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ISSN 2278-9529  
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **Re-Framing *Great Expectations* in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* and Llyod Jones's *Mister Pip* : A Study under Postmodernist and Post-structural Lens**

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### **Abstract:**

A Postmodern trend has emerged to formulate new texts by reprising the earlier Victorian narratives—either undertaking the discourse of rewriting or by absorbing hypertextual or intertextual means. This paper will engage to elucidate the post-structural aspects— like ‘decentring’, ‘deconstruction’, ‘differance’, ‘invagination’, ‘deterritorialization’, ‘schizophrenia’, ‘knowledge/power’ and others — that are entwined within such two texts— Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs*, which is the back-story of the convict in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, Abel Magwitch, rechristened as Jack Maggs, and Llyod Jones’s *Mister Pip*— a story of a little girl, Matilda who defines her adolescent experiences in terms of Pip’s story and how enigmatic ‘non-existent’ yet ‘hyperreal’ presence of Mister Pip in the dystopic island named Bougainville becomes the cause of the islanders’ nemesis . In the scope of this paper an attempt will also be made to explore how Carey and Jones, in their ‘re-envision’, somewhat simulated/ followed the storyline and other factors—such as the usage of language, Victorian manners, attires, social codes— existing in Dickens’s *Great Expectations* only to deconstruct/ reconstruct, although in different levels, the canonical Victorian master-narrative.

**Keywords:** post-structuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, rewriting, decentring, *Great Expectations*, *Jack Maggs*, *Mister Pip*.

A Postmodern trend has emerged in about 1960s to revisit the existing early texts and to reconstruct/deconstruct the ‘narratives’ either by rewriting the earlier ones with some notable twists (as Eve Sinclair’s rewriting of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, entitled as *Jane Eyre Laid Bare*, Sara Grey’s *Wuthering Bites* as the Gothic rewriting of Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*) and sometimes adapting into the contemporary post-modern context (for instance, Will Self’s *Dorian: An Imitation* which is a modern ‘updated’ version of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey*) , or by formulating the ‘hypertext’ that presents a story –mostly altering the points of view or ‘decentring’, perceiving Derrida’s concept, the earlier protagonist by a previously marginal/ silenced one—that ultimately links to the earlier narrative. ‘Hypertextuality’, in the words of the French theorist Gerald Genette, ‘ refers to any relationship writing a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary ’ (Genette, wikipedia.org). Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* are some of the most adored ‘hypertexts’. Another way of ‘reprising’ the earlier narrative is ‘intertextuality’, that is, to refer to some incidents or lines or situations pertaining to the earlier text directly in such a manner that the reference suit the

present context or attribute a different level of meaning altogether and more often those references act like the 'signs' of something else. However, according to Julia Kristeva every single text is an 'intertext' as each text refers to, directly or indirectly, some aspects of the earlier text(s). The intertextual references to Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* in Llyod Jones's *Mister Pip*, and Shakespeare's *King Lear* in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, are two popular examples of this genre. Julie Sanders in her texts *Adaptation and Appropriation* has defined these types of postmodernist reprises as: 'reinterpretations of established texts in a new generic context or perhaps with relocations of an "original" or source texts culture and/or temporal setting.' (Sanders, 19) Barbara Klonowska in her article "Great Expectations: A Hundred and Fifty Years Later" (published in *Reflections on Dickens*) termed this kind of Postmodern formulation of hypertexts as the 'appropriation':

Rewriting is another process by which a hypertext produces new hypertexts, commonly known as parallel texts: prequels, sequels or other sides of well-known stories. This kind of literary appropriation is frequent in postmodernist fiction which rewrites the canon from ex-centric and marginal points of view. The resulting changes affect all the aspects of the novel much more connected with or inspired by earlier texts. (Klonowska, 226)

This paper would engage to deal with two such Postmodernist 'appropriations' of Dickens's masterpiece *Great Expectations* namely Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* and Llyod Jones's *Mister Pip*, and in the scope attempt to explore the Postmodern and Post-structural corners existing in the 'reprised' texts .

