I

_Nation and Narration: Reinventing Australia_

The process of inventing a nation in terms of its comprehensive culture is largely dependent on its literary output. As such, poets and novelists shoulder a significant responsibility in the process of nation-building. Alan Lawson deliberates that in settler countries like Australia and Canada, “social, literary and political commentators ... have, perhaps, shown an even greater obsession with the problem of national identity than those of most other emergent colonial or post-colonial nations”.¹ Timothy Brennan, in his contribution to Homi K. Bhabha’s _Nation and Narration_, quotes that “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it _invents_ nations where they do not exist.”² Carey’s _raison d’être_ is to create a ‘nation’, a sense of pride and belongingness out of a disparate people, i.e., the early settlers, the first wave of European immigrants, the second wave of Asian immigrants, etc. One of the most commonly running theme in almost all of Carey’s novels is ‘national identity’. Carey³ once said: “Almost everything I have ever written has been concerned with questions of ‘national identity’, a seemingly old-fashioned project that seems, to me, an alarmingly modern concern.” In the same interview⁴ he also comments “my fictional project has always been the invention or discovery of my own country.” Writers, in this venture, have thus made every effort to “provide images of the _here_ that will not shock or embarrass by comparison with the long-held images of _there_”.⁵
Nationalism gained political pre-eminence in the 19th century, emerging from two main sources: the Romantic exaltation of 'feeling' and 'identity', and the Liberal requirement that a legitimate state be based on a 'people'. Expounding this idea meant the enforcement of a considerable degree of uniformity, so that a common or shared experience would be possible. In this sense, the very nature of nationalism requires the creation of boundaries. Johann Gottfried Herder has stated that an individual could achieve his/her fullest development as integral part of a particular nation. In order to become a nation, the body of people, with a common territory, culture, language, history, needs to be sufficiently conscious of its national unity and identity. The sense of national identity has in many cases been built upon national symbols. "Identity is a variety of ethnicity with its special features like common territory, history, language, religion, shared memories and myths and other cultural traits." Stories handed down about a nation that forms the matrix of its cultural history is what accords the nation its identity. Myths, legends, etc. go a long way in creating this sense.

Every individual is privileged to acquire his identity from his nation's history. For a people like the Australians who have a penal past, identity formation becomes tantamount to a crisis. Though short-lived the convict heritage never fails to haunt, because its total erasure from the atavistic mind is impossible; nor is it desirable as expounded in Carey's *Jack Maggs*. There is no wish to embrace the past and there is no conscious desire to erase it either. All of
Carey's novels are set in Australia or are about Australians. His expatriate experience has not affected his concern with Australia: "Being away from it, I've never been less able to separate myself from it." He has also emphasised his continuing concern with Australian history: "What you end up wanting to talk about is Australian history ... You've grown out of that soil — out of the soil that starts with a convict economy, a concentration camp, genocide and all of that. You're the echo of a defeat culture." In each of his novels the quest for an identity assumes different modes and is dealt with at different levels.

Australian national identity is thus constructed to a great extent by the nation's penal experience narrativized by Carey. Hassal interprets this search for experience as follows:

The Australian dimension of the setting is especially appropriate because as far as its European inhabitants are concerned, Australia began life as a hell on earth for transported convicts, and the imagery of hellish imprisonment has figured in its literature and its cultural self-images ever since. Ironically enough, the other dominant myth of Australia has been as a paradise, a new world, a virgin continent, a south land of the Holy Spirit, a social laboratory, where the ills of the old European world might be put to right. Carey draws on this specifically Australian tradition of hell and heaven, as well on the larger Christian tradition in *Bliss*. 
Aijaz Ahmad in his deliberations in *In Theory* expounds Fredric Jameson's views on the national experience as being fundamental in the maturity of the Third World intellectual. This estimate can also be applied to a settler colony like Australia. Thus, to quote Jameson, it can be said that:

All [Australian] texts are necessarily ... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as ... national allegories .... The telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself.  

Carey creates the national consciousness of Australia through the mythic device, which is most suitable to the nation as its history defies all tests of verifiability. It is neither true nor false since it is largely constructed on models of lies and truths. Grappling with verifiability shapes the very character of Australian identity. The national identity cannot overlook the indigenous culture of the aborigines. There is an awareness that the convict Australia does not actually have a history, given the fact that its earlier aboriginal cultural history was exterminated. Though acknowledging the rich cultural history of the aborigines, which was consciously erased by the white imperial forces, Carey does not speak from the position of the native aborigine. Thus, the need
to create the cultural history and identity of Australia assumes prime importance. There is, in addition, an awareness that Australia can no longer look to England to find roots, where they evidently no longer belong or are no longer accepted, and so arises an awareness that roots have to be grown in a new soil.

Through the hell of the past, Contemporary Australia is shown as struggling to build a 'heaven' for itself. In Bliss, Harry 'dies three times' (*Bliss 11*) He becomes 'totally convinced that he was actually in Hell' (*B52*). Consequently, he is awakened to the true nature of his life. He looks at his old life with the same people, in similar situations, in a whole new light. The past is reviewed by Harry and he finds it inadequate. His attraction to the commune life is a result of his desire to get away from the 'Hell' he was living in so far, the dangerous materialistic world based on power that is ruthless power. His entry into the commune is also not an easy one. Assuming his role as a storyteller of the commune, it is some time before he is accepted as one of them. His search for a 'heaven' is complete when Harry meets Honey Barbara at Bog Onion Road. This information is corroborated by the fact that the whole novel is narrated to us by Harry’s and Honey’s children. This clearly illustrates that Harry had been hitherto telling stories which had been piled upon him from his predecessors. In the bargain, Harry mastered the art of crafting stories. However, he hardly realised their relevance or their role in transmission of the

* For all further references to Bliss, (B followed by page number) will be inserted in the text
value system of a nation. Harry’s meeting with Honey takes on epiphanic dimensions as he now begins to see definite meanings in his stories.

Bettina, with her dreams of making it big in New York its Glass towers, also fights for the right to live her rightful life, i.e., having a chance at making ads. The novel explores the effect of American culture on the Australian psyche. Having been enamoured of Harry right when she set her eyes on him, the fact that he makes ads and talks gloriously of New York, consolidates all her attention and love for him. Dreaming of ‘going to be a hot-shot’ (B96), Bettina has to come to terms with the reality that Harry is not going to let her fulfil her dreams. When he does allow her to do ads, she finds that she cannot sell them on her own. She needs Harry to do it for her. Her success is, however short-lived as she dies of cancer, supposedly caused by excessive inhalation of petrol fumes, a symbol of materialism and progress. Honey functions as a remedy in respect of Bettina. Honey makes valiant attempts in transforming the Joys family to her way of clean living. However, gradually she finds herself succumbing to the temptations of the city. She finally finds her way back when she consciously decides to leave the city, the Joys, and return to the commune.

Carey’s second novel, *Illywhacker*, which was shortlisted for the Booker prize is, as Tony Thwaites states, “an ideal candidate. It deals explicitly with the question of ‘Australianness’.” Howard Jacobson found *Illywhacker* a uniquely Australian work and contended that the experience of reading it was
nearly the equivalent of visiting Australia. The life of the 139-year-old trickster and liar, Herbert Badgery, parallels the development of Australia following its independence from England, and is full of odd adventures, including stints as a pilot, car salesman, and even snake handler. Carey attempts to present an Australia that is striving to shake off the colonial chains binding it and asserting itself. Hebert embodies this attitude in his lifetime, whether it means trying to build an indigenous Australian aeroplane, as Woodcock states:

Herbert... [attempts] to make an Australian aeroplane and in doing so remake Australia independent of the colonialist legacy... [the act] represent a dream about Australia as a self-determining autonomous nation producing its own culture.... Through this picaresque treatment of the Badgeries' family history Carey felt as if he were 'at last trying to come to grips with what it means to be an Australian and what Australia is'.

In the story of the four generations of the Badgeries that we read of, the reader views the different developments that have taken place in Australia. Herbert's attempts to assert his identity, his realisation that his lies were more easily acceptable to people than his truths, go a long way in portraying the early Australians who were opportunists, who struggled, no doubt, and tried to get what they wanted through all possible means. That Herbert, embodying the
early Australians, is not clear about what he wants himself, is what sabotages all his attempts at stability and happiness.

