

Re-reading and Rewriting *Great Expectations* in *Mister Pip*

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Mister Pip (2007) is set in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, during the Bougainville crisis, when the island was blockaded.¹ The novel, as narrated by a local girl, Matilda, consists of a number of “fragments.” The story of *Great Expectations*, which a white teacher, Mr Watts, reads for the local kids in the classroom, is composed of “fragments” of the master novel (196). After the villagers are deprived of all possessions including their books by the government soldiers called redskins, the kids collect “fragments” of *Great Expectations* so as to recover the story. Mr Watts tells the villagers and the local resisters, regarded as rambos, the story of his life, which consists of “fragments and anecdotes” (162) of *Great Expectations* and the villagers’ tales. The narrator, Matilda, assimilates her life into Pip’s. In short, the fragments of the major Victorian novel are planted into Jones’s novel along with other small stories narrated by the local residents. Patrick McCarthy, referring to the relationship of *Mister Pip* and *Great Expectations*, comments: “Dickens lies at the center of both the fantasy and the realism. *Great Expectations* affords both paradigms and contrast to the story” (59). Dickens’s novel slips into various places in Jones’s adaptation. Pip’s story shows not a flat transformation of the original novel into another but is incorporated as a spatial and polyphonic variation in *Mister Pip*. In the swelling space of the text, the Victorian boy’s life melts into the narrator Matilda’s and Mr Watts’s respectively. This paper will argue that the Victorian text is regenerated in the rewritten text, arriving at an understanding of the changing situation of the nineteenth century’s communication and the literary theory of the twentieth century.

I

Recent revisionary novels² of Victorianism are written as embedded in the postmodern critical views of the collapse of existing orders and a resistance against literary canon. The experiments of such adaptations are defined as “reinterpretations of established texts in new generic contexts or perhaps with relocations of an “original” or sourcetexts culture and/or temporal setting” (19), according to Julie Sanders. Additionally, texts that are transformed into the form of a new cultural production (26) are called “appropriations” by Sanders. Texts of adaptations and appropriations serve to destabilise the authentic existence of old works by dead authors in modern culture. John Galvin, discussing the adapted performances of Dickens’s works, says:

the ultimate restoration . . . is not of the text, anybody’s text, but of the restorer. We’ve got to get up off our knees from venerating the fetishized text—or down off the high horse from which we beat it, degraded and dethroned—and return to the fundamental understanding that we are writers too. (7)

The modern writers and readers possibly have an advantage of planting their stories on canons.

The idea of revisionary texts derives from the conception of post-colonialism. For instance, Homi Bhabha refers to “newness” (10), which is on the border of culture, to explain “the articulation of cultural differences” (2). He writes that the border between two cultures “renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent “in-between” space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (10). The place, where the present meets the past, produces “hybridity” of two different cultures, according to Bhabha, and the phenomenon occurs in rewritten texts of past literary works, too.

A typical instance of post-colonial revisionary texts is Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs*. It has been believed to be a post-colonial adaptation (or

appropriation) of Dickens's novel, *Great Expectations*. The main character, Jack Maggs, is a replacement of Dickens's Magwitch; he is exiled to Australia as a convict and returns to England to see his "son", Henry Phipps. It is not surprising that Maggs is chosen as the main character in the revisionary writing because the centrality of the colonial man shows a possibility to place Dickens's master narrative in another light. Dickens drives Magwitch to the margin, Australia, and finally to his death in the novel: Australia was a place of exile where convicts and prostitutes migrated in nineteenth-century novels. In terms of this post-colonial viewpoint, Magwitch is a marginal person and at the same time has a power to overturn the relationship between white superiority and marginality. Maggs's colourful life from birth to tranquil death is presented in the rewritten novel:

The Death of Maggs, having been abandoned by its grief-stricken author in 1837, was not begun again until 1859. The first chapters did not appear until 1860, that is, three years after the real Jack Maggs had died, not in the blaze of fire Tobias always planned for him, but in a musty high-ceilinged bedroom above the flood-brown Manning Rover. Here, with his weeping sons and daughters crowded round his bed, the old convict met death without ever having read "That Book" (Carey 328).

Those who returns to "those fertile river flats" (Carey 327), where Pip is not able to return after all, are the Magwitch family.³

It is likely that the postcolonial potential of *Great Expectations* led Lloyd Jones to compose the story of a local girl of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, on it. Some reviews characterise *Mister Pip* as a post-colonial rewriting. "In this story-within-a-story," Olivia Laing writes, "Jones has created a microcosm of post-colonial literature, hybridising the narratives of black and white races to create a new and resonant fable". In "Dickens in the South Pacific", the reviewer states, "Lloyd Jones gives the tired post-colonial themes of self-reinvention and the

reinterpretation of classic texts a fresh, ingenious twist but his real achievement is in bringing life and depth to his characters” (Burleigh).