Now, the major difference between Structuralism and Post-structuralism is that while the Structuralism strives to seek an order or a pattern in analysing texts 'always assuming that the text would yield its meaning once we unravel its 'core' elements' (Nayer, 33), the later, obliterating the earlier parochial and restricted norms of structuralism, attempt to validate/study the texts more radically escaping 'structurality' (Abrams, 239). Insisting on open reading of a text freed from 'authorial authority' (Nayer, 38), Barthes writes in his seminal essay "The Death of the Author": 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.' (Barthes, 148) Derrida's concept related to the endless deferral of meaning or '*differance*' points out how any fixated/formulated explanation of a text would not be absolute since the meanings of the 'signs' within that text is ever changing/ deferring. However, there are some basic principles in the Post-structural discourse but those normative principles and definitions provided by the notable Poststructuralists like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Guiles Deleuze, Felix Guttari, Michel Foucault and others never sought to establish any structured formula to study a text.

Derrida, while dealing with notions related to the binaries in the essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences", delineates how 'centre' of any discourse is not fixed and how peripheral/marginal can become 'centre' by 'decentring' the existing one. Abel Magwitch, a significant yet peripheral character in Dickens's *Great Expectations* becomes the 'centre' /protagonist in Carey's Postmodern re-narration, rechristened here as Jack Maggs. The focus has been shifted from Dickens's Pip's bildungsroman to Maggs's desperate urge to return to London, even though risking his life, to see his adored 'son' and

also the object of his benefaction, Henry Phipps, Pip's alter-ego, who once provided him food and file. Philip Hensher in his review of Carey's *Jack Maggs* entitles as "Great Expectations Disappointed" published in *Spectator* on 20<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1997 commented: '*Jack Maggs* is an example of a curious genre, the modern addendum to a classic work of literature—in this case *Great Expectations*.[...]Carey is not, for the most part, attempting a pastiche; he is, rather, writing prehistory of *Great Expectations*, the events from which the invention of Magwitch springs.' (Hensher, 13) In Jones's *Mister Pip* 'decentring' occurs in terms of authority over the narrative, when Mr. Wotton reads out the selected portions from *Great Expectations* skipping all the violating factors existing within the texts or utilizes here Dickens's narrative to relate make out and uphold his 'story' to the rebel soldiers, and even when Matilda relates the events/situations in the novel with her own life-events, it can be felt that Dickens's authority over the narrative is 'decentred'. In this context, Barthes's idiosyncrasy related to the decline of authorial authority and readers' own interpretation narrated in "The Death of the Author" can be delineated in the terms of multiple interpretations of Dickens's narrative, *Great Expectations*, by Mr Wotton, Matilda and other kids who used to listen 'Wotton's version' of the narrative in the class.

In an interview, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak comments that 'deconstruction', which is an inseparable part of Poststructuralism, is not only about 'destruction, it's also construction... [and] you can only deconstruct what you love' (Spivak, web ). Undoubtedly Carey and Jones's adoration for *Great Expectations* and, to some extent, Dickens is palpable in their discussed projects and with 'love' for the former text they attempt to 'destabilize' the early interpretations. In 'deconstructing' Dickens's master-narrative, Peter Carey in *Jack Maggs* 'decentred' Pip by altering the points of view, subverts the self-portrayal of Pip (as *Great Expectations* was narrated by Pip himself) as the docile, innocuous boy into a greedy and lecherous (as the text implied) Henry Phipps who lavishly embezzle Maggs's hard-earned money. It also attempts to deconstruct the portrayal of Dickens by first incorporating a character of Tobias Oates who, in his characteristics and situation, appears undeniably to be a shadow-portrayal of the esteemed Victorian novelist—like his newly achieved fame with the publication of a comic novel like that of Dickens's with the publication of *Pickwick Papers* in 1836, like Dickens his childhood was 'miserable' (Carey, 143), his interest in mesmerism and so on— and then by narrating his activities in the fictional situations with which his ambitions get entwined into. Moreover, Carey's text, if considered to be a prequel, further left a dubious hint signifying that Dickens's text is actually a moulded version of Maggs's story just as J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* hints how Mr. Foe, that is Daniel Defoe, stole Susan Burton's story and formulated renowned story of Robinson Crusoe.

In Jones's *Mister Pip*, however, the 'deconstruction' of earlier narrative has occurred in a very unconventional level. When Mr. Wotton starts reading *Great Expectations* in the school, the real and fictional worlds become merged in the kids' psyche as they could not distinguish the two, and the kids along with enters into a world of 'hyperreality', in Baudrillard's terms. Now, the factors related to the multiple explanations of Dickens's text by the kids, Matilda, Mr. Wotton and others, its intrusion into their lives in different levels, and the crucial pertinence of that text in forming the story of the unfortunate and brutally

oppressed islanders' (since the major ravaging barbaric incidents occurs due to the islanders' inability to surrender Mr. Pip) attribute to the deconstructive discourse present in Jones's novel.