The Badgery families are trapped by their own aspirations and mythologies, embodying the direction of contemporary Australian society. Herbert's desire to make history, or Leah's sense of there being no history, represent phases in a search for an Australian identity ... 14

Carey tries to project the Australian past as not only consisting of convict origins. In trying to foreground the aborigines as original inhabitants who had their own culture and traditions that were as rich as any other culture, Carey attempts to subvert the imperial creation of Australia's history as a tale of the convict who was sent to the land. Carey is definitely attacking the image of Australia as a wild and barren uninhabited bush country as projected in earlier Australian literature. He also incorporates the world of the aborigines who lived contented lives before it was disrupted. Oscar and Lucinda, set in England and Australia, in the middle of the 19th century is obviously intended to demonstrate just how very different a country the past was, and how, in that country, salvation and damnation were
not only a constant topic of intellectual debate but a matter of profound emotional concern to the individual."\textsuperscript{15}

As in Gabriel García Márquez's \textit{A Hundred Years of Solitude} or in Salman Rushdie's \textit{Midnight's Children}, or in Günter Grass' \textit{The Tin Drum}, \textit{Oscar and Lucinda} uses a large-scale fabulatory form to interweave the fantastic and often painfully absurd adventures of extravagant fictional characters with the actual events of national or international history to create a gigantic teeming canvas.\textsuperscript{16} The verisimilitude or falsity of historical narration is consciously kept in abeyance. Facts are intertwined with fantasy. The reader encounters an alternate society that had thrived long before the advent of the Europeans. The reader observes that the Europeans, who came with the zeal to convert the pagans and to spread Christian values ended up in the process eradicating a whole culture and tradition, only to lay claim to the land as its original inhabitants. Lucinda feels disillusioned with the fortune that she has inherited, as she feels the rightful owners of the land she inherited are the natives. She wants to shake off her inheritance and to be free of its burden. Oscar is a defrocked clergyman, who gives in to the temptation of gambling and accepts all adversities as retribution for all his wrongs. With his love for Lucinda remaining unexpressed, he looks for unusual ways to express it. Jeffries who wants to be a pioneer in finding new lands stops at nothing to achieve this objective, even to the extent of slaughter and misrepresentation of facts.
The Tax Inspector referred to by critics as a tragicomedy of modern life in run-down Sydney, is set amongst the Catchprices, an accursed family of car dealers. Set in 1990’s Carey presents outer-suburban Sydney at its worst. ‘The future’ which Maria sees in Australia (The TaxInspector34), is one of possibility but also one compromised by the ongoing effects of the poisons of the past, the “convict beginnings” about which Carey stated, “have their effect on the Australian culture-I think our easy tolerance of corruption might spring from that”. Benny Catchprice, the sixteen year old youngest member of the Catchprice family reveals to his brother, Vish that he has ‘changed’ (TI18). Thus, as Woodcock tells us, “Benny undergoes a miraculous transformation from a slob in Doc Marten boots and Judas Priest tee-shirts to an elegantly manicured and silk-suited salesman ready to rescue the family business from debt and the tax inspector”. Similarly, Vish too tries to escape from his family and find solace with the Hare-Krishnas. Jack, Benny’s uncle, likewise has moved out of the family home and has now turned into an epitome of the corruption that plagues Australia. Benny, who has a problem tackling his dismissal from Catchprice Motors and subsequent unemployment makes his incompetence evident. To tide over all this, the reader sees Benny going through a psychological upheaval which leaves him mentally unstable, and having a whole lot of illusions. He seeks to be successful. The desire for success makes him employ all the wrong and most bizarre means to achieve his

\footnote{For all further references to The Tax Inspector, (TI followed by page number) will be inserted in the text}
ends. All he desires is to be in control. With all these characters, there is an obvious aversion, almost hatred, of their past. They are looking for ways to break off from it and make something new of themselves. Whether it is Vish, Benny, Mort, all are shown as struggling to attain this objective.

Carey’s novel (The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith) is about national identity viewed from the outside and the periphery. On page 117 we read: ‘No one can even tell me what an Efican national identity might be. We’re northern hemisphere people who have been abandoned in the south, All we know is that we’re not.’ This quest for identity is carried out on a personal level. …

Creating two imaginary lands that could be considered as prototypes of Australia and America, Carey underlines the quest for an Australian national identity. He undertakes this endeavour in the person of the mutant, Tristan. Tristan, the disillusioned narrator, seeks his father to assert his parentage, which is suspect. The journey leads him to Voorstand, and there, swamped by the culture of that country, Tristan finds himself gaining fame disguised as Bruder Mouse, the very symbol that his mother, Felicity, and his people, the Eficans despised. As the novel progresses, we find Tristan feeling repentant for assuming the disguise. When he finally does away with it, the reactions are severe and he is saved by the timely intervention of his father, Bill.
Carey, when questioned on his motive for writing *Jack Maggs* in the Bold Type interview²⁰ said:

I am Australian. Our founding fathers and mothers did not come to our shores in search of liberty, they came to prison. Very few modern Australians are descended from those first convicts, but I believe that they affected the character of our nation forever — after all, not many modern Americans have ancestors who were on the Mayflower, but those folks on the Mayflower affected America forever. Unlike Americans, Australians do not like to celebrate this moment when the nation is born, and it has been something of a passion for me to do just that. We carry a great deal of furniture about our beginnings. It’s a complicated business to discuss in so brief a form as this, but there is a great deal of self-hatred, denial, grief, and anger, all unresolved.

In *Jack Maggs*, Carey seeks to “reinvent... possess... to act as ... advocate”²¹, the character of Magwitch from Dickens’ *Great Expectations*. In Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, Magwitch is shown as a savage who tries to corner Pip. He is an ex-convict who has come back from the prison-island of Australia to claim his due for having raised Pip. Pip looks at him, and everything associated
with him, in horror. Carey subverts the Pip-Magwitch relationship. As Carey states:\(^{22}\):

Dickens' Magwitch is foul and dark, frightening, murderous. Dickens encourages us to think of him as the "other", but this was my ancestor, he was not "other". I wanted to reinvent him, to possess him, to act as his advocate. I did not want to diminish his "darkness" or his danger, but I wanted to give him all the love and tender sympathy that Dickens' first person narrative provides his English hero Pip.

In *Jack Maggs* thus, Carey tells us the story from Magwitch’s point of view. For Carey, "*Great Expectations* is not only a great work of English literature; it is [to an Australian] also a way in which the English have colonized our ways of seeing ourselves."\(^{23}\) In the novel *Jack Maggs*, Carey makes an attempt at "reinventing the story of another fictional ancestor, the convict Magwitch who was transported to Australia."\(^{24}\) In the novel, the main protagonist, Jack Maggs, is an illegal returnee from the Prison Island of Australia. His disposition, on his arrival in England, creates a lot of speculation among the fellow passengers in his coach. He is said to have ‘hooded eyes’ (*JM3*) and doesn’t desire conversation with anyone.
To Maggs' mind, living a life as Jack Maggs Esquire in Australia is repulsive. He cannot envisage his life as an Australian and clings desperately to his mother country and his identity as an Englishman. All this, despite the brutal treatment meted out to him by England. All his attempts are only directed at being 'a bad smell here than a frigging rose in New South Wales' (JM250), as he divulges to the writer, Tobias Oates. Maggs is a respectable man with two sons in Australia. However, to further his efforts of a return to England, he has adopted a son, Mr. Henry Phipps and raised him like a gentleman and thus maintains a freehold mansion for him at 27, Great Queen Street in England. His yearning for his mother country is characteristic of all those who were deported to Australia and who longed for a return as they still felt themselves to be citizens of England, the country of their birth. A national identity removed from England is abominable for people like Maggs. A return to England, his supposed homeland, even at a considerable risk to his own life, and a denial of all the prosperity and good name Australia has brought him, is what Maggs prefers. His disclosure to Mary Britten that he had come there only 'for the culture' (JM7), puts forth his intentions. Again he desperately tries to assert to her that London is 'my home. That's what I want. My home' (JM8). The reader sees him even more desperately trying to convince Percy Buckle when he says 'I am a fucking Englishman, and I have English things to settle. I am not to live my life with all that vermin. I am here in London where I belong' (JM141). We see him clinging and holding onto each and every part of his life in London. He remembers all his childhood days, the people then, very vividly and all he
desires is to be accepted in London. He openly, and in no uncertain terms, rejects Australia, even though it has provided him his fortune. He refers to it as 'that vermin' (JM141) and denounces his own blood back there as belonging to the Australian race. He very astutely states that he is 'not of that race' (JM340).