In the view of post-colonialism, however, there are possibly two conflicting explanations of the novel. One will be made from a positive viewpoint; the author attempts to mingle the story of the white boy into the black island, as Bhabha tries to practice in his book. In fact, Matilda, who has once been attracted by white worlds such as London, made Pip alive in her mind and finally goes back to her own place. Her identity is formed by both the white world learned from Mr Watts and the local society in the island; she opens up the place of a cultural hybridity of the white world and the native locality in her mind. On the other hand, it can be said that the reading act of Mr Watts changes the kids into adherents of the Dickens’s world, so to speak, the white world. Matilda, as a grown young woman, discovers that Mr Watts

was whatever he needed to be, what we asked him to be. Perhaps there are lives like that—they pour into whatever space we have made ready for them to fill. We needed a teacher, Mr Watts became that teacher. We needed a magician to conjure up other worlds, and Mr Watts had become that magician. When we needed a saviour, Mr Watts had filled the role. When the redskins required a life, Mr Watts had given himself. (210)

Although Matilda mentally grows up through Mr Watts and *Great Expectations*, the novel suggests that he turns her and the local kids into a sort of white gentlemen as the “magician” in the form of Magwitch and Miss Havisham has transformed Pip and Estella into a gentleman and a lady. Mrs Watts, Mr Watts’s ex-wife, who the grown-up Matilda visits to learn about his former life, indicates a quite different figure of Mr Watts. When their conversation turns to Grace, his present wife, who pretends to be Queen of Sheba because of her mental illness, Mrs Watts warns Matilda of the dangerous behaviour of Mr Watts. She thinks that he has changed Grace into Queen of Sheba and made her unable to “snap out

of” the role (209) because he has driven her to change her identity and appearance. Furthermore, there is another scene to show that Mr Watts manipulates others. When villagers finish their speeches in the classroom, the kids are encouraged to applaud by Mr Watts. After some of their lectures, they break into applause “without prompting from Mr Watts.” It means that they have gained “the gentlemanly ways” “under his guidance” (74). In other words, “the children are mesmerised” (Atkins) by their white teacher; the white man controls the islander’s life with his superiority. Thus, when one sees the story in the Pacific with the post-colonial viewpoint, it is possible to develop both arguments: a story of hybridity and of an oppressive white man.

These post-colonial explanations of rewritten novels have been repeated in existing criticism. The author himself focuses on the post-colonial aspects in his writing. He said in an interview in *The Observer*, “If you’re from a migrant society, it’s easy to see the orphan and the migrant as interchangeable. For both, the past is at best a fading photograph” (Bedell). He sees *Mister Pip* in a colonial light. He connects the past of orphans, who do not have a memory of his identified place to go back to, and the sense of instability of migrants, who have lost strong attachment to their homelands. Yet, while he brings a background of migrants in his novel, he consciously refers to the pastness of orphans and migrants, too. In addition to the sense of the past, the reviewer in *The Times* states that Jones asks the reader to see how “we construct and repair our communities, and ourselves, with stories old and new” (Katsoulis). She is aware of the question of time distance, which is indicated in the novel; between the new *Great Expectations* for the village kids and the ancient stories of their mothers and grandmothers, and between the modern age and the Victorian *Great Expectations*. In short, although Matilda is a colonial other for the white Mr Watts, they stand in a line against the Victorian period; the past is the other for the present.

The representation of the past and the present in *Mister Pip* will lead us to an understanding of the interrelation between the Victorian period

and the modern era. In trying to elucidate the otherness of the past it is useful to concentrate on trauma, the one prominent theme in the novel. We will discuss how the traumatic experiences of Matilda and Mr Watts are interwoven, accumulating to form a totality. Another leading factor will be the usage of orality in the novel. The book is full of oral potentiality; oral narrative is brought back to the modern era by the narration of *Great Expectations*. A consideration of the revival of orality in the rewriting of the Victorian novel will show us the way to a better understanding of the otherness of the past.

