Conclusion

The main objective of the present thesis was to explore how the fictional writings of Peter Carey strive to create a National Identity of Australia and its peoples through his narratives. The National Identity of Australia, like most other nations, evolves out of the nation's historical processes. After a minute critical reading of Carey's fictional works, the study concludes by stating that a dominant theme in Carey's writing is of National Identity, a theme largely acknowledged by the writer. In fact, all the select texts reverberate throughout with a profound quest for identity.

Carey has been greatly successful in rendering the quintessential image of the nation of Australia, never denying its imperialist or penal heritage, however, offering multiple readings of its historical past other than the imperialist interpretation. He reworks imperial narratives about Australia, questioning their veracity by employing postmodern modes all along subverting myths about the nation's convict past and the myth of Empire-building by hegemonic forces. His fiction successfully challenges the common notion of Australia as a 'cultural wasteland' or as a land 'Down-Under.'

In Carey's works, the literary discourse intermingles with the nationalist discourse. To make his discourse sound convincing and authentic, he ransacks the history and the cultural evolution of the nation. As Homi K. Bhabha aptly
states, "from those traditions of ... literary language ... the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea."¹ A nation is not merely a state, a political entity but as Bhabha continues to state, the nation is "the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it."² The notion of the nation then, is imaginative. The matrix of a literary fiction is also imaginative. Clearly, in Carey's novels nation and narration are interlocked and the fictional device proves to be very potent in constructing National Identity.

If nation states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical', the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and...glide into a limitless future. What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being.³

Perceptibly, the idea of a nation has a historical, cultural as well as a sentimental component to it. The nation is a system of historico-cultural signification and its representation is more of that of social life rather than the discipline of social polity.⁴

The peoples of Australia are not homogenous. Officially adopting the policy of multiculturalism, like Canada, Australia is committed to celebrate cultural
pluralism. As a multicultural society, the nation of Australia faces the problem of projecting a common or homogenous identity. It can no longer claim British identity by virtue of being its settler colony. Stephensen argues that although Australian culture may have begun in Britain, "a gum tree is not a branch of an oak."5 "Race and place" are the "two permanent elements in a culture, and Place...is even more important than Race in giving that culture its direction."6 In fact, Peter Carey’s writings are an address more to the Australians than to the international readers. In Carey’s fiction, the aborigines, the convicts, the several waves of immigrants find due representation. As Sneja Gunew puts it:

multiculturalism was designed to lay to rest both the iniquitous White Australia policy and the official immigration policy of assimilation... national identity might benefit from acknowledging the realities of cultural diversity.7

Australia’s national identity, as constructed in Carey’s fiction, co-opts all. Australia tries to define itself in resisting the British cultural paternalism or American cultural hegemony or Asian economic imperialism. In Jack Maggs, Jack Maggs, the banished convict, after repeated attempts to identify with England is forced to face the stark reality that England would never receive him back. He has to break free from the hold that his mother country England has over him, which comes about when his son shoots at him. In Bliss Carey explores the cancer theme as a consequence of the new life culture of
materialism and fast foods, obviously the effect of Americanism on Australia. It is the success culture that finally causes Bettina’s death, who blows herself up leaving only one clue to the cause of her action; ‘Petrol killed me’. In *Illywhacker* Carey presents the fast moving Asian economic hegemony that was rapidly prevailing in Australia. In *Illywhacker* the owner of the Pet Emporium is the Mitsubishi Company and Hissao, Badgery’s grandson, is only the face of the Emporium, not the real owner. Hissao actually manages to put all his countrymen and women on display for tourist consumption. Carey subverts the foreigner’s stereotyping of the essential Australian and offers another dimension to the Australian personality.

The typical Australian in Carey’s work is a battler, a survivor against all odds: the unmapped wilderness, the harsh climate, the uninhabitable geography, all of which shape the Australian personality. His works adumbrate the general legend of the typical Australian, as Russell Ward opines in *The Australian Legend*:

A practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry and appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser … He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often … he is usually taciturn rather than talkative … he believes that Jack is not only as good as his master, but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better. 8
The aesthetic expression of National Identity in Carey’s fiction is not merely thematic but also structural. He writes back to the empire most often using the postmodernist mode to advance his postcolonial concerns. Being highly influenced by Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges, Carey makes extensive use of prolepses, magic realism and presents multiple truths in a discontinuous, disrupted and distorted narration. Adopting the form of historiographic metafiction, Carey reworks the history of Australia in a self-reflexive manner because “history’s problem is verification while fiction’s is veracity.” The metafictional self-reflexivity propels him to employ diverse techniques such as challenging authorial authority, use of parody, use of multiple generic forms, playing with truths and lies about the myths and histories of the country and the like.

In Carey’s fiction, an element that looms large is that of powerful resistance of fixations of any kind, be they of the land of Australia, its peoples, or even Carey’s own fictions. Though Carey’s novels lend themselves to a neat post-colonial and post-modern reading, Carey refutes any post-colonial or post-modernist concerns. He refuses to be fixated into any mode of writing. For example, he is “wary of being labelled a magic-realist.”

Notwithstanding Carey’s argument, the postmodernist practice is most suitable for denouncing the many lies told about the nation. On the other hand, his
fiction does not offer a neat reading of the truths of the nation. Lies and truths are intermingled in many fabulations, the real and the fantastic are amalgamated. Many a time, Carey has been criticized for writing from the ‘outsiders’ position as he writes from New York. However, more than seeing this as a hindrance, Carey works this outsider position to his advantage, stating that it affords him objectivity. The view of an outsider is more detailed and more enlightening, opines Carey. In Carey’s situation, the outsider and the insider juxtapose before each other. Being born and raised in Australia, Carey carries first-hand information about his homeland and time and again, he acknowledges that his fictional project has been the invention or discovery of his nation. Thus his project propels him into the nation’s historical past so as to comprehend its present.

From the in-depth reading of Peter Carey’s works of fiction, the present thesis concludes that certainly literature carries the ability to signify and to emanate nationhood, i.e., “the institution of literature works to nationalist ends” and concludes that the aesthetic rendition of Australian National Identity in Peter Carey’s fiction is best echoed in Australia’s historical processes.
Notes


2 Bhabha, 1.

3 Bhabha, 1.

4 Bhabha, 2.


6 P. R. Stephensen as quoted in Gunew, 101.

7 Gunew, 103.

8 <http://www.petra.ac.id/asc/people/immigrants/national identity.html/>


10 Bruce Woodcock, Peter Carey, Contemporary World Writers Series (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996) 11.