However, the rejection that he faces, once he is in England, jolts him out of his reverie. With the help of Mercy Larkin, he is able to accept that he does not belong in England anymore. The awareness of his rejection comes across to him in various ways. His own house is empty when he arrives even though he has informed the occupants, i.e., his son, of his impending arrival. He realises that his house is empty, 'yet he knocked, tapping and scratching against the pane' (JM10). When he finally succeeds in entering his house, his thoughts are, 'for this he laboured? To stand in Henry's hallway like a thief, his breeches smeared with London soot?' (JM40). Thus the reader sees him getting disappointed with everything he experiences in England. His efforts to locate his adopted son also prove futile. The last straw in his string of disappointments that shatters all his illusions is when his son points the gun at him in a bid to kill him. Acceptance of his self, as it is, dawns on him and he returns to Australia to start life afresh. With Mercy as his companion and wife, he accepts his Australian identity and thereafter leads a very contented and fulfilling life.

Carey thus exemplifies the leaning, as he has acknowledged, of according to his nation and its past a new face. In all the novels discussed, Carey states a
case for the Australian nation and its people. The reader is made aware of the passion with which each of the characters in the novels of Carey pursues the search to find an identity and in the process also creates a national identity.
i) In the Web of History

The question of national identity is certainly political and it brings in with it the political, the historical, cultural and ideological issues. For the nation of Australia defining national boundaries is an act of resistance against denigration of their culture by either powers, England or America, personalized in the character of Jack Maggs in *Jack Maggs* who sheds himself free from the influence of these two powers.

The main task of Peter Carey is to represent the National Identity of Australia on the global map. While following all the post-modernist models such as fissures, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and particularities, which reject fixation, Carey rejects being fixated even in these models. *Illywhacker* as a historico-cultural text gives us a kaleidoscope of cultures but certainly not a fixed one.

History of a ‘given’ construct is subverted and alternatively, multiple historical possibilities are suggested. Therefore Carey’s representation of Australian history is not reproduction of factual details but imaginative and inventory, debunking notions of objectivity, further problematized by genre-blurring.

*Illywhacker*, in fact, uses letters, records, poems, narratives, journalistic clippings, diaries, creating a generic confusion thereby suggesting multiple historical possibilities. History writing suffered no restraints of possibilities and many a historian used the technique of fictional representation to create
imaginative versions of their historical records. In her discussion of a
historiographic metafiction, Linda Hutcheon says, "The post-modern novel has
done the same and the reverse." Historiographic metafiction plays upon the
truth and lies of historical records. Blurring the distinction between facts and
fiction, "postmodernism deliberately confuses the notion that history's problem
is verification, while fiction's is veracity." While the historical novel many a
time makes use of real historical personages, the metafictional reflexivity of the
postmodern novel includes ex-centric, marginalized or peripheral characters.
Here characters cannot be types because the question of positioning the
protagonist in a socio-cultural set-up, is impossible, as there is no sense of
cultural universality. The postmodernist models best suit nations such as
Canada or Australia where national identity is constructed not from a single but
multiple histories of peoples and consequently multiple cultures.

For a nation with a peculiar history like Australia, Carey attempts to create a
past and consciously subverts the history of Australia constructed and handed
down by Imperial powers. Carey categorically states his intention in his
interview with Jean W. Ross:

The Australia I wished to write about was the one described by Mark
Twain... i.e., "Australian history is almost always picturesque;
indeed it is the chief novelty the country has to offer ... It does not
read like history, but like the most beautiful lies; and all of a fresh
new sort, ... It is full of surprises and adventures, and incongruities, and incredibilities. 27

Illywhacker, for instance, was described in the Publishers Weekly announcement as “some 100 years of Australian history transformed by the imagination into drama and myth.” 28

History is viewed as another story-telling process and therefore enters the understanding that subjectivity is bound to creep in. In some of Carey’s fiction multiple narrators tell the same tale in different versions. “Derrida has proclaimed the separation of the signifier and the signified, which, if true, would reduce all lies and (hi)stories, satires and truths to the status of mere texts”. 29

Veronica Brady 30 in Overland tells us that Carey has always been preoccupied with history, with the state of events, places, institutions, memories and habits. Sometimes as in Illywhacker and Oscar and Lucinda he parodies this state; sometimes, as at the end of Bliss, he dissociates his characters from it and at other times, in the stories especially, he escapes ahead of it into an imaginary world of his own, a kind of counter history which nevertheless has an uncanny, often eerie and sometimes funny resemblance to what we choose to regard as the ‘real thing’.
Critics also confirm that all of [Carey's] writing, despite its variety, seems to be rooted in storytelling. *Bliss*, an account of modern day Australia, is considered to be a “story about story-telling”\(^{31}\). There is a preoccupation with the creation of stories ‘something new... something interesting... something we haven’t heard before... it must be totally original’\(^{\text{B76}}\). The story of Little Titch narrated by Harry is ‘the only original story he would ever tell’\(^{\text{B76}}\). It is here that Harry embarks on his journey as a story-teller. All his life he has thrived on the stories his father, Vance, narrated to him. These, when narrated in turn by Harry in *Bliss* assume a whole new dimension. The meaning Vance accorded to his stories is lost on Harry. Harry finds his true calling, i.e., that of the story-teller in the commune.

In this account of the myth-making role of the story-teller in the “broken culture” of Bog Onion Road, Carey is clearly offering an ambitious interpretation of both the personal value to the story-teller, and the cultural value to the community, of local stories and story-telling, particularly in a colonized culture like Australia’s.\(^{32}\)

The narrative in *Illywhacker* is a pastiche of historical references. As the critic Sue Ryan\(^{33}\) opines:
although a lie because it does not tell the whole truth, may also be seen as an incomplete version of the truth. In this way Carey’s lies about Australian history can be seen as part of the truth, just as the version given in history books is lies or only partial truth.

Brought to the foreground, is also the power of the written word to authenticate lies. The trickster, or illywhacker, Herbert Badgery “… [goes]… behind the scenes… of Australian history… He travels up and down its secret alleys from the late 19th century to the early 20th centuries, casting his cynical gaze on the lies he finds there”. 34

Herbert’s ‘salesman’s sense of history’ (1343)... reveals Australia itself as a ‘show’, a product constructed from illusion and deception. Initially, Herbert embodies what Carey has called ‘a kind of entrepreneurial optimistic nationalism’. Herbert’s ‘combative nationalism’ is portrayed in a number of ways:

… he celebrates the diversity and detail of Australia, its landscape, localities, societies, people and characters… it is a One Hundred Years of Solitude of the outback, with small-town lives and incidents woven together into a panoramic account of national history… Herbert’s life is presented as that history in the making…. Australia’s history is itself lies, that ‘the raw optimistic tracks’ of its
pioneers were made at the expense of another society, and ‘cut the arteries of an ancient culture before a new one had been born’.

Illywhacker’s ‘novelist-as-liar device’ goes a long way in reinforcing the viewpoint that history is ultimately a construction from particular subjective point of view. The reader in Carey’s fiction is made aware of this subjectivity in historical narrations. When the novel begins, we have Herbert informing or rather warning us that even though he is the narrator, he is ‘a terrible liar and [he has] always been a liar.’ (I11) We are repeatedly informed directly or subtly that the narration need not always be the truth. According to Illywhacker’s “project is not so much to play tricks ... as to do with the history of Australia”.

As in Illywhacker, the story the narrator tells in Oscar and Lucinda is a family history which is also a national history, told from the point of view of the central white characters. But this dominant outlook is shadowed all through by a hidden history. This history emerges most powerfully when Kumbaingiri Billy, the aborigine, tells his version of the arrival of Jeffries, Oscar and the expedition. “This forms a damning indictment of the pretensions and hypocrisies of Jeffries’s attempts to enter the annals of exploration, discovery and empire-building- which leads us to the glass church”. The zeal of empire building is seen in Mr. Jeffries who agrees to lead the expedition, carrying the Glass Church up north to Bellingen. The land has been unexplored and
unmapped. Mr. Jeffries dreams that he 'would write such journals as the colony has never seen. Every peak and saddle surveyed to its precise altitude.' (Oscar and Lucinda). Information provided by Mr. Jeffries in his journals is however far from the truth. The differences in Mr. Jeffries' journal, that which Oscar himself witnesses, and what the Aborigines speak of in their stories shows how, as Ms. Vergara says, "history is re-written". All three versions are different, and this leaves one uncertain of the actual train of events. Jeffries wants to name the new territory and thus become a pioneer himself, thereby "appropriating the land for the English". He is totally oblivious to the loss of human life even if that is of the Aborigines, thereby shattering the much touted egalitarianism of the Imperial forces.

