathan Schick in *Illywhacker* wants Herbert and Leah to put “some abos in [their] act” to do a “war dance” (*IL* 325), suggesting that they are only to be exploited as exotic species, thus foreshadowing the final image of the pet shop as a human zoo. The only novel which includes more than a cursory mention is *Oscar and Lucinda*.

In *Oscar and Lucinda*, the narrator reports that Kumbaingiri Billy, an Aborigine friend of his father’s, told the story of the massacre executed by Jeffries. The following chapter is narrated in Kumbaingiri Billy’s voice, finally providing the native perspective on the encounter with the white men, which differs greatly from what the narrator reports of Jeffries’ own records of the event. The whites appear as surreal creatures at first:

The white men came out of the clouds of Mount Darling. Our people had not seen white men before. We thought they were spirits. They came through the tea-trees, dragging their boxes and shouting. The birds set up a chatter. What noise they all made. Like twenty goannas had come at once to raid their nests. Anyway, it was not nesting time. We thought they were dead men. (*OL* 475)

Their world is violently disrupted by these strange creatures, who bring even stranger materials with them, like the glass that “cuts the skin of the tribes” (*OL* 477), and who disrespect their sacred land, leading to the massacre. The glass cuts, which is also the title of the chapter and the first verse of the song composed by Odalberree, represents the violent intrusion into the world of the natives, which has heretofore been peaceful and at one with nature, as the descriptions from the passage cited above demonstrate, likening the people to goannas, and emphasising what was going on in the natural world when the “spirits” came (the birdsong). This version of events, with the focus on the spiritual and the mystical reflects the nature of Aboriginal culture, which was also an oral culture, where stories were passed down through their retellings. This retelling gives the events a mythical flavour, enabling Carey once again to demonstrate mythmaking in practice.

Carey’s inclusion the Aboriginal perspective is important, and demonstrates the writing of revisionist history, contrasting the two points of view

without asserting that one is truer than the other. The sudden intrusion of an Aboriginal voice is seen by critics in overwhelmingly positive terms, with Sue Ryan-Fazilleau noting it is “a unique breach of the dominant narrative code of omniscience. (...) The narrator thus demonstrates his respect for the Aboriginal version of that episode of his-story that overlaps their-story, a respect he does not show for any other version.”³³ Certainly, in terms of the novel itself, it is a striking chapter which lets the unheard voice of the Aborigines finally speak. Being a solitary event of its kind, it has the desired effect of putting in question everything told so far from the white perspective. Yet its inclusion is not without its problems, and the passage could be read in less positive terms.

While this chapter seems to give the Aborigines a certain degree of agency, it may be illusive, as the story is ultimately narrated by Bob the narrator, who decides to put it in his narrative, even though it appears as if it were narrated by Kumbaingiri Billy. Moreover, as the Aboriginal culture is an oral one, which ensures their stories’ continued circulation but also fluidity, Bob fixes it in writing, thus robbing it of a part of its creative force. Bob’s role is thus essentially contradictory, because, on the one hand, he gives voice to the Aborigines, but also appropriates that voice in writing. He even casts a shadow of doubt on the story at the end of the previous chapter by asserting Kumbaingiri Billy’s young age when he heard it – emphasising it is second-hand and maybe even comes from a different tribe – as well as asserting that “perhaps it is not one story anyway” (*OL* 475). This comment may either be taken as questioning of the truth value of the story that is to follow – that it may literally be a different story; or, an acknowledgement that – confronted with both sides of the coin – the narrator finds them so contrary he does not know which to believe, acknowledging what Carey’s novels implicitly acknowledge all along – the fluidity of history, which makes this reading more likely.

While the intrusion of the Aboriginal voice in *Oscar and Lucinda* is an important gesture, in terms of Carey’s oeuvre in general, the Aboriginal point of view is a problematic topic. While his novels defend Aboriginal rights, they also perpetrate the same silencing of Aborigines as Australian historical accounts in not turning them into fully-fledged characters, only convenient caricatures. Gaile suggests that part of Carey’s revisionist strategy is alerting the reader to the

³³ Ryan-Fazilleau, 26.

strategies of imperial discourse, “especially to the silences produced by purportedly true historical discourse.”³⁴ Even though that is one possible reading of the lack of realistic portrayals of Aborigines in his novels, Gaile’s opinion seems blindly uncritical. The superficial view Carey presents of the Aborigines contrasts with the passionate passages about *terra nullius*. Taken together, what emerges is an expression of white guilt, and recognition of the wrongs inflicted on the native population, but it seems to be for the benefit of the whites rather than the natives, who are not given any say on the matter in Carey’s novels, apart from that chapter in *Oscar and Lucinda*. So, while Carey’s novels recognise their land rights, they do not seem to recognise them as an active part of the national identity, only in terms of how the issue of *terra nullius* has influenced white Australian identity. On the one hand, it is an accurate reflection of the identity discourse in Australia, yet on the other hand, it seems an oversight from a writer who so vocally defends Aboriginal rights, both in his fiction and personal life.

4. 3. The Cultural Cringe: From Political to Psychological Independence

The birth of the national type and the nation in 1901 on the one hand fuelled nationalist sentiments further, but on the other hand, it also invited comparison with other, older nations, especially the motherland, resulting in cultural cringe, leading to continued identification with the culturally superior Centre. White notes that national identity was conceived of as a “twin identity” wherein “almost every reference to the new nation was tempered, qualified, checked by assurances that larger loyalties to empire remained”.³⁵ *Illywhacker* explores these conflicting tendencies in most detail, as it takes the readers on a ride through the 20th century and into the 21st.

Loyalty to the Empire prevails. Not only does Herbert’s father think of himself as English, but many successful Australians “the minute they beg[in] to make a quid they star[t] to turn into Englishmen” (*IL* 113). Carter explains that such loud proclamations of Britishness served as a denial of “colonial inferiority”³⁶. However, it comes at the expense of distancing oneself from the new nation, asserting one’s superiority over fellow countrymen to avoid being labelled a colonial. Herbert calls them “Imaginary Englishmen” (*IL* 112), because

³⁴ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 114.