II

Mister Pip traces Matilda's slow recovery from the terrible events of the past. Matilda gradually heals herself by narrating her story of loss. Giving an order to the process of loss and writing back her own past enable her to free herself from the trauma. As a sense of order is essential for her, the story of her life in the island is written in chronological sequence of deprivation. First, she loses her father, who goes to work in Australia. Second, medicines, canned food, and everything imported to the island are kept out of the island. Then, her belongings in the house, including her shoes, a gift from her father, a pencil and a calendar, are burnt by the government soldiers called "redskins." Next, her house and the only copy of *Great Expectations* in the island are burnt. Finally, her mother and Mr Watts are killed by them in a dreadful way, and she loses the ability to feel. She writes: "I do not know what you are supposed to do with memories like these. It feels wrong to want to forget. Perhaps this is why we write these things down, so we can move on" (179). Writing these terrible things and arranging them in order push her on to advance, leaving the past. At this point, in the text, a gap in time clearly exists between the past, which Matilda is "trying to forget" (196), and the present.

With respect to the interrelationship of the present and the otherness of the past, the theory propounded by Hans-Georg Gadamer, a leading scholar of Hermeneutics, is highly suggestive. He describes "the

fusion of horizons” in historical understanding in *Truth and Method*. He states that “*knowledge of oneself can never be complete*” (302) because one has “a horizon”, yet a horizon can be extended to another: so that it is possible to know the other’s horizon. He points out that when one knows about the other, one “must place [oneself] in the other situation in order to understand it” and then “[acquire] an appropriate … horizon” of it (303). In light of historical understanding, the present cannot be formed without the horizon of the past. Then, he argues:

In tradition this process of fusion [of the horizons of the past of the present] is continually going on, for there old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other. (306)

It is likely that *Mister Pip* fulfils this idea at different levels.

Firstly, Matilda has rejected the events of the past in the island for a long time after she has migrated to New Zealand as they are too painful and intolerable, constituting a trauma for her. The separation between the island and her new life is drawn by Matilda when she is saved from nearly drowning by Mr Masoi’s boat while the Masois are illegally leaving the island. Her new life starts at that point. She does not recall the island and rather tries to eagerly forget it. In other words, she hardly tries to understand the past events. In fact, Matilda’s memory of shipping from the island to Gizo is blurred. There is not a line dividing up the past and the present in her memory. Since she does not perceive a limitation of her past events, she is unable to participate in a process of transforming from the past to the present.

However, later, she makes a distinction of time by herself. She recalls a scene in the island, in which Mr Watts has asked her whether she would flee from the island with him and the Masois without her mother and she has not answered affirmatively. Looking back on this episode, she imagines what it was and what it would be.

Because it seems to me, thinking about it all these years later, that what I felt was a parting, a line drawn. I have called it a line, but maybe it is better to talk about a curtain. A curtain dropped between Mr Watts and his most adoring audience. He would move on and I would shift into that burial ground occupied by figures of the past. I would be a small speck on a large island as he sat in Mr Massoi's boat motoring from one life to another. (215)

Strikingly, she consciously changes the word "line" into "curtain." A line makes a distinction with a sense of flatness, yet a curtain closes Mr Watts's reading theatre. It clarifies the distinctions between two worlds and gives Matilda a standing point to see the other world. It is obvious that she looks into the side of her island from the ocean since she gradually becomes "a small speck" in her imagination. Gadamer defines "horizon" as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (302). It seems that, while a line merely distinguishes this from that, the curtain makes two spaces with distinct horizons.

The curtain seems to have been taken from a description in *Great Expectations*: after Pip reluctantly enters in his apprenticeship, he thinks:

There have been occasions in my later life . . . when I have felt for a time as if a thick curtain had fallen on all its interest and romance, to shut me out from anything save dull endurance any more. Never has that curtain dropped so heavy and blank, as when my way in life lay stretched out straight before me through the newly-entered road of apprenticeship to Joe. (Dickens 87)

He imagines the curtain between the world of "interest and romance", which means a life with Estella and Miss Havisham, and his own "dull" life with Joe. The side where Estella and Miss Havisham stand is like the

stage of a theatre. The representation of Satis House has, in fact, a theatrical atmosphere in Pip's description; for instance, Miss Havisham's whiteness is presented as "the ghastly wax-work at the Fair" (Dickens 70). She is the object to be watched at exhibition here, and Satis House is a scene of "interest and romance" for Pip. In short, the curtain suggests the existence of a stage where the fanciful play of his imagination will be enacted.

The use of the curtain by Pip can be applied to Matilda's description. In her recalled past, there are two areas; one is Mr Watt's world that is "moving on" and another Matilda's "burial ground", the island, although the reality has gone in the opposite direction for Matilda and Mr Watts. The "burial ground" has the sense of the past and stagnation, and the reader can at least imagine the horizontal room such as a stage where the curtain falls dividing Matilda's two worlds.