_Oscar and Lucinda_, which bagged the Booker prize, deals directly with issues of British imperialism in colonial Australia. Commenting upon the Victorian expansion of the British Empire, the stories of Oscar and Lucinda expose the myth of empire building as a glorious pursuit. The myth of empire building adopted by the British, is revealed at its stark best when Lucinda resents her fortune as she realizes that it has been usurped from the Aborigines by her parents and by extension, the British colonizers. The colonial project is at full play in the displacement of the Aborigines and its consequent claim to the Australian land as a matter of right.

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2 For all further references to _Oscar and Lucinda_, (O&L followed by page number) will be inserted in the text
"The stories of Oscar and Lucinda expose the myth of empire building as a glorious pursuit." says Bernadette Vergara. He also adds that "Colonization and British imperialism are themselves a form of storytelling. Conquering the new and unexplored land, mapping it out, is a story." Mr. Jeffries' journal citing the course of journey and subsequent exploration, Oscar's account of the same journey, and the tales passed down by the Aborigines, illustrate how history is subject to variations. These different accounts also illustrate how difficult it is to distinguish fact from fiction even in the case of Oscar and Lucinda, although there is otherwise little doubt cast upon the narrator's own version of his great-grandfather's story. *Oscar and Lucinda* is very much about the origins of history in the form of Mr. Jeffries' deliberate and conscious effort to make and write history in his journals and also Oscar's missionary work which essentially entails bringing the stories of Christianity to the Aborigines. The novel also compares the two versions of Oscar's story, that told by the narrator and the other by his mother. The narrator never really tells how he constructed his version of Oscar's story. On the first page, he describes the daguerreotype and says that it seemed obvious to him that his great-grandfather was holding his breath and attempting not to twitch. *Oscar and Lucinda* offers an almost complete appropriation of history because the narrator revises it so completely from his mother's story of Oscar as pioneer clergymen.

Carey demythologizes contemporary Australia, in the process revealing a hidden history beneath the surface 'show'. The hidden imperial history of white
Australia's colonization of Aboriginal land is clearly revealed. Carey also reveals how deeply imbued with Christian culture his life and Australian history has been. Woodcock categorically assumes that, "as the novel plays with storytelling, so it also plays with history".40

In _Oscar and Lucinda_ the narrator tells of his past like a story. Beginning the story by calling Oscar his 'great-grandfather' (_O&L_1), "the narrator implies that he exists because Oscar had sexual intercourse with someone, thereby producing his grandparent."41 Carey names the novel _Oscar and Lucinda_ presumably dedicating the plot equally to Oscar's and Lucinda's development, leading the reader to believe that Oscar and Lucinda end up together having a sexual relationship and thereby fulfilling their love. Furthermore, the narrator begins the chapter on Oscar's and Lucinda's first encounter by telling the reader, 'In order that I exist, two gamblers, one Obsessive, the other Compulsive, must meet' (_O&L_187). Although this statement implies that Oscar and Lucinda have sex, the text never clearly asserts it. It is the reader who makes this connection because the reader wants to believe the story. The narrator introduces Miriam earlier in the novel but does not call her his 'great-grandmother' (_O&L_422) until Oscar and Miriam meet. Entitling the next chapter, which begins after Oscar and Miriam have sex, "Oscar and Miriam" (_O&L_422), Carey plays on the novel's title _Oscar and Lucinda_ that originally led the reader to believe in their future sexual relationship.
The narrator clarifies at the onset of the novel that he himself ‘learned long ago to distrust local history’ (O&L2). It is only after this confession that he goes on to narrate his history. Here too one finds disparities in the information he gives us. Equally doubtful is the source from which he could have received such detailed information about his history. Woodcock aptly says that “Oscar and Lucinda plays with history and fiction in ways which remind us that history too is a storytelling process and something we must be wary of.” It also brings forth the arbitrary and partial. Not only is history made up of chance occasions and potentialities, it also contains different points of view thereby suggesting subjectivity in history-writing. Any history, the book suggests, is merely one view of the past, and may hide many other possible versions of the same events. For example, the narrators distrust of local history is occasioned by the fact that ‘Darkwood, for instance, they will tell you at the Historical Society, is called Darkwood because of the darkness of the foliage, but it was not so long ago you could hear people call it Darkies’ Point, …’ (O&L2).

*The Tax Inspector* “is more weighed down by the burden of the past.... [It is] shadowed by history.... the only big city in the world that was established by convicts on one side and by soldiers on the other”. The Sydney, we perceive from a reading, is a product of the killing effects of capitalism. As Woodcock says:
Carey [in *The Tax Inspector*] paints a vitriolic portrait of social
decay and disintegration, the collapse of communal ethics and the
sheer rapacity of the business world consequent upon the global
market economy of the late 1980s.

Further Hassal reiterates\(^45\) that "*The Tax Inspector* sets a grimly detailed
account of three generations of incest in the Catchprice family against a
broader account of public venality and corruption of Sydney".

The novel deals with the government tax investigation of a small car dealership
of the Catchprices. Although it depicts just four days in the life of the
Catchprice family, when the tax investigation is in effect, Carey constantly uses
the flashback "...what Jen Craig calls Carey’s manner of ‘telescoping time
with an incident or object at either end of it’.\(^46\) to dig back into the past. In
this way he links the Catchprice history with the wider social history.

The novel has three main stories to tell us, that of the Catchprice family, the
story of Maria Takis and the story of Sarkis, the Armenian. It begins with
Benny’s transformation, to an elegant and silk-suited salesman. The reader
learns that Benny has shaved off all his bodily hair, as if to portray that he ‘had
been peeled of all history’ (*T*/133). Benny’s transformation seems to be one
attempt at reinventing himself and reworking his history, i.e., his past, which,
as revealed in the course of the novel, is disturbing as it involves child abuse by
his own father. The reader finds the whole of the Catchprice family fighting with the ghosts in their pasts. Gran Catchprice, although aware of all the wrongs going on, prefers to turn a blind eye to the doings of her husband, and consequently of her son. Maria, the idealist tax inspector, who is eight months pregnant when we meet her, gets entangled with the Catchprices too. Sarkis, an immigrant in search of a job, is manipulated and taken advantage of by Benny, by enticing him with employment.

*The Tax Inspector* shows what Carey has called “a newer Australia that we still haven’t mapped”. 47 The novel, while giving us the history of the anglophone Catchprices, also “gives a significant presence to the non-Anglo/Celtic Australia of the various immigrant communities...”. 48 Maria, a Greek immigrant, quietly drops her father to his home in Newtown, ‘slipping into Greek territory like a spy in a midget submarine’ (*T*/*130). So also Sarkis and his mother, Armenians, suffer when they are ‘away from the Armenians’ (*T*/*82). Sarkis, depressed and unemployed, when we are introduced to him, is ‘ashamed, not ashamed of his mother, but ashamed on her behalf…’ (*T*/*82).

The two imaginary lands of Voorstand and Efica that Carey creates in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, is reminiscent of America and Australia, respectively. Efica’s history as a penal colony and its massacred indigenous peoples (*The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*9), “suggests analogies with

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1 For all further references to *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, (ULoTS followed by page number) will be inserted in the text
Australia and the wider post-colonial experience." The eighteen islands of Efica constitute a hybrid culture with a hybrid English language. Tristan, the mutant, born in the small island nation of Efica states that “[Efica is] a country so unimportant that you are already confusing the name with Ithaca or Africa” (*ULoTSS*).

As his life progresses, Tristan also explores the relationship between these two countries in the novel. Efica is swamped, culturally and politically by Voorstand. Although both the countries were founded by colonial Europeans, as their respective histories tell us, until the novel’s narration, “Efica has remained a poor archipelago,… while Voorstand has become an arrogant and technically advanced colonial power in its own right, although not without compromising some of the principles on which it was founded.”

*Jack Maggs* is a character study of the first Australians, the English convicts who were banished to what was then a penal colony. In the novel we encounter Jack Maggs:

contradictory urges to both reveal and conceal the story of his life. His use of his story is an attempt to expunge his past and have himself recreated in a sense as Henry Phipps, cleansed of his sordid past and a gentleman in a fine house at last. …
He writes of his past, his history, in an ink that appears only when held against the light. This history is meant only for the eyes of Phipps. At the same time it haunts him in the nature of the phantom:

[a] pain and the horror that always accompanied these crises. It was not a horror of anything, or about anything, but a horror so profound that a certain time elapsed during which he hardly knew where on earth he stood (JM33-4).