³⁵ Richard White, 112.

³⁶ See Carter, *Dispossession*, 56.

they would hardly be considered English in England, but their loyalty is not imaginary, as Cocky Abbot, a businessman, asserts: ““Our mates died for England,”” he shouts at Herbert, defending the Empire, to which Herbert replies: ““My point,’ I shouted. ‘My point exactly’” (IL 123). His point is that in their fierce loyalty to the Empire they are serving its interests rather than their own. When he is trying to convince them to make and sell Australian planes, they laugh at him and instead want to “import the best the British Empire can produce” (IL 122). Herbert compares their position of an agent for British planes to that of a child and a parent, asserting that “if you want to serve the interests of the English, you go and be an agent for their aircraft, and you’ll stay a damn child all your life” (IL 122). He is not talking just about the plane anymore, but about Australia still being in the position of a child, the colonised, against the superior parent, the coloniser. The businessmen’s refusal that anything Australian-made could equal or surpass British products demonstrates their subservience and their lack of belief in their own country.

That such ideas are hard to eradicate is also demonstrated by Emma, the wife of Herbert’s son Charles, who buys a picture of the King of England and hangs it in the kitchen, thus “instinctively (...) reproduc[ing] elements of her mother’s house” (IL 425). Charles, raised by his nationalist father, is enraged and tears the picture down with some difficulty, the King “refusing to abandon his position” (IL 425), suggesting how deep-rooted these ideas are, and in Emma’s case even unconscious, simply a force of habit. Charles, despite thinking “the English the scourge of all humanity (...), hypocrites, snobs, snivellers, and past masters” (IL 433) enlists when WWII is declared (only to be rejected). What emerges from this display of imperial loyalty is a portrayal of Australians as weak, naïve, and happy to be ruled by a mightier power.

Herbert, however, has no love for the English, and represents the voice of nationalism in the novel, quite literally in terms of language. *Illywhacker* foregrounds the importance of the postcolonial process of abrogation of the language (see 2. 7.) in the emphasis it places on Australian English as an expression of nationhood. Australian expressions are interspersed throughout the novel, such as the title, or words such as “galah” (IL 44), or “goog” (IL 53), and appear in other novels as well – *Oscar and Lucinda*, for example, contains a glossary of the slang words used (OL 520), suggesting colonial roots of the

abrogation process. It is the accent, however, that is the chief distinction from British English. Herbert speaks “the natural nasal Australian accent” (*IL* 38), annoying his father who chastises him for his pronunciation of “castle”: “[c]ahstle,’ (...) ‘not kehstle’” (*IL* 29). But Carey’s use of “natural” announces that that is the true language of the land (again, ignoring the Aborigines). The role of accents in identity-assertion appears crucial, as accents become a way of declaring one’s allegiance. This is exemplified not only by Herbert, but also by the imaginary Englishmen “disowning their language, softening their vowels, greasing their way into the plummy speech of the men who ordered their ancestors lashed” (*IL* 113). However, accents also signify class – another reason why the imaginary Englishmen “pommify” their speech. While for the nationalist-minded Australians the local accent is a sign of independence, others attach to it certain less favourable attributes, ultimately making it a sign of inferiority.

At the beginning of the 20th century, “King’s English” (later Received Pronunciation) – which “revealed no trace of geographical origin” – was considered “good English”, “a birth right of the upper reaches of society”, with other regional and social varieties marginalised.³⁷ This distinction was undoubtedly recognised in Australia at the time, disrupting the idea of an egalitarian society represented by the Australian accent. Seen as a regional offshoot of the mother tongue, it was perceived as inferior. In *My Life as a Fake*, Australian accent is described as “rough” (*MLF* 215), “nasal, hoarse, ravaged by failure and regret” (84), and as an accent that one “never expect[s] (...) to talk about poetry” (*MLF* 111), suggesting a certain crudeness, giving “an impression of someone working-class, not well educated” (*MLF* 76). In *Illywhacker*, Phoebe scorns the Australian way of speech, saying: “‘They’ve all got pegs on their noses.’ (...) ‘It’s pig ignorant,’ said Phoebe, ‘and if I were American I wouldn’t trust them either. They talk like pickpockets,’” (*IL* 488), she asserts, again seeing the accent as a sign of inferiority, even linked to criminality as a nod to the convict past. To an extent, this division between RP English, nowadays joined by General American due to the status of the United States, and the other regional varieties persists to this day. Fighting for a local vernacular, like Herbert does,

³⁷ Tom McArthur, “English World-Wide in the 20th Century,” *The Oxford History of English*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 451.

however, is a necessary step in achieving independence of expression and of the mind.

Herbert's efforts do not end in promoting the local language. He also tries to instil patriotism and self-confidence in his fellow countrymen by promoting the local industry. He sees that the subservience to the Empire is detrimental to the development of Australia: "Anyone can see that the English are as big a pest as the rabbit. No offence, but they're identical. They come here, eat everything, burrow under, tunnel out (...) and when the country is rooted ...' I faltered, 'it'll be rooted'" (*IL* 123). He wants to stop this exploitation and sees no reason why Australia cannot take care of itself, his thoughts reminiscent of the 1920s initiatives such as the Australian Industries Protection League founded to promote and protect Australian-made goods.³⁸ Herbert likewise wants Australia to be producing its own cars, and planes, and appreciating its own uniqueness, embodied in the "true Australian snake (...) [who has] been in jail. It is a mean bastard of an animal and it cannot be bought" (*IL* 126). For Herbert, his pretend pet snake whom he imprisoned in his swag best represents Australians, hinting at their convict heritage, and emphasising their incorruptibility. Yet his thesis is based on a lie, since it is not his pet snake, but one picked up to show off and kept, and moreover, as Gaile reports, the king brown snake has not been recorded in Victoria,³⁹ where this occurs, putting the whole story into question. He exploits the snake for his own agenda, essentially simulating the national-identity-creation process, as shown in the novel, which is similarly exploitative.