However, in order to 'reprise'/rewrite Dickens's *Great Expectations* the 'simulation'—in a wide or narrow extent— of that 'master-narrative' was inevitable. Although in *Jack Maggs*, all the names of the characters are more or less altered and the characteristics too, in order to posit Magwitch-like Maggs in the similar context—that of a exiled criminal who once got food and a file from a boy, Pip/Phipps, became the boy's benefactor and now aspires to become his 'second father'— and to drive the story somewhat towards Dickens's, as already implied, some aspects of Dickens's narrative are to be simulated. Carey closely followed the contemporary Victorian or more particularly Dickens's language—minute descriptions of the characters, settings, locations, the lengthy rough passages from Maggs's diary notes and the extracts of Oates's text "The Death of Maggs" are being the exemplary—and also strived to recreate a realistic ambience of 1832 London by displaying the contemporary prevalent city-attires, basic duties of footmen, smells and sounds of the metropolis, and with the vivid details Lamb's Conduit Street, Great Queen Street and others in order to present his text as a kind of convincing prequel/reprising of Dickens's classic one. Further, to suit the context, Carey copied, as he has said in an interview, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century typical criminal slangs (Koval, 670) and imposed them in the mouth of Maggs. Llyod Jones simulates the narrative frame of *Great Expectations* to build up a story of an unfortunate tortured girl that would be compatible with that of Pip's—or, at least, it can be said that Matilda has narrated her 'back-story' following Pip's style and revealed how she understood all her life-events in terms of Dickens's story.

In the 'deconstructing'/reconstructing discourse of the discussed reprising, the meanings of several 'signs' pertaining to the Victorian text are altered, or more accurately, to define in Derrida's theory, 'deferred'. Pip's 'great expectation' to become a 'gentleman' has been altered to Henry Phipps's desperate crave for lavish life and also has deferred to Maggs's passionate urge to see Phipps, in Carey's text, and in Jones's narrative, Matilda's wish to survive and acquire education. Derrida's theory of '*differance*' is reminiscent of C.S. Pierce's delineation of 'semiosis' as a 'triadic' process where a signified, referred by a 'sign', can become a 'referent' in turn. Now, following the paths of the pioneers like Barthes and Levi-Strauss, if this concept pertaining to the 'semiotics' implemented in the present context, it can be elucidated how several signs existing in Dickens's text transform their meanings. In *Great Expectations*, Mrs. Gargery's treatment of Pip was the sign of 'malice' and 'envy' and Miss Havisham's strange and somewhat rough behaviour were signified as the resultant consequence of her enormous sufferings caused by a wicked greedy deceiver who desert her giving the false hope of marriage. In Carey's *Mister Pip*, in her surrealistic world, Matilda initially compares her mother, who has been unnecessarily rude to Mr. Wotton, with 'Mrs. Gargery', and then, seeing her mother's immense strives for their survival after her father's irresponsible departure to Australia, she thinks of her mother as being Miss Havisham-like pathetic figure. Pip's 'great expectation' to become a gentleman converts into Matilda's desire to attend school once again. Pip's crave for a modest 'easy' life transform into

Matilda's feeble crave for survival in the end, here again, the 'log' that saves her life amidst the stream from drowning, is equated with Mr. Jaggers, the lawyer, who came in Pip's life as a 'saviour':

What would you call a saviour? The only one I knew went by the name of Mr Jaggers. And so it was natural for me to name my saviour, this log, after the man who had saved Pip's life. Better to cling to the worldliness of Mr Jaggers than the slimy skin of a water-soaked log... (Jones, 186)

Noted Poststructuralists Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their seminal work *Anti-Oedipus*, defined the quick emulation of philosophy and desire by others as 'deterritorialization'. Now, the conversion of Mister Pip's 'desires', although with significant alteration, into Matilda's in Jones's text, can be explained as, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari, 'deterritorialization'. And also following Deleuze and Guattari's notion, the pervasive influence of the unavoidable visualization of Pip's life-events that aggravate the complexities of Matilda's psyche can be delineated as 'schizophrenia'.