We see Maggs trying to grab Tobias Oates’ promise of getting rid of the phantom and the ensuing pain resulting therefrom. He seeks to wipe out his past and start anew. But in this endeavour he finds no support.

In *Jack Maggs*, Carey implies that there are always two stories being told, that there are, “as in all crooked businesses, two sets of books”52 The narrator tells us Maggs’ life story, but the one that is official, i.e., the one that is published, accords a different ending to Maggs. Carey complicates the conclusion a little more by implying that the textual history that remains in the Mitchell Library actually hides the true story of the time. Maggs never reads ‘That Book’ (JM356). It is Mercy who collects all the copies, the serialized parts then compiled together, and the amended versions, of Maggs’ story that appear in
print, and these account for 'no fewer than seven copies of the last edition' (JM356).

Carey in *Jack Maggs* thus accounts for more than one story of Jack Maggs, all never telling the whole truth and therefore getting reduced to fiction. With Tristan in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* too, the reader is made aware of the overriding influence of the superior Voorstand that swamps Efica, manipulating the latter for its own benefit. In *The Tax Inspector* Carey explores the mapping of an Australia that has always remained concealed. *Oscar and Lucinda* and *Illywhacker* both present an alternative history of Australia to the reader.
ii) **Telling Lies to Tell the Truth**

Speaking about his novels, Peter Carey quotes from Twain, "*It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies.*" Sue Ryan\(^5^3\) in her study of Carey's fiction draws a conclusion that "the lie" is one of the metaphors in his novels. In her opinion:

By analysing how and why characters' lies are created, received and developed we gain insight into how Carey perceives the function and creation of his fiction. The main function of lies is seen to be **creative entertainment.** \(\ldots\) And yet lies are also seen as a way of **expressing the truth.** \(\ldots\) although a lie does not tell the whole truth, (it) may also be seen as an incomplete version of the truth, \(\ldots\) just as the version given in history books is lies or only partial truth.

All of Carey’s novels have characters that resort to lies to create a world to suit their mindset. Reasons for resorting to telling lies could be varied. But most of the time it seems as if it is a means of escape from reality. When the characters lose control of current circumstances, a make-believe world is the best option available to them to come to terms with the present problems, difficulties or dilemmas. In the process of creating a world with lies, one can’t help but notice the ingenuity of these characters, in trying to make their make-believe world look real. Acknowledging this trait in his characters, Carey opines\(^5^4\) that "Australians are like that.\(\ldots\) You’re working with limited resources, but
because you have limited resources, you make something that's wittier and cooler than what you have anyway”.

In their attempt to grapple with reality, the characters create stories, unbelievable and most extraordinary ones that are supposed to assist them. However, most of the time they end up getting trapped in the stories themselves. Their lies run amok and continue to evolve independently, in ways their initiator had not foreseen. In many ways they turn on the creators themselves. Only those who manage to extricate themselves from their stories manage to survive till the end of the novel.

Harry in Bliss, the major protagonist, has till his first death, i.e., clinical death, always lived a complacent life feeding himself on the stories of his father, Vance, who tells him about the ‘trembling glass towers’ (B22) of New York. These stories help him in his meandering path in life. He wins over Bettina, his wife, because she is overwhelmed by his tales of New York. In his hands the stories of Vance Joy lose their meaning and become directionless. He is a Good Bloke, a popular figure around who can tell amusing stories. When he is arrested by the police after his red Fiat has been crushed by an elephant (B71), he is asked to tell an original story, as the police refuse to believe the truth. The car is certainly crushed, but one never really gets to know whether the car was really crushed by an elephant. This impression is created because of the way Mr. Billy de Vere, from the circus, informs Harry. He says, ‘This is almost the
same as the original story' (B70). We see him forever trying to make meaning of all that is happening around him, and in the bargain creating a whole imaginary world. It could be thinking that he is in ‘Hell’ and all those around him are ‘Captives’, or even writing advertisements that tell a false story. His final role is that of a storyteller to the forest community at the end of the book. In his quest for storytelling, Dominique Hecq believes that Carey “attempts to recapture some of these lost myths in its journeying through histories and stories”55

In Illywhacker, Herbert Badgery in the first few lines he tells us his age and then informs us tongue-in-cheek that ‘I’m a terrible liar’ and that ‘My age is the one fact you can rely on, and not because I say so, but because it has been publicly authenticated’ (II11). Herbert goes back to 1861 in his narration of the history of his life, upto the present, where he is caged in his son’s establishment in Sydney, ‘The Best Pet Shop in the World’. A story of three successive generations of the Badgeries and their friends, the novel parallels the progress of Australia from its independence from England, and runs from 1861 to 2025. As he narrates the history of his life, he himself keeps questioning the truth of the stories he is telling, and parallels the official history of the country with prodigious lies. The reader is given constant reminders that the narrator is a notorious liar. Multiple versions of events are given in the narrative to stress on the fictional nature of the narration. Each of these versions can have some truth in them. It is as Sue Ryan states56 'Illywhacker
sets out to express the harsh truth about Australians and their history in the guise of fiction, in an attempt to make it palatable and even entertaining.’

“Carey prophesizes the destructive nature of stories and how while telling them one assumes power over meaning in an individual's life”, ⁵⁷ states Amanda Cooper. Indeed, the transport of the church, a fanciful and impractical scheme, destroys life in its path until Oscar prays for the church's destruction. In the same way, the narrator’s mother believes in the story even though it destroys her relationship with her husband. When stories fall apart, as this one does, the people who found meaning in them must falsify them in order to continue believing in them.

Carey tries to present the fact that the past of Australia has always been a series of lies, right from the narratives of the first white settlers in Australia. Thwaites quotes M.V. Anderson’s unfolding of the history of Australia ⁵⁸, where he elucidates:

Our forefathers were all great liars … However it is their first lie that is the most impressive for being the most monumental, i.e., that the continent, at the time of 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. (p.456)
iii) Treating the Colonial/Capitalist Cancers

Theorists Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, in Decolonising Fictions, claim that postcolonial writers seek to construct texts that 'write back' against imperial fictions and question the values once taken for granted by the once dominant Anglocentric discourse of the imperial epicentre. In Jack Maggs the process of 'writing back' is thoroughly illustrated. 'The colonial 'other' character from a canonised Victorian novel becomes the principal figure in a modern 'decolonising' text, and the peripheral reaches of empire become of central importance.' As Brydon and Tiffin point out:

Anglocentrism denies Post-Colonial territories the right to their own identities, assuming instead that they are merely engulfable parts of the imperial centre. Therefore, in Great Expectations, Australia functioned not as a coherent, cohesive nation, but rather, as an off stage peripheral location were characters awaited their return to the on stage action of the imperial centre, London.

Carey takes on this dominant concept, by writing a novel that seeks 'non repressive alternatives to imperialist discourse' and which refuses to indulge the metropolitan centre over the Colonial margins. This is a typical struggle of postcolonial cultures where decolonisation, "an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them" is endeavoured. Subversion is a characteristic of postcolonial discourse.
For a nation like Australia, a settler colony of Europeans, asserting one’s national identity and culture assumes prime importance. This objective is achieved either by ‘writing back’ to the Empire or by pitting one’s own ethnic culture against the culture of the colonisers. "Nationalist ideologies use cultural devices to demonstrate the process of collective self-definition, to provide feelings of pride and hope connected with symbolic forms so that these can be consciously de scribed, developed and celebrated."61 The sense of national identity has in many cases been built upon national symbols.

Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* elucidates on ‘cultural identity’. One position he talks of is looking at it in “terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, … which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common”.62 In post colonial societies, the rediscovery of this identity is often the object of what Frantz Fanon once called:

[A] passionate research … directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others.63

This rediscovery attains the profile of either unearthing what the colonial experience had decimated or producing an identity by re-telling the past.
Culture refers to the customs, practices, languages, values and world views that define social groups such as those based on nationality, ethnicity, region or common interests. Cultural identity is important for people’s sense of self and how they relate to others. A strong cultural identity can contribute to people’s overall wellbeing. Defining a national identity can be done through a sense of national characteristics or traits, or through national symbols and icons. Myths are thus cultural signifiers and go a long way in according a national status to symbols, icons, or certain characteristics, and therefore assume grave importance in the creation of a national identity. Therefore story-telling and myth-making are traits paramount in the construction of national cultural history and identity.