As a former car agent (for the American Ford, ironically) and trickster, Herbert perceives Australia itself as a product to be marketed and sold. As Bruce Woodcock says, "Herbert's 'salesman's sense of history' (...), which gives such priority to salesmanship and putting on a show, reveals Australia itself as a 'show', a product constructed from illusion and deception; and his life parodies his country's."⁴⁰ While it has been established that identity is indeed a construct, Herbert takes the process a little too far and not in the right direction. He himself is complicit in this construction out of deceptions, and despite his dislike of the English, he falls prey to other colonising forces, exploiting Australia in the process as well. His exploitation of the snake foreshadows his theatre act with

³⁸ Richard White, 143.

³⁹ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 247.

⁴⁰ Woodcock, 58.

Leah with native Australian animals. When recruited by the American Nathan Schick, they do not oppose the proposed exploitation of native animals and people alike: “‘What I want is an Aussie act for the States. This is a great country, but it hasn’t even started to be exploited. You people don’t realize what it is you have to sell’” (*IL* 325). His statement sums up the concept of identity construction in the novel – a selling point for the outside world, rather than an expression of the authentic self. This need for valorisation from others leads to compromises like these, creating a vicious circle of exploitation and subjugation. As Woodcock notes, emphasising the similarity between Herbert’s and Australia’s identity construction, “[d]espite his ardent vision and dreams, Herbert’s life epitomises the selfproduction of Australia as a subject nation”.⁴¹

This subjugation continues with the next generation represented by Charles, who starts the Best Pet Shop in the World as “an expression of the purest patriotism” (*IL* 453), and culminates when his son Hissao takes it over. A zoo of Australian animals morphs into the final image of a human zoo of Australian “types”:

The shearers, for instance, exhibit that dry laconic, anti-authoritarian wit that is the very basis of the Australian sense of humour. They are proud people, these lifesavers, inventors, manufacturers, bushmen, aboriginals. They do not act like caged people. The very success of the exhibit is in their ability to move and talk naturally within the confines of space. They go about their business, their sand paintings, their circumcision ceremonies, their strikes, their settlements, their national anthems, arguments about ‘Waltzing Matilda’ and ‘Advance Australia Fair’. In Phoebe’s are the artists and writers gather for their discussions. (...) Goldstein is not happy. She wishes to leave. (...) The sign on her door says ‘Melbourne Jew’. She spends a lot of time explaining that she is not a Jew, that the sign is a lie, that the exhibition is based on lies, but visitors prefer to believe the printed information, (...) written and signed by independent experts. (*IL* 568)

Carey packs into this paragraph all the criticism of Australians that permeates his historical novels. He draws an image of people happily caged and exploited, not even realising it, or ignoring it. Leah, aware of all the lies Australia is based on, is the only one fighting her entrapment, and the lies, which are universally believed since they are set down in print – an obvious allusion to official written history and its impact on the country, a reminder that the past looms in the present. Yet the majority remains oblivious. Carey explained in an interview that the final image was his starting point for the novel, and elaborated:

⁴¹ Woodcock, 70.

We think we're so anti-authoritarian and free, and refuse to look at how dependent we are economically, culturally, militarily. While we're on our leash or in our cage we can strut about and bark, but we're a very frightened people. So I began with the ending of the book – people living in a pet shop. I thought I had made some strong political points about the country but reviewers tended not to notice.⁴²

His point is indeed highly political, and hinted at in the image of entrapment found in all the novels discussed here, whether it is the hints of convict past, Herbert's period in jail, and entrapped animals in *Illywhacker*, Lucinda and her mother trapped by social conventions, and Oscar trapped first in the wagon on his expedition and finally in the sinking church in *Oscar and Lucinda*, Ned Kelly trapped in the cycle of corruption and eventually trapped by the police in *True History*, or Chubb and Sarah trapped by their own lies in *My Life as a Fake*. All these images suggest the lack of freedom of Australians and their failure to break free of the colonial past and its lies that Carey so fiercely criticises.

Carey seems to suggest that Australia has gone from one form of colonisation to another, emphasised in *Illywhacker* by the foreign investors of the pet shop. According to Gaile, “[t]he impact of British colonization, the logic of the novel suggests, has made the country vulnerable to subsequent colonizational manoeuvres from aggressive nations in postcolonial and neocolonial times”.⁴³ The American and Japanese money the shop depends on symbolises the new power structure between Australia and the world, where the United States have replaced the British Empire as a world superpower after WWII, and where Asia is becoming increasingly important for Australian trade. In the 1930s and 1940s, when America was growing in importance, “American interests were intent on breaking into the empire trade arrangements so favourable to Britain,” fuelling Australian nationalist sentiments and mocking colonial allegiances.⁴⁴ This is demonstrated in Nathan Schick and his enthusiasm for “Australiana”, illustrating also the self-serving nature of the whole enterprise, meant for his and America's profit. Similarly, the American investment into Charles's shop, and later its acquisition by the Japanese Mitsubishi, effectively sanctions their power over Australia. Moreover, Carey's incorporation of these world powers into his novel is a nod to their current influence of on Australian culture. Since WWII,

⁴² Davidson, 65.

⁴³ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 154.

⁴⁴ Richard White, 150.

“Australian way of life” has been measured against ‘the American way of life’,⁴⁵ and with globalisation, American English expressions and pronunciation are increasingly penetrating Australian English due to the America’s global cultural hegemony.⁴⁶ The influence of Japan, and other Asian countries, is undeniable in the fabric of Australian cities, with the presence of Asian neighbourhoods, restaurants, markets, and even dedicated shopping centres.⁴⁷

Charles’s dreams depend on these foreign powers, as American money “save[s] his arse” (*IL* 453), putting Americans in the privileged position of a saviour, their superiority confirmed by General MacArthur, who picks the Australian cockatoo as his “mascot”, keeping him in a cage and teaching him to talk – a symbolic acknowledgement of the neo-colonial power. Similarly, when the shop passes into Hissao’s hands and he runs out of money, a saviour appears in the form of Mitsubishi. Or rather, Hissao has to go to Japan himself to secure the investment, already acknowledging his inferior position, cemented by his personal transformation, which again testifies to the forces of neo-colonialism: because the Japanese would not

do business with a curly-headed, Baccus-lipped, baggy-suited Australian with scuffed shoes [,] Hissao therefore transformed himself. He became dullness personified. He had his hair neatly barbered. He bought the correct English suits and a wristwatch that would declare his rank more clearly than the business cards he had no time to print. In the corridors of Mitsubishi he was all but invisible. It was his destiny. (*IL* 564)