The space of the island with a horizon of the past, then, reminds Matilda that she has actually not "moved on" and still belongs to her past as Pip feels himself sinking into his apprenticeship. When she returns to her flat in London from Gravesend, she discovers how she has been "trapped" in her former possessions:

There were the trappings of my life—the mounted photograph of Dickens, an article blown up to poster size announcing publication of *Great Expectations* in book form. There was my desk and the pile of paper known as my thesis. It had sat there all day waiting for me to get back from Gravesend with fresh material. It had sat there like Mr Watts had once, with his secret exercise book, waiting for fragments. Well, I didn't have any fresh material. (215)

Since the second day when she starts to go to a high school in New Zealand, she has devoted herself to the study of Dickens. She has been collecting "fragments" of Dickens's life in New Zealand, Australia, and England as she and other kids had retrieved fragments of *Great Expecta-*

tions in the island. The phrase, “Like Mr Watts,” used in the quoted sentences, metaphorically presents her subjectivity bound by a person of her past, Mr Watts. Also, the “fresh material”, which she cannot bring back from Gravesend, as well shows that she has not gained a new world in her “new world” after she had left the island. This means that the limitation of her present life has not been seen by her. This is to say that she has lived in a narrow space, “overvaluing what is nearest” her (Gadamer 302) before she recalls the curtain, which creates the horizons of the past.

After the six days of depression and psychic confusion, she starts to write her story, *Mister Pip*. Her discovery of the curtain shows that she begins her practice of understanding the past. By writing, she situates herself in the past, and sees the horizon which is divided by the curtain and the stage. In the process, the fusion of “old and new” works in Matilda. She writes as follows at the end of the novel: “Pip was my story, even if I was once a girl, and my face black as the shining night. Pip is my story, and in the next day I would try where Pip had failed. I would try to return home” (219). Pip connects Matilda’s past with her present. In the sentence, Matilda as the restless girl and the young woman combine together in the same figure, Pip.

Her statement is likely to indicate a challenge to postmodern scepticism. The current theorists of sceptical epistemology “[insist] upon the impossibility of knowing another culture or the past, because the refusal of understanding is viewed as a way of shielding others from the power that is inevitable in all acts of knowing” (Anger 9). As it is mentioned above, Gadamer asserts that the assimilation of these horizons of others extends the limitations of knowing. According to Anger, who proposes a possibility of knowing the past, “Gadamer urges the interpreter to adopt an attitude he believes further understanding: one must have the “good will” to understand” (13). The process of understanding the past brings Matilda to a realization that her present subjectivity is fusing into the past self. The enclosed spaces with horizons makes one know the other, and in *Mister Pip*, the act is operated by the sense of time

distinction. In other words, the text is regarded as a post-modern interpretation of the original canon, and at the same time, it attempts to release itself from the sceptical attitude to knowledge.

The following instances of spaces will show that the usage of the past canon leads to the positive attitude towards knowledge. It will be seen that the discussion of the horizons of the past and the present can be effectively transformed into that of spaces. The novel has a lot of spaces with horizons. Firstly, the sentence that describes Mr Watts's strange appearance is as follows: "...His eyes were too interested in what lay up ahead to notice us barefoot kids" (1). The striking description of his eyes continues, "His large eyes in his large head stuck out further than anyone else's—like they wanted to leave the surface of his face" (1). His eyes fly out of his surface towards the air. There may be some distance between his eyes and face, which makes the reader and Matilda imagine about Mr Watts. Matilda guesses from the gap of his eyes that he "had seen or known great suffering and hadn't been able to forget it" (1). Furthermore, the readers soon discover his spectacular figure with Mrs Watts; his nose is covered with a red clown nose and pulls the trolley which Mrs Watts stands on with her blue parasol. Their march is a kind of show on parade in front of Matilda and the villagers: "To be a show-off you need an audience. But Mrs Pop Eye didn't pay us any attention; we weren't worthy of that....Mr Watts interested us more" (3). Here, from the first paragraphs, the relationship between the kids and Mr Watts is theatrical. Then, Mr Watts creates a theatre when he tells his life story to the rambos. In a dangerous and strained situation, "Mr Watts [is] Pip and they...[are] the audience" (149). Mr Watts is unreliable for the audience, so his narration of his story is like a fanciful theatre.