*Myth* is defined as “a popular belief or story that has become associated with a person, institution, or occurrence, especially one considered to illustrate a cultural ideal” and also as “A fiction or half-truth, especially one that forms part of an ideology.” The word myth comes from the Greek “mythos” which originally meant “speech” or “discourse” but which later came to mean “fable” or “legend”. The word “myth” is also defined as a story of forgotten or vague origin, basically religious or supernatural in nature, which seeks to explain or rationalize one or more aspects of the world or a society. Myths and mythologies seek to rationalize and explain the universe and all that is in it.
Therefore myths are also often used to explain human institutions and practices.

All myths are, at some stage, actually believed to be true by the peoples of the societies that used or originated the myth. Our definition is thus clearly distinguished from the use of the word myth in everyday speech which basically refers to any unreal or imaginary story. Some myths describe some actual historical event, but have been embellished and refashioned by various story tellers over time so that it is impossible to tell what really happened. In this last aspect myths have a legendary and historical nature.

Myths play a critical role in how a culture constructs its sense of time. In this sense myths are contrasted with history, which concerns recent, well-documented events, and to poetic epics and narrative legends, which concern an historical person, place, or incident from the distant past. What human needs do myths satisfy? Myths authorize the cultural institutions of a tribe, a city, a nation by connecting them with universal truths. Myths justify the current occupation of a territory by a people.

Carey, in his writings shows a keen interest in creating viable Australian origin myths. “We’re the only country on earth that has its beginnings in a concentration camp, a penal colony, and a genocide, too,” Carey had once
acknowledged. It is for this country that he tries to create and recreate myths. Australia, for the Europeans, was initially "life as a hell on earth for transported convicts, and the imagery of hellish imprisonment ...". The other version of Australia was a "paradise, a new world, a virgin continent, a south land of the holy spirit, a social laboratory, where the ills of the European world might be put to right." For a people whose origins are not glorious enough, looking at the past is uncomfortable. The veneration of outlaws and the hatred of cops and the seeing of the government as a potentially benevolent force even if it has been cruel in certain respects, is a reflection of the vagaries that the people had in their past. However, the search for a more pleasant past is not forgotten. The desire to create viable myths for Australia's beginnings that would show the past in a new light, a good light, is always on.

Carey acknowledges that his "fictional project has always been the invention or discovery of [his] own country". The Australian past haunts its people, and is sought to either be done away with or in some way made more palatable. It is here that the 'tall-story', one of the dominant genres of Australian fiction comes into play. Fictionalising or lying, is one dominant factor that is shared by all of Carey's novels. Re-telling the story of the past and filling the narration profusely with untruths serves to reorient our understanding of the impossibility of knowing historically accurate facts. What adds to this tall story is the narrator making his motive of lying very obvious, which further serves to fictionalize the nature of the narration. Just as coming to terms with the past of
its country is necessary, making a myth of its history is one way in which Carey seeks to make peace with his country’s penal origins. The myth is the most potent form to fictionalize facts and to make fictions seem like facts. In their attempt at story-telling, Carey’s characters “attempt to create a past, the honourable past of folklore; but all they create is a present, and a captivity”. 71

So we see Herbert in *Illywhacker* sings paeans of his story-telling prowess, when, as the narrator, speaking from the omniscient point of view, he bluntly states, ‘you may as well know, lying is my main subject, my specialty, my skill’ (111). He has no hesitation in letting the reader onto this secret of his. This seems to be a deliberate attempt to orient the reader towards not accepting the narration as the truth. His narration which begins in 1861, and recounts the story of three generations of the Badgery family, runs in tandem with the history of Australia from the time of Australian independence from England.

Harry too, enjoys his story-telling persona. He has grown up on the stories of his father which speak of New York and its greatness. Failing to understand the true meaning behind Vance’s stories, Harry’s subsequent narration is erroneous. He cannot get the essence of these stories. It is only in his role as the story-teller of Bog Onion Road that Harry begins to grasp the true nature of the stories he had always narrated. The novel narrated to us by Harry’s children, also leaves one wondering at the end on the authenticity of the storyteller, and
amazed at the manner in which Harry manages to hand down the account of his life to his children.

Similarly, *Oscar and Lucinda*'s narration by Oscar's great grandchild also creates the same awkwardness as in *Bliss*. The mastery that the narrator has over the narration and the events that have taken place leaves doubts about the dependability of the narrator. Adopting an omniscient stand, the narrator seems to be aware of details that even his great-grandfather, Oscar would not be in possession of. Add to this, the fact that he informs us at the beginning of the novel that one should not believe local history too readily. Through examples he makes this point more comprehensible.

Benny, Tristan and Maggs too, subscribe to the story-telling genre. Tristan, like Herbert Badgery, narrates his own story, and his intimate knowledge and awareness of all the happenings in and without his presence creates similar predicaments as in *Bliss*, *Illywhacker* and *Oscar and Lucinda*. Benny and Cacka, as well as Gran Catchprice, living in their own solitary created worlds, also create an illusory aspect about themselves. Benny, in his desire for change, makes up the idea of a successful salesman, one who would “rescue the family business from debt and the tax inspector”.72 His makeover is disquieting and his subsequent torture of Sarkis and Maria, generates a very portentous appearance in the novel. Maggs, in his story-telling quest is more concerned about expunging the ghosts of his past. He desires to recount his life but fears
the impending consequences of his narration. His story finally appears in book form with no less than seven amendments, and incorporates a different ending to his life, thereby turning it to fiction, or just another well-told and interesting yarn.

Tristan is another of Carey’s well-formed characters. Another omniscient narrator created by Carey, his commentary in the novel ends with ‘At that time, although I did not know it, my unusual life was really just beginning.’ (ULoTS414). This is besides the fact that we are already told of Tristan’s life till then by Tristan himself, and this story is no less unusual and interesting than what one would probably expect if the novel had continued.

In this story-telling quest where they try to create and recreate reality around them, these narrators have a façade of control over their narration. One rarely gets the impression that they are unsure of their story. They appear totally self-assured and confident of the veracity of their tales. This self-confidence and poise serves to add truth value to even the most improbable stories, thereby making them plausible and convincing. Whether it is Herbert, who remains a showman till the very end, winning the confidence of all with his tales, even though he tells us that he is a trickster, or Harry’s children, or Oscar’s great-grandchild, both of whom could not possibly be in possession of the whole life story of their respective ancestors, or even Tristan, Carey proves to be a master at making the ‘tall tale’ believable.
Carey tries to create affirmative and constructive myths to help his people. Australia, looked upon by all and sundry as ‘hell on earth’, is construed by Carey more positively. He does this by trying to create the myth of the ‘battler’.

Ronald Taft informs us that with any traditional Australian hero, the “emphasis has usually been on their toughness and their suffering rather than their scientific skill, their vision or even their success”. It is “tradition that regards enterprise as alien and labour as indigenous to Australia.” One “affectation”, Taft says, that is widely approved of is the “pose of extreme toughness and lack of fear. Hardships are meant to be endured without complaint and dangers to be faced without expressing fear”. Success is alien to these people and Carey acknowledges the presence of, what he calls the “tall poppy syndrome”. Carey further elaborates in the Powell Books Interview that “if you have a field of poppies and one poppy gets taller than the rest, the head gets chopped off. And that’s how we celebrate success in Australia. ...it’s fine for a minute and then — boom.” But even though success is not forthcoming, one doesn’t see despair or despondency creeping into them. Carey states that, “In our culture, we don’t call them losers. We call them battlers. A battler is someone who struggles forever and will never, ever really get anywhere. And in Australia that’s a really honourable position”.

Thus, we are told, ‘there was a toughness in Harry Joy you may not have suspected’ (B40). Hell is what frightens him more. He wonders what it would
be like, the kind of punishment that is meted out as penance for all the wrongs committed. With all his fears he doesn't know whom to approach, someone who would show him a way to circumvent the road to Hell. ‘...to believe (i.e., in the Christian God of his mother) just because he was frightened of hell seemed to him to be unreasonably opportunistic, and he could not do it. (He hoped, just the same, that God saw him and at least gave him some marks for his honesty.)' (B40). His wife Bettina wants to know if the television commercial he had written was ‘great’ (B99). All that he can say in reply is ‘It worked... it wasn’t great. But it makes us money’ (B99). This is all that Harry desires. He is complacent in all he does.