Like his grandfather, he can assume a different identity, but by deliberately assuming a Japanese-preferred character, he bows to their superiority, and sentences Australia to the fate of the colonised to be exploited. Even though Hissao has his pet shop, the final image shows how much went wrong with Charles’s original dream, which produced a human zoo of “Australian types” based on misguided stereotypes, which, however, earns money for their masters and thus serves its purpose: “Of course it is the Best Pet Shop in the World. Who could possibly compete with it? It is not just our owners, the Mitsubishi Company, who say so. Everyone comes. Name a country and I will have met someone who travelled from it just to see us” (*IL* 567). What those visitors see is

⁴⁵ See Richard White, 162.

⁴⁶ See for example McArthur, 458.

⁴⁷ In Brisbane, for example, the suburb of Sunnybank has been nicknamed “Brisbane’s Little Asia” for its Asian majority and their cultural presence. See Jodi Panayotov, “Sunnybank: Brisbane’s Little Asia,” *mustdobrisbane.com*, *mustdobrisbane.com* Pty Ltd., <<http://www.mustdobrisbane.com/features/sunnybank-brisbanes-little-asia>> 3 Dec 2017.

thus not the intended proud display of Australia, but Australia as defined by and for the outside world, formed and moulded to sell well.

This is a harsh indictment of Australia which, for lack of a clear definition of its own identity happily subjugates itself to another. Leah embodies this confusion: “she, for her part, was sick to death of trying to decide what it meant to be Australian. (...) there was no such thing as Australia or if there was it was like an improperly fixed photograph that was already fading” (*IL* 554). A fading photograph leaves a lot to the imagination, and is therefore quite mouldable, exactly like Carey’s Australia. Even those who believe in an authentic Australian culture and nation, like the Badgerys, succumb to the neo-colonial powers. The nationalist project fails, because it is fraught with lies – lies about the legitimacy of land ownership, or the “bullshit” about “Australia’s Own Car” (*IL* 476) – the Holden – owned by the American company General Motors. As Gaile asserts,

although postcolonial Australia is not formally bound or subjected to any nation, the attempts that Carey’s characters make at coming of age, at asserting an authentic selfhood, continue to be thwarted because of the debilitating effects of foreign influence. Collective mental disorders such as the cultural cringe or cultural schizophrenia, induced by the British, continue to work their insidious ways on the Australian psyche.⁴⁸

The psychological scars are in Carey’s eyes the main reason for the Australian subservience, and they will not be healed unless the issues that caused them are confronted head on, as his novels try to do by pointing them out.

These scars mainly manifest in cultural cringe, which is still an issue in today’s Australia. While it stems from the colonial marginalisation of Australia, it is also connected to the Australian Legend and its ethos of egalitarianism and anti-intellectualism. After transportation ceased, Australia evolved into “a workingman’s paradise”⁴⁹ in the mid-19th century, from which the bush type of Russell Ward’s definition arose, where physical strength was much more important than the intellectual one. Richard White draws on the observations of the 19th century French diplomat and historian Alexis de Tocqueville about America, reporting that “his work encouraged many English intellectuals to regard democracy and high culture as totally incompatible,” maintaining that without the class division in a society with an aristocracy, art and high culture will

⁴⁸ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 192.

⁴⁹ Richard White, 29.

not flourish,⁵⁰ particularly in a “workingman’s paradise” where practicality is valued over beauty. Moreover, the desire for equality in democratic colonial societies, according to Tocqueville, is detrimental to intellectual effort: “As men grow more like each other, the doctrine of the equality of the intellect gradually infuses itself into their opinions; and it becomes more difficult for any innovator to acquire or to exert much influence over the minds of a people”.⁵¹ His predictions seem to have held true in Australia to an extent, with Australians adopting anti-intellectualism as part of their national character in the 1890s.

When the accomplished writer Patrick White returned to Australia in 1948, at a time when many intellectuals were leaving the country for Europe,⁵² he bemoaned the state of the local culture:

In all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the schoolmaster and the journalist rule what intellectual roost there is, (...) muscles prevail, and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves. It was the exaltation of the 'average' that made me panic most [...]⁵³

White resolved to fight this material and average culture by writing novels that were very unconventional for his time, in both style and subject matter, although, predictably for the mid-century Australia, his novels were also only concerned with white Australia. This issue aside, White revolutionised the Australian novel in his time to stimulate the intellectual and cultural life of the country, and Carey does the same. It is interesting that both novelists’ work was always reviewed much more favourably abroad than at home, at least in the first reviews, not only due to their challenging style, but also the criticism of Australia.⁵⁴ For Carey, this is a sign of the mediocrity ethos in Australia, maintaining about critics that “when your head goes just a little bit above the crowd, they’re ready to snap it off”.⁵⁵ This “tall poppy syndrome” attitude is the result of not only the egalitarian ethos, but also the type of cultural nationalism of the 1950s, which was closed off to anything outside Australia in order to produce an authentic Australian culture

⁵⁰ Richard White, 56.

⁵¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication, trans. Henry Reeve, ed. Jim Manis (Hazleton, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2002) 717.

⁵² See Webby, 11.

⁵³ Patrick White, “The Prodigal Son,” *The Literature of Australia: An Anthology*, ed. Nicholas Jose (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 2009) 559.

⁵⁴ In regards to negative criticism of White, see Webby, 126; for Carey see Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 12.

⁵⁵ See, 36.

“wholly divorced from outside influences.”⁵⁶ Such parochialism is also a subject of Carey’s criticism.