Pip, a projection of Charles Dickens's fancy in the context of Victorian age, has become a felt presence—'hyperreal', in terms of Baudrillard—the non-existent yet more than real in the land of Bougainville that haunt throughout Jones's *Mister Pip*. The rambos are assured of Mr Pip's enigmatic existence in the island and could never be convinced that Pip is actually a fictional character of a Victorian text. Even the naive boy Daniel, who attended the classes and saw Wotton to read out Pip's story from Dickens's *Great Expectations*, could not distinguish the virtual reality of the fictional world from the realistic one. This is betrayed in his answer to the soldier's query related to enigmatic Mr. Pip: 'Pip belongs to Mr Dickens, sir.' (Jones, 84)

According to Lyotard, as he described in his "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" Postmodernism is always sceptical towards 'grand-narratives' and focus on the micro-narratives instead. Now, the very act of rewriting/ reprising the earlier narrative by altering the points of view or transferring the voice to the previously marginal one can be delineated as collapsing the master-narrative. Llyod Jones crumbles Dickens's text and entwines those crumbled pieces into Matilda's narrative—the references of the earlier text act as the 'referents'/signs that attribute crucial meanings to the incidents and situations occurred in the 'dystopic' island Bougainville. Mr Watts's version of Pip's story, necessary to be formulated to calm the brutal soldiers furiously searching for Mister Pip who they believe has joined the rebels, can also be defined as a compelling 'micro-narrative' of Pip in comparing to Dickens's 'grand-narrative' :

Mr Watts' decision to introduce himself as Pip to the rebels was risky, but it was easy to see why he'd made it. Pip would be a convenient role for Mr Watts to drop into. [...] Mr Watts' story was to prove just as compelling as *Great Expectations* had to us kids. [...] Mr Watts' Pip grew up in a brick depot on a copper mine road without any memory of his parents.... (Jones, 142-143)

The enfolding of one narrative within the other—a fact interpreted as ‘invagination’ by Derrida in "The Law of Genre" occurs in both Jones’s *Mister Pip* and Carey’s *Jack Maggs*. The crucial enfolding of Dickens’s narrative in Jones’s text occurs when Mr Wotton starts reading out the selected portions of it to the children in the class, can be defined as ‘invagination’. In Carey’s *Jack Maggs*, it occurs when Tobias Oates attempts to formulate a text incorporating a moulded version of Maggs’s story, “The Death of Maggs”. In both the texts the attempts of gaining the authorial authority—a position of power—could be noticed. The signification of Michel Foucault’s dictum that ‘knowledge is power’ can be felt when Tobias Oates engages to write the semi-fictional life-story of Jack Maggs after knowing much of Maggs from his diary and from his own mouth or when Wotton with the knowledge of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* interpret his life-events in the framework of Pip’s to the soldiers in *Mister Pip*. However, in Carey’s text Jack Maggs’s fierce opposition of being (mis)interpreted and tearing off Oates’s manuscripts in the midst of a river can be explained as a kind of resistance to the centerization of power and also a reluctance of being objectified as a mere character to be manipulated by a ‘author’ in the ‘metafictional’ game.

The Postmodernist re-envisions or ‘appropriations’, in terms of Julie Sanders, by Carey and Jones of Victorian master-narrative *Great Expectations* can be delineated as the effort to collapse the ordered hierarchy, the resistance against the homogenizing/normalizing tendency of ‘super-structural’ (in Marxist sense) categorization /marginalisation and also an attempt to revitalize the much adored canonical text with the touch author’s individual notions and art of narration. However, as Derrida strived to impose that since the very configuration of meaning of the sign is accomplished by the interplay between the other signs through a network of differentiation and deference, not any of re-narrated /twisted signs/facts pertaining to Dickens’s text by the narratives of Carey and Jones can either be absolutely reliable or deniable; even though the formulation of *Mister Pip* and *Jack Maggs* occurred much after *Great Expectations*, the unique spatiality of the ‘reprised’ texts ascribed by the influential Post-structural theorem of ‘free-text’ (that is, ‘text is an end in itself’) and the impossibility of determining the ‘transcendental signified’ blurs the differentiating line between the actual and exaggerated / perverted facts. It would be better to consider the discussed reprisings as, following Derrida’s concept, as the ‘*archi*-writings’ that pre-exist in the form of ‘spaces’/’scopes’/ ‘aporias’ left by the ‘master-narrative’ before its palpable existence and appear to the forefront through, in terms of Foucault, the ‘author-function’. However, it is indelible that Carey and Jones somewhat utilizes in their texts, *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* respectively, the ‘sign value’, in terms of Baudrillard, that is attached to Dickens and also his much adored work *Great Expectations* to increase in utter Marxist sense of the word, the ‘market-value’ (and also somewhat ‘aesthetic value’) of their ‘products’/ texts.

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