Oscar fails in his attempt to show Lucinda his love. His hard and arduous trek through unmapped country, and getting the glass church to its destination seems reason enough for the reader to get the impression that Oscar’s and Lucinda’s love-story will culminate on a happy note. The end of the novel frustrates this impression and we read of Oscar’s failure despite his success. He fulfils the wager, but loses it in the end as he feels duty-bound to marry Miriam. Benny, Maria, Gran, all lose out despite trying their best to get what they desire. Benny dies a horrifying death, Maria gives birth to her son down in a cellar under equally testing conditions, and Gran finally does what she always threatened to do, blow up the place with gelignite.
Badgery, regardless of his story-telling prowess which gains him access to power over people, never remains in control of the events in his life. This novel foregrounds the traditions of illywhacking and independence. But for all his success, Badgery remains a failure as he can never achieve stability in his life that he forever desired. Badgery’s stories pilot his decline and play their grand part in his downfall.

One common strand that runs through all these characters is the need for social success. This success, however, is not for an Australian and therefore they end up as failures. As Carey says himself:

... the Australian culture seems one that usually celebrates defeat and feels most uncomfortable with success. All our great stories are ones of defeat. ........ For whatever reason, we don’t like success, and we don’t like other members of our group when they separate themselves from us by having success.78

We see most of his characters as social failures. They are powerless against forces that come onto them externally. Carey himself describes his characters as ‘victims of a way of living’, people who have ‘come to accept their own nightmares’.
Thus one notes the resourcefulness of Harry, or Badgery, or Oscar, or Tristan, or Benny, or even Maggs. All of them fight against odds that seem unsurmountable. They have grand visions of success. They fight dearly for their due, which is always denied to them. Despite it all, one can’t help but notice an optimistic streak in all these characters. Fighting against all odds, is what Carey desires to ascribe to the Australian identity. This is in direct opposition to the negative view one has of Australia as a penal colony. He seeks to present Australia as a land of promise, which has people who are inventive, hardworking and who always look forward to walk on the road towards success, without worrying about the roadblocks that they may encounter on the way.

A distinct myth that Carey subverts, is the glorious myth of Empire-building. This refers to the hegemonic intentions of both, colonial England and the neo-colonial America. *Oscar and Lucinda* is most fundamentally about “belief systems—belief in Christianity, dreams of Empire and progress”, says Dr. Randall Bass. British imperialism was at its zenith during the 19th century. The novel deals directly with issues of British imperialism in colonial Australia, and deprecatingly comments upon the Victorian expansion of the British Empire. Lucinda resents her fortune because it has been acquired when her parents’ land had been sold by her solicitors. This land, she feels, belongs to the Aborigines, and it is the colonisers, i.e., the British, and by extension, her family, who have stolen it from them. The zeal of empire building is also seen
in Mr. Jeffries, who agrees to lead the expedition, carrying the glass church up north to Bellingen, the unexplored and unmapped land.

In *Oscar and Lucinda*, "glass functions as the embodiment of progress for the colonizer and yet contributes to the physical and spiritual destruction of the colonized Australian Outback." opines Bamali Tahbildar\textsuperscript{80}. According to Oscar, the white man, the glass church is a symbol of technology and progress; and to manage to transport the glass church into Bellingen is to transport the ideal monument of industry and Christianity, both important facets of the British Empire, into "unchartered" territory:

Each pane of glass...would travel through country where glass had never existed before, not once, in all time. These sheets would cut a new path in history. They would slice the white dust covers of geography and reveal a map beneath, with rivers, mountains and names. (*O&L*374)

Although the glass church may be a sign of technology and progress in the eyes of the English, it is left finally as a symbolic piece of architecture that isn’t compatible with the Australian Environment. The glass church traps heat, encloses and suffocates the smallest of nature’s creatures:
There were bush-flies inside the church. They did not understand what glass was. There were also three blue-bellied dragon-flies. For one hundred thousand years, their progenitors had inhabited that valley without once encountering glass. Suddenly the air was hard where it should be soft. Likewise the tawny hard-shelled water beetle and the hand legged wasp. They flew against the glass in panic. They had the wrong intelligence to grasp the nature of glass. (O&L418)

Tahbildar comments,81 "by suffocating nature's smallest creatures within its hard and transparent walls, the glass church figuratively kills the stories and belief system of the native culture." As a missionary symbol, the glass church disturbs both physical and spiritual aspects of the Australian Outback. In Oscar and Lucinda, religious expansion or technological 'progress' (as embodied by the glass church) is the perpetuation of colonial power.

The intricate relationship between returned convict Jack Maggs and up-coming writer Tobias Oates forms the core of the text's reconfiguration of imperialist discourse. Carey, in the Bold Type Interviews states that82:

*Great Expectations* is not only a great work of English literature; it is (to an Australian) also a way in which the English have colonized our ways of seeing ourselves. It is a great novel, but it is also, in
another way, a prison. *Jack Maggs* is an attempt to break open the prison and to imaginatively reconcile with the gaoler.

The relationship between Oates, soon to become the Empire’s greatest living writer, and Maggs, the marginalised colonial figure, is one that parallels the manner in which the literary potential of the Imperial colonies was mined by Victorian writers. Oates is simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by Maggs: drawn to the convict because of his paramount interest in human nature and because of the literary potential of the man’s life, yet always fearful around him. He desires to use Maggs in the same way as the greater part of Victorian writers (including Dickens) used the Colonies, as a blank imaginative space, a territory to be filled with fictional representations emanating from the metropolitan centre. It is a comparison that Maggs himself draws out when he writes to Henry Phipps, stating: ‘I have left a blank map for you and you have doubtless filled it with your worst imaginings’ (*JM*238).

Throughout the novel Maggs is identified with the colony of Australia, and often referred to as ‘the Australian’, negating his entire previous existence in England, and underscor[ing the fact that his decade in exile in Australia has had a far greater effect on his development and shaped his personality than otherwise. As with Magwitch in *Great Expectations*, for Maggs, Australia has served both as his prison, and as a means of creating a prosperous new life. Following his pardon from the New South Wales prison, Maggs has become so
successful that he was able to build a brick mansion, have a street named after him, and anonymously raise a poor English boy to the status of a gentleman back in England. The greater part of Carey’s reworked narrative is thus devoted to the convict’s attempt to work out his relationship with both his native and adopted lands.

Lawson’s rhetorical question, “Who am I when I am transported?” arises from the situation of the individual transported from the imperial centre to a peripheral outpost “where the climate, the landscape and the native inhabitants did little to foster any sense of continuity, where the sense of distance, both within and without, was so great that a new definition of self- metaphysical, historical, cultural, linguistic and social - was needed”. At the resolution in Carey’s decolonising text, Jack Maggs is allowed to return to the distant continent, happily marry the servant girl Mercy Larkin, prosper in business, live to a ripe and peaceful old age, and father ‘five further members of that race’ (the race of Australians) (JM327). However, Jack’s happy ending only comes about when he finally accepts that there are alternatives to the exploitive imperialist discourse of Britain, and ceases to privilege the abusive land of his birth over the adopted land that has given him so much.

*Illywhacker*, in its attempt to foreground the lies of the country, too, tries to expose the ill effects of the glorious pursuit of the white man to establish himself as a native of Australia. In characters like Herbert, one notices the
element of deception. They are constantly deluding themselves that they are honest and straightforward and that their understanding of issues is always correct. In his narration, Herbert constantly draws our attention, though very subtly at times, to this fact. The root of this deception lies in the first lie of the first white man to set foot in Australia that the land was ‘occupied but not cultivated’, and so the legal owners, the aborigines, were displaced and the white man assumed ownership.

This issue of the Aborigines is raised by Leah when she argues that ‘the land is stolen. The whole country is stolen. The whole nation is based on a lie which is that it was not already occupied when the British came here. If it is anybody’s place it is the blacks’ (1307) and that ‘It is a black man’s country....We can only move around it like tourists’ (or picaros?) (1323). By making the Aborigines an active absence, the novel, seeks to draw attention to their exploitation and denigration by the Empire and its forces, thereby debunking the myth of empire building.