Herbert of *Illywhacker*, as an example of the bush type, is, at least initially, an example of Australian anti-intellectualism, as he cannot read (*IL* 287), and his focus is on things material – Australian products, animals, and houses. Once he learns to read, begins reading the newspapers, and eventually gets a degree in history, he begins to notice the “old pattern of self-deception” (*IL* 477) about the Australian car, the land ownership, and other lies permeating the country, but he does not care to do anything about it. Leah voices a direct critique of Australian anti-intellectualism when trying to convince Herbert the land was stolen: “I try to have an intelligent conversation, but there is no tradition of intellectual discussion here. When a subject is discussed the women simper and say they have no ideas and the men settle it with a fight,” (*IL* 213). The novel essentially proves her right, as no intelligent discussion happens about the problems of Australia’s history, or about the pet shop, and everyone but she is happily imprisoned without resisting. It symbolises the psychological imprisonment of Australians, not only in the colonial mentality of subservience, but also the local parochialism, which is itself a product of the cultural cringe – a fear of not being able to withstand a comparison with other cultures. The intellectuals of Carey’s novels always end up as outcasts from society, whether it is Leah in *Illywhacker*, or David Weiss and Christopher Chubb in *My Life as a Fake*, punished for their intellectual pursuits. As Carey sums up in *My Life as a Fake*: “In Melbourne a billiard player will always outrank a poet” (*MLF* 75), suggesting the value of a public intellectual.

Cultural cringe manifest itself the most in *Illywhacker* in the people’s distrust of local products and their willing subjugation, as discussed above, or in direct comparison to other cultures: “Schick (...) had the distinct advantage of being American and therefore never hesitant about expressing an opinion. Australians, in comparison, lack confidence, and it is this, not steel mills or oil wells, that is the difference between the two nations” (*IL* 324). This statement again foregrounds that the problem is psychological, rather than material. It is also evident in *True History*, where the schoolmaster Curnow bemoans the “adoration of the Kelly Gang”: “What is wrong with us? Do we not have a Jefferson? A

⁵⁶ Rollo Hesketh, *Meanjin* Vol. 72, No. 3 (2013) < <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/a-a-phillips-and-the-icultural-tinge-creating-an-iaustralian-traditioni/> > 1 Dec. 2017.

Disraeli? Might not we find someone better to admire than a horse-thief and a murderer?" (*TH* 419). He cannot come to terms with the national mythology, based on a noble criminal, rather than an admirable intellectual, and his attitude to Kelly no doubt reflects his controversial standing in Australia's culture, even though his influence is undeniable. Chubb in *My Life as a Fake* expresses the feelings of cultural cringe most directly when Sarah mentions her Australian mother who, having relocated to the UK, "could never abide Australians" (*MLF* 20), ashamed of her origins. Chubb explains it as "a terror of being out of date (...), wondering, what are people saying in France or wearing in London (...). They call it the Tyranny of Distance now" (*MLF* 30). Chubb is suffering from the same affliction, thinking he "had been born into a second-rate culture" (*MLF* 87), trying to rectify that by reading the greats of English literature, and writing "priggish, self-serving, snobbish" classicist poems which showcase him as "a paragon of art, of learning" (88) in the anti-intellectual Australia, on which the fake McCorkle is supposed to be a joke, because "it cannot be (...) that the ignorant can make great art" (*MLF* 33) in his reasoning. It is ironic then, that McCorkle's poetry becomes the expression of an authentic Australian voice, despite his wishes, and the debate about whether it is a fake or not comes to reflect the debate about the authenticity of Australian culture, as if to prove that no matter how much the nation looks down on it, it exists. As Robert Macfarlane asserts, one interpretation of the novel is "as an inquest into, and a condemnation of, Australia's particular susceptibility to hoaxing and fakery. It is a susceptibility, Carey contentiously implies, which stems from Australian culture's desperation to be recognised as a producer of authentic literature and not just as its consumer".⁵⁷ The novel successfully shows both.

Yet like the squatters in *Illywhacker*, Chubb and Sarah's mother are cultural snobs, who do not believe in Australian culture, and rather imitate that of the former Centre. That, it seems, is the solution for those Australians who are not content with neither the anti-intellectual climate, nor the parochial nationalism, and look for intellectual stimulation elsewhere. Such is the case of Phoebe and her high school teacher Annette. Annette spent eight months in Paris, after which everything in Australia fades in comparison, evidenced in her book published

⁵⁷ Robert Macfarlane, "Monstrosity, Fakery and Authorship in *My Life as a Fake*," *Fabulating Beauty*, ed. Andreas Gaile (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 340.

decades later, which is “typical [in] that she chose to write about eight months in Paris in 1916 and ignore twenty-eight years in Australia” (*IL* 5). She instils in Phoebe the same scorn for Australia: “She knew the names of the streets of Paris and many of the people who had walked on them. She knew what a bidet was. She read Ruskin and learned to scorn Henry Lawson (...) and learned to mock his bush poetry with her mentor’s one-sided smile” (*IL* 6). Consequently, later, family life with Herbert does not suit her, and she leaves him for Sydney’s poetry scene, establishing a magazine with a cheeky title – *Malley’s Urn* (*IL* 483). Similar abandonment of Australian provincialism is embodied in Sarah’s mother in *My Life as a Fake*, as well as in Chubb’s girlfriend Noussette. Like Annette, she has a French-sounding name, speaks “accented English (...) sprinkled with French words,” reflecting the view of France as a cultural capital,⁵⁸ and claims to be “a Polish Jew,” though she is likely “Mary Morris from Wangaratta” (*MLF* 91), simply changing identities as it suits her, later claiming she is French upon setting up a French restaurant (*MLF* 148). In her case, the rejection of Australianness is not for lack of intellectual stimulation, but rather to seem more interesting, which at the time surely equalled European. Carey, however, demonstrates, that these engagements with other cultures, whatever the intentions behind them, are formative forces of Australia.

4. 4. Embracing Transnationalism: Australia as a Product of Cultural Exchanges

However strangely placed *My Life as a Fake* may seem in the discussion of Australian culture and identity due to its Malaysian setting and few Australian characters, it is the culmination of Carey’s commentary on contemporary Australia. One way of looking at Bob McCorkle is as a personification of Australia. While Gaile makes this connection on the basis of the common unnatural birth (discussed in 3. 2.), it also works in terms of McCorkle’s cultural production – his poetry – in the way he embraces the words of others as his own, with a unique twist. By authenticating the supposedly fake poetry, Carey consecrates the compositional nature of Australia’s culture, and his final note on believing in the existence of Ern Malley further confirms his belief in the national culture invented from a combination of outside and inside influences alike. Just

⁵⁸ See Richard White, 96.

like this thesis argues for a transnational approach to Australian literature (2. 8.), so does Carey argue for such an approach to Australian culture in general. Carey's novels emphasise that Australian culture, created artificially in the new land, cannot have evolved in isolation, but out of the cultures and traditions already available in the new, unique mix, acknowledging that the nature of Australian identity is and has always been compositional and therefore transnational. The denial of the transnationalism practised by cultural isolationism only stumps Australia's cultural progress and cements the vicious cycle of cultural cringe. The Malaysian setting suits Carey's point, being an intersection of different cultures, like Australia – Jaroslav Kušnír calls it “a symbolic place of cultural hybridity as represented by the Sikhs, Tamils and Chinese, but all integrated in the Malaysian culture”.⁵⁹ He further notes that the culture, however, is resistant to the colonising outsiders – the British, the Americans, the Australians – protecting against further colonisation.⁶⁰ Similarly, Australia should be wary of neo-colonising efforts of the world superpowers, not bowing to their cultural hegemony, but like in Malaysia, it should not result in isolationism, but a productive dialogue. Ultimately, the essentialist nationalism of the 1890s is simply not applicable to Australia. Cultural identity, as Kušnír notes, is in *My Life as a Fake* presented in postcolonial terms, as “never stable, fixed, or essential, but rather fluid, fragmentary, unstable and formed by the particular cultural context the places and regions have developed into in the course of history.”⁶¹

Nowadays, Australia has developed into a place where 33.4% of the population were born outside of Australia, where both parents of 34.4% Australians were born overseas, and where 22.2% of the population speak a language other than English at home.⁶² Just like McCorkle's poems (even Carey's novels themselves) are composed of various sources, so is the society. *True History* is populated with the English, the Irish, and already there appears a “Chinaman” (88). In *Illywhacker*, the Chinese are paid much more attention, centred around Mr Goon, who has a significant impact on Herbert, hinting at the

⁵⁹ Jaroslav Kušnír, “Identity, Post-Colonialism and Writing in Peter Carey's Novel *My Life as a Fake* (2003),” *Eger Journal of English Studies* VII (2007): 72.

⁶⁰ See Kušnír, 72.

⁶¹ Kušnír, 73.

⁶² See “2016 Census QuickStats,” *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, Commonwealth of Australia, 23 Oct. 2017
<http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/036> 3 Dec. 2017.

increasingly important Asian influence in Australian culture, and whose family is a prime example of “Australianising”, as his grandchildren “don’t understand Chinese – they’re real little Aussies” (*IL* 345), but influenced by their grandfather’s heritage. The surnames of other characters indicate just how multicultural Australia is – Goldstein, Kaletsky, Vogelnest or Lo in *Illywhacker*, or Vogelsang and Weiss of *My Life as a Fake*. This multicultural make-up of Australia is not directly commented on by Carey, it is simply there. A rare exception is the case of Mr Lo, an illegal immigrant in *Illywhacker*, whose case reminds the reader of Australia’s White Australia policy at the time, and its non-sensical nature:

The government, having regard for the colour of Mr Lo’s skin and the shape of his eyes, did not wish him to stay. They had given him the same iniquitous dictation test that they had given Egon Kirsch, although they had done it in Dutch not Gaelic, and they did not wish him to stay. They were wrong. (*IL* 474)

The dictation test Carey alludes to was a means of keeping out non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants, who could be denied entry to the country if they failed the test in a language of the immigration officer’s choosing.⁶³

Carey mentions the Czech journalist and lecturer Egon Kisch, who wrote in German (and whose name Carey misspells), as his case demonstrates the absurdity of the test, which he was given in Scottish Gaelic and failed.⁶⁴ The episode caused quite a scandal in Australia.⁶⁵ Kisch was invited to Melbourne by the Movement Against War and Fascism to speak at the All Australian Congress Against War in November 1934. However, prior to his arrival by ship to Freemantle, the Collector of Customs received a Memorandum from the Commonwealth Investigations Branch prohibiting Kisch’s entry on the grounds of his being a communist, and thus a “prohibited immigrant”, as the document states. He was detained on the ship after it arrived in Freemantle and as it made its way up the coast, his case attracting more attention, which culminated when they docked in Melbourne, greeted by his supporters, and Kisch jumped from the ship on the pier breaking his leg. Due to the pressure from the public, the case was

⁶³ See for example Iain Stewart, Jessie Hohmann and Kel Robertson, “Dictating to One of ‘Us’: The Migration of Mrs Freer,” *Macquarie Law Journal* Vol. 5 (2005): 241-242.

⁶⁴ See for example Richard White, 146.

⁶⁵ The following account of the events is based on the information provided on the education platform VRRROM about the incident, where a scanned copy of the document prohibiting Kisch’s entry to Australia can be found as a scan. See “Egon Erwin Kisch: A Prohibited Immigrant,” *VRRROM*, Education Services Australia Ltd and National Archives of Australia, 2007-2010 <<http://vrrrom.naa.gov.au/print/?ID=25317>> 18 Feb. 2018.

taken to court and the decision to exclude him was overruled on a technicality, setting him free. However, in Sydney the dictation test came, which he failed and was taken into custody again, only to be set free again by the court which ruled that Scottish Gaelic was not a European language. Other attempts at expelling him from Australia followed, but he was able to stay for a few months and give public talks, before leaving after a deal with the conservative government in March 1935. His case was seen as going against the principles of free speech and resonated with Australians, particularly the literary circles, who shortly after founded the Australian Writers' League, which strongly opposed fascism.

While the test was abolished long ago, this episode serves to remind the reader of the absurdity of such policies and their susceptibility to misuse, and in today's reading amidst the refugee crisis it may also remind the reader of the strict immigration rules and the appalling treatment of asylum seekers in Australia.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, today's Australia is a multicultural society where the intermingling of different cultures produces a unique transnational culture. *My Life as a Fake* in particular demonstrates this well – in taking its characters out of Australia and including culturally-hybrid characters such as the older Chubb who speaks a Malay pidgin, or his Asia-raised Australian daughter, he demonstrates Australia's greater openness to and acceptance of outside influences.