Fletcher says that each of the three books of *Illywhacker* can be read as “chronicling the exercise of control over Australia by different foreign powers: England, the United States and Japan.” Along with debunking the colonial myth of empire building, Carey also attacks neo-colonialism and its after-effects. *Illywhacker*, portrays the degeneration of Australia, into the ‘Best Pet Shop in the World’, where so many of Hissao’s ‘fellow countrymen and
women [are put] on display' (I99). Just as America with its visions of progress and success lured Australians and indoctrinated them in materialism and capitalism, the later economic powers like Japan too did their own bit in furthering this indoctrination. Australia is thus only displayed as per the needs of these neocolonial powers. The display can be false, because as truth value is suspended, no one can really authenticate it. What matters is that the display be spectacular and attractive to the tourists who visit the place. Hissao, even though the owner of the Pet Shop, is powerless and has no say in the manner of the display. He is only a proprietor in name and is governed by the market forces, driven by the desire for profit.

The advertising business is highlighted as "the embodiment of the imperialist forces of Western capital". Carey presents Australia as an "outpost of the American Empire" with the people living in the world of American dreams. In Bliss, Harry develops this fascination for New York from his father, Vance Joy. When his father spoke of New York and 'its glass towers trembling in an ecstasy of magic' (Bliss19), Harry was filled with a thrill that seemed like 'a splendid book read by all mankind with wonder' (B19). This also turns out to be the seed of David's 'vision of New York' (B35). It is this fascination that drives David to get into business and makes him a drug dealer 'having dreams that swept the Americas from New York to Tierra del Fuego' (B34). Harry 'conducted his business more or less in the American style' (B13). Bettina dreams of New York, and these dreams, as Woodcock comments "are the
badge of her lust to succeed in business, to become ‘an advertising hot-shot’ (B96), in the service of which she ‘became more American than the Americans’ (B100)”. While she manages to convince herself that she would fulfil her American dreams, she goes on with life following all their habits and ideas and views. Even the most trivial of habits ‘were adopted as articles of faith’ (B100). Her whole life thus is woven into the American myth of making it big and successful.

Woodcock pertinently notes that “the element which reveals the nature of capitalist delusions most explosively is the cancer theme. The linkage between capitalism and cancer is part of the satirically apocalyptic side to the novel”. Cancer is spreading its tentacles around and many are getting caught by it. Harry first hears of it from Aldo, the owner of the restaurant Milanos, who is a victim of cancer. Aldo feels that ‘this cancer business...is being sent to punish us for how we live, all this shit we breathe, all this rubbish we eat...cancer is going to save us from ourselves. It is going to stop us eating and breathing shit’ (B67).

Alex Duvall, Harry’s employee, ‘a man of principle who had decided a long time ago, that men of principle can never win’ (B83), had made it a habit of rewriting all his conference reports ‘in which his role, seen by the revolutionary investigators he imagined would one day sit in judgment on him, would be blameless’ (B83). The rewritten reports went thus:
Client requested that Agency should prepare such and such. Agency expressed the opinion that such and such. Agency warned client that this practice was unprincipled, that this promise should not be made, that this chemical was carcinogenic, that this product could cause liver damage. (B84).

Alex, to get the great load off his heart had been making reports such as this for seven years. These reports were never sent out or viewed by anyone else. They were stored in a filing cabinet having just one key that was safely kept in his possession by Alex. It is at this chore that Harry finds him on Saturday morning when he comes to the office to ‘find out who were Actors and who were Captives’ (B4). When he views the report Alex is typing, Harry is shocked at the role his own agency was playing in the perpetration of the cancer epidemic. The reborn Harry thus takes a bold decision to clean up the business. To begin with he decides to fire Krappe Chemicals, when earlier ‘he had ignored Alex when he had nervously, tentatively suggested there was something wrong with various Krappe Chemical products’ (B91). Harry’s cleaning desire leads to an obsessive cleaning of his house like polishing everyone’s shoes, the glass, scrubbing the bathroom clean, etc.

When Harry reveals his intentions to Adrian Clunes, the representative of Krappe Chemicals, that he has evidence that their ‘products cause cancer’
(B123), Adrian dismisses Harry. He doesn’t deny it. He justifies his stand by saying, ‘it’s been going on for years. It’s been in the papers’ (B123). When Harry denies this knowledge and reiterates that he was only told that they ‘used too much saccharine’, Adrian accepts that ‘you know and I know that’s the company line’. When Harry refuses to see reason and is adamant on ending their association, all Adrian does is to toast ‘To Harry Joy, the newest, most impossible idealist in the world’ (B123). He then reveals to Harry a map, a cancer map, depicting the ‘incidence of cancer according to place of residence and place of work’(B125). Later Adrian confides in Harry that he ‘knows about cancer …from both sides’ (B25). This is because Adrian’s wife also has cancer. As Adrian’s view goes ‘the whole of the Western world is built on things that cause cancer. They can’t afford to stop making them’ (B124).

Various characters in the novel have their own explanations and views of the cancer theme. Alice Dalton, head of the Mental Hospital where Harry is admitted feels that ‘it’s their own fault’ (B170) that people contract cancer. In her opinion it is ‘emotional repressions’ (B171) that are the cause of cancer. She believes that the Americans with their brand of capitalism ‘are a very fine race of people’ (B171), and if at all cancer is spreading, it is only because the people ‘hate business…They are jealous of people with power, successful men who have made a name for themselves’(B171). Harry’s daughter, Lucy and her boy friend Ken opine that ‘we are into the late twentieth century, and definitely not fighting against it (cancer). Enjoy it… The sunsets wouldn’t look so
beautiful if there wasn’t all this shit in the air’ (B213). Lucy feels ‘it’s too late’ and that ‘we are the last...we are the first people to come to the end of time’ (B214). Lucy shows a fatalistic streak in her when she tells Honey that even though she uses demineralized water in the hope of escaping from the scourge of cancer, she will ‘still get cancer, just like the rest of us’ (B218).

However, in Bettina, Harry’s wife, we have a victim of the cancer epidemic. From the beginning we see her as a selfish character who ‘didn’t want to be good, she wanted to be successful’. She believes in all her glowing visions of capitalism, her dreams of making it big in New York, etc. With the threat of cancer looming in the air, Bettina has made it a point to get herself checked once a year, and “the rest of the year she did not think about it” (B218). When she finally realises her longstanding dream of making it big in the advertising world, she is diagnosed with cancer. The doctor tells her that ‘This is something we normally find in people who are exposed to petrol fumes over a very long period’ and then confirms that ‘petrol causes cancer’ (B251). This confirmation coupled with the fact that she had barely a year to live fills her with a kind of dread or desperation. She realizes that all that she has held dear till now has been at the root of her destruction. She thus ends her life by blowing herself up along with the directors attending the Board meeting. All that is left behind as a clue to decipher her actions is an ad with the headline ‘Petrol killed me’ (B254), and the body copy where they learned that ‘the death in the headline was a death by cancer’ (B254).
Notes


3 Peter Carey, Interview, Bold Type, 28 January 2003 <http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0399/carey/interview.html>

4 Bold Type Interview.

5 Lawson, 168.


11 Jean W. Ross, “CA Interview with Peter Carey,” Contemporary Authors 127: 74.

12 Ross, 73.


14 Woodcock, 68.


16 Woodcock, 72.

17 Woodcock, 97.

18 Woodcock, 90.

19 David Coad, rev. of The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith, by Peter Carey. World Literature Today 70.3 (1996): 758.

20 Bold Type Interview.
21 Bold Type Interview.

22 Bold Type Interview.

23 Bold Type Interview.

24 Woodcock, 117.


26 Hutcheon as quoted in Caldeira, 98.

27 Ross, 75.

28 Ross, 75.

29 Hassal, *MFS* 644.


31 Woodcock, 39.

32 Hassal, *MFS* 641.


34 Ryan, 37.

35 Woodcock 58, 553.

36 Woodcock, 57.

37 Woodcock, 82.


39 Vergara <http://www.thecore.nus.edu/post/australia/carey/careyov.html>

40 Woodcock, 80.


42 Woodcock, 81.

43 Brady, 80.

44 Woodcock, 89.

Woodcock, 91.

Woodcock, 96-7.

Woodcock, 97.

Woodcock, 109.

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Bold Type interview

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Hassal, Macadam 645.
70 Bold Type interview
71 Thwaites, 406.
72 Woodcock, 90.
74 Taft, 194.
75 Taft, 195.
76 Powell Books Interview
77 Powell Books Interview
78 Ross, 75.
82 Bold Type Interview.
83 Lawson, 169.
84 Lawson, 169.
86 Woodcock, 45.
87 Woodcock, 13.
88 Woodcock, 45.
89 Woodcock, 45.