However, despite Gaile's praise for Carey's efforts in the construction of Australia's multicultural identity, and the "deconstruction of such misleading images" as the white heterosexual male as the national type,⁶⁷ Carey's approach still leaves something to be desired. Like the portrayal of Aborigines, multicultural Australia is more talked about and hinted at than shown in fully-fledged characters of different cultural background, who, if present at all, only play relatively minor roles (Leah, Weiss, Mr Goon). The majority of Carey's characters are Anglo-Celtic whites. However favourably disposed they are to the multicultural reality of Australia, this role division still clearly supports the dominant image of Australian identity. While Carey is undeniably successful at

⁶⁶ Refugees seeking asylum in Australia are being held in detention centres on Papua New Guinea, which have long been criticised by the United Nations. See for example Calla Wahlquist, "UN Attacks Australia's 'Inhumane' Refugee-processing System," *The Guardian*, . Guardian News and Media Limited, 4 Nov. 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/04/un-attacks-australias-inhumane-refugee-processing-system>> 3 Dec. 2017.

⁶⁷ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 232.

writing some minorities into history, most notably women (see 4. 2.), the Aborigines and the ethnic minorities would still deserve to have more agency.

This does not discount Carey's efforts in the production of Australia's modern image, but it has been a subject of criticism, most notably by Karen Lamb. She sees Carey as "writing white, predominantly male Australian history,"⁶⁸ which she has trouble seeing as postcolonial, since the British "are clearly getting exactly the kind of Australian history they feel comfortable with, and Carey is the good colonial son who has brought it home to them. His fictions do not offer much that is not easily accommodated within a British perception of imperialist history."⁶⁹ Her biggest quarrel is with *True History*, which she perceives as "an exoticized version of white suffering"⁷⁰, perpetuating a white Anglo-Celtic nationalist myth of the exclusivist Australian Legend. She is certainly right that the focus is on the white majority, their suffering under colonialism, and its legacy in the years after, but her indictment of Carey is too harsh. His explorations of the past never give a simplistic view of the past, and do not portray Australians only as victims, but also as perpetrators of violence, even though they focus on its impact on the white majority. However, as evident from these pages, they certainly question the construction of history and identity and prompt the reader to some serious considerations by alerting to alternative versions of both – in that his novels are certainly postcolonial and therefore confrontational towards the British master narratives.

⁶⁸ Lamb, 25.

⁶⁹ Lamb, 28.

⁷⁰ Lamb, 26.

5. CONCLUSION

History, like culture, is a living thing – open to rewritings and reinterpretations – particularly in a country like Australia, so new and yet so ancient. That is, ultimately, what Peter Carey’s historical novels address, reflecting the fluidity of history and identity which is constantly evolving, responding to new impulses and findings. In his writing, Carey gives voice to those who were previously left unheard, offering competing versions of history, without singling one out as the correct one, and recognising the multiple threads that have been – and are still being – woven into the fabric of Australian identity. With the help of postmodern narrative strategies of intertextuality, fragmentation, and the unreliability of his narrators, underscored by the central theme of lies running through all the texts in a postcolonial act of writing back to the Empire, Carey succeeds in calling attention to the problems of Australia’s past as well as its present, as this thesis has shown.

In that sense, Carey can be seen as a political writer who has clearly shown his allegiance in the history wars. His status as a political writer has been recognised by most critics, mostly in connection with postcolonial literature. Gaile, for example, asserts that “most of Peter Carey’s fiction is highly political. His writings are explorations of key issues in Australian politics, ranging from cultural issues to the intricacies of foreign affairs”.¹ Gaile further reports that the political agenda is actively pursued by Carey, who “has made it very clear that he wants to use his position as one of the spokespersons of the liberal left to encourage a redefinition of accepted notions of Australianness, past and present”.²

While his efforts are admirable, his redefinition is not without its problems. While the novels present a much more open and inclusive history of the continent, incorporating foreigners and misfits of all kinds, giving more agency to women, and advocating for Aboriginal rights, Carey’s history is still very much a white history, for which he has been criticised, as discussed at the end of the previous chapter. While writers are artists and not politicians, for a self-confessed political writer this lack of direct address of the relations between white Australians and the Aboriginal population is puzzling. Even now, it is one of the most pressing issues in Australia, as has most recently been proved during the

¹ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 107.

² Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 107

2018 Australia Day celebrations. Year by year, the controversies surrounding the date, 26 January, are increasing, and January 2018 has seen widespread protests – there were between forty to sixty thousand participants in the Melbourne Invasion Day rally, easily outnumbering the Australia Day celebration, as *The Guardian* reports,³ following the vandalising of the Captain Cook statue a day prior.⁴ Tempers are running high and the pressure for changing the date is increasing.

It is only fitting then that Peter Carey has chosen to finally address this topic in his new novel, *A Long Way From Home*, which has been released in Australia at the end of 2017 and in the UK in January 2018. For reasons of time and space it cannot be discussed here in detail, however, its publication itself is significant enough in terms of Carey's oeuvre to deserve a mention, as it is the first time since *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000) that a Carey novel has seriously ventured into Australian colonial past (most of his novels since then kept Australian history at the outskirts, apart from his second-last novel, *Amnesia*, which touches on the 1970s take down of the Whitlam government achieved through British and American involvement). It seems that in these turbulent times, Carey has recognised the importance of once again reopening this topic.

In a *Guardian* books podcast interview with Claire Armitstead, discussing his new novel, Carey talks about having tried not to write about the Aboriginal people for a long time, having been approached by an Aboriginal activist in the 1980s, who was afraid of more misconceptions about his people; but recently Carey changed his mind: "I started to feel I really had to do this (...), try to legitimately imagine their role in what is of course a very big white story, the occupation of Australia."⁵ For the first time since *Oscar and Lucinda* (which is also the only – very brief and not unproblematic – instance, discussed in 4. 2.), he gives voice to the Aboriginal people – a significant turning point in his mythistory, an attempt to make it even more inclusive. In a time when cultural

³ Calla Wahlquist, "'People Are Starting to Understand': Huge Invasion Day Protest Stuns Melbourne," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 26 Jan. 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jan/26/huge-invasion-day-protest-melbourne-australia-day>> 8 Feb. 2018.

⁴ Australian Associated Press, "Captain Cook Statue Vandalised in Melbourne Before Australia Day," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 25 Jan. 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jan/25/captain-cook-statue-vandalised-in-melbourne-before-australia-day>> 8 Feb. 2018.

⁵ Peter Carey, "Peter Carey in Conversation – books podcast," Interview by Claire Armitstead, *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, Audio recording of a live interview with Peter Carey, 23 Jan. 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2018/jan/23/peter-carey-in-conversation-books-podcast?CMP=twt_books_b-gdnbooks> 9 Feb. 2018.

appropriation is a huge talking point, this could potentially be problematic, yet Carey maintains he is not afraid of being accused of it:

Appropriation starts being talked about when there have been acts of insensitivity and carelessness (...) I think the important thing in all of this is to say, among my readers, I can be the people who I'm writing about. And I want those people to be able to read my book and for it to connect with things that they know, for it not to be stupid. (...) also the need to show care and respect and clue of the communities that you're talking about and no one's gonna talk about appropriation, because you haven't gone off like some ignorant beef in the night; you've been part of a conversation.⁶

Ultimately, all of Carey's books on Australian history have the same aim of encouraging a conversation about the issues hidden under the surface and suppressed in the nation's memory. Although having been silent on this topic for quite a few years, this last instalment once again proves Carey's continued interest in the political and cultural issues of his country. As he himself admits, under the story of the grand car race which frames the novel, there lies the story of the relationship between the invaded and the invading cultures, about "an enormous pain and damage to the Indigenous population which the white population are blithely unaware of, which is what the book really is about."⁷ This damage amounts not only to the loss of their land, but also to the adverse impact on their culture. Carey recognises that his position as a man of letters gives him a certain platform which he can utilise to alert to that: "I did think that being a writer gave me the privilege of doing what we should all have been doing, which is to go, to ask questions, to read".⁸

This applies not only to his latest novel, but to all that make up his history of Australia, which seems to have been conceived in accordance with this statement, with the writer having asked the questions that have not been asked, having done his reading, and offering his results for the reader to judge. The destabilisation of all discourse in Carey's novels further contributes to the impression that there is nothing like the absolute truth, only various points of view and versions of events which the readers or consumers of history must consider for themselves and use those that pass their muster in the construction of their history and identity. That is not to say his version of history is not critical – the very act of rewriting it is a critique of the "official" colonial history which

⁶ Carey, "Peter Carey in Conversation – books podcast."

⁷ Carey, "Peter Carey in Conversation – books podcast."

⁸ Carey, "Peter Carey in Conversation – books podcast."

produced such version of events so as not to tarnish the image of the Empire. However, in postcolonial times, when this agenda no longer ought to be followed, revisions such as these are necessary to come to terms with the past, which is why Carey's history is inclusive of multiple viewpoints and shows in practise the fabulist element of historiography. Despite being populated with lies, his novels, like the nature of Australian history itself perceived by Mark Twain, "are all true, they all happened".⁹ As Gaile explains: "Carey's novels are as enlightening and truth telling about the cultural history and the Australian consciousness as any traditional history that, for methodological and institutional reasons, adheres to the truth criterion."¹⁰ With his final novel, this consciousness finally also includes the Aboriginal people.

With its focus on the fate and voice of the Aboriginal people, *A Long Way From Home* is an important addition to Carey's long line of historical novels. Only its thorough analysis could show to what degree this changes the view of Carey's historiography and how it contributes to his shaping of the Australian nation and its mythology, however, the initial impression suggests this novel could invalidate the aforementioned criticism of writing the history of white Australia only, however ethically problematic the inclusion of Aboriginal points of view may be. What the latest novel questions is the whiteness on which Australian identity is based without much recognition of the Indigenous population – this questioning, as shown earlier, is very much the topic of Australia's current affairs. The fact that Carey has placed this newest search for Australian identity in the setting of a car race around Australia also powerfully suggests that Australia is still on a journey to finding its identity – a topic present in all the novels discussed, which revolve around one or multiple journeys. Carey, it seems, has a destination in mind, but whether and when Australia will reach it remains to be seen. The road signs are definitely there, as the voices for an inclusive identity – incorporating the Aborigines, the various nations that now make up the Australian population, and all other minorities – are calling for the replacement of the white male bushman (and his reincarnations such as the digger, lifesaver, or surfer).

⁹ Twain, Ch. 16.

¹⁰ Gaile, *Rewriting History*, 289.

Carey's novels have steadily been contributing to effecting this change, suggesting an image of a nation that covers diverse identities and recognises all forces that have been contributing to it. In terms of the national identity and consciousness, what Carey calls for is a transnational approach to Australian culture, literature included. His novels acknowledge their debt to various foreign writers and literary capital outside of Australia, and are populated with characters with a foreign heritage, yet they are all Australians, as is the literature. It is time to acknowledge that the unique culture of Australia is a product of various cultural exchanges, and abandon the nationalistic tendencies which are, unfortunately, on the rise in today's increasingly interconnected world. Where Australian literature is concerned, the transnational approach – both to its conception as well as to its analysis – seems the only way forward in order to improve Australia's position in the world republic of letters, because in order to accommodate literary capital, writers cannot be isolationists, as writers like Carey, Flanagan, or Tsiolkas have recognised.

Carey's history of Australia moves across physical and literary borders, acknowledging the different currents flowing into what constitutes today's Australia. As such, he has contributed to the country's mythology, increasing its cultural capital, including the literary one, on which future generations can build. He fosters conversations across borders – whether physical or psychological – and promotes Australia's openness to dialogue, which would bring the country's culture into the centre of Anglophone cultures and show that, despite various prejudices, Australian culture has a lot to offer.

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