Then, the spatial theatre of Mr Watts and the kids or the rambos prepares a sphere which Pip and *Great Expectations* fly into beyond time; the harmony created between a character of Victorian England and the modern kids in Papua New Guinea. It can be interpreted through explaining the symbolical situation of a copy of *Great Expectations*. The

book, which is stolen by Matilda's mother, is secretly kept in air during the most dangerous period when the villagers wait for the redskins returning to find who Pip is; "*Great Expectations* was rolled up in my father's sleeping mat hanging from the rafter above the floor where my mum slept" (99). The roof of a house in Papua New Guinea is supported by a formation of rafters. In short, the copy of *Great Expectations* is hung in the space below the roof. This seems to mean metaphorically that Mr Watts is in a pendent situation: it is uncertain whether Mr Watts is Mister Dickens or Mister Pip due to his fictional story of life. On the other hand, the volume is enclosed by the sleeping mat. This points to his limited life in the island, where he cannot move freely among the villagers, redskins, and rambos. He changes his identity as the requirement arises; a role of Mister Dickens first, Mister Pip next, and a white man to die later to save the villagers from the redskin's assault. As Mr Watts's book tells the reader his situation, it keeps itself in the enclosed phenomena with a horizon, the world of Pip's story, although the space is very narrow.

The hanging space of *Great Expectations* symbolises a room of imagination and fancy. Mr Watts's voice of reading *Great Expectations* creates a world apart from the life of the island for the kids: "Mr Watts had given us kids another world to spend the night in. We could escape to another place" (20). After the redskins has burned the houses, however, Matilda notices that she "[misses that space]" because of her homeless circumstances: "I had discovered that the plainest house can crown a fantasy or daydream. An open widow can be tolerated. So can an open door. But I discovered the value of four walls and a roof" (103). Fancy and imagination require an enclosed room because they belong to one's private area. Then, Mr Watts tells the kids that they can gain the margin of their imagination in their minds as they speak to themselves with their own names; "we located that little room in ourselves where our voice is pure and alive" (107). In short, the scope for imagination should be surrounded with some walls to hide a private imagination, and the voice again helps to get a space for fancy.

Thus, these spaces in *Mister Pip* are all surrounded with some walls which propound limitations. The space of the red nose provides Mr Watts's reading theatre. The pending *Great Expectations* is transformed to the imaginative room of Matilda's mind. The horizons of the white world of Mr Watts, the Victorian *Great Expectations*, and Bougainville are interlocked in the novel. Accordingly, the Victorian past can be melted into the horizon of the present in the revisionary text, and it improves accessibility to the past as the other.

III

To illustrate the act of understanding otherness of the past, a leading topic is concentrated on in this section; the formation of trauma in *Mister Pip*. The process of trauma is applied from Freud's theory, which has formed the basis of modern critical attitudes of scepticism. According to Cathy Caruth, who rightly points to the relationship of Freud's principles of trauma in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) and the critical theory of poststructuralists, Freud's traumatic process is based on the story of the beginning of Jewish history. Freud has considered that history is not a simple style of "experience and reference" but consists of discontinuation of the past and the future, where a terrible event of the murder of "Egyptian" Moses by the Hebrews is hidden in a context of "the preservation of Hebrew freedom" (Caruth 184). The circumstances of "liberal return to freedom" (Caruth 184) to Canan in the Old Testament have been created to eliminate the real event concerning Moses. The replacement of Moses's story is caused by unconscious trauma of his murder. In short, the story of escape and return, which were joined together in a plot, included a traumatic sphere between them, Moses's homicide in history. In Freud's explanation, the unconsciousness of the trauma is brought by "*the act of leaving*" (Caruth 190).

"*The act of leaving*" and the unconscious trauma are observed by Matilda in *Mister Pip*. Her mother and Mr Watts are killed in a terrible way by the redskins in the island. Then, liberation is gained by her illegal migration from there. Like Moses, she leaves her birthplace

beyond the ocean in a storm. In her new life, she studies Dickens eagerly for herself due to Mr Watts's introduction involving the great novelist, but pretends to improve her results in school by the support of her father, who is proud of her and does not know anything about her past: "I didn't have the heart to tell him about Mr Watts. I let him think I was all his own work" (198). In addition, she "[tries] to forget" her mother, too although "[s]ometimes... I couldn't keep the door closed on that little room in my head where I'd put her" (196). Due to the departure from the island and the terrible past, she unconsciously hides her mother and Mr Watts away behind schoolbooks and research sources of Dickens and pushes them to "that little room in [her] head" although the narrator Matilda is aware of her unconscious trauma.

To illustrate otherness in the text, Caruth's argument is worth considering again. She points out that many contemporary critics "make history unconscious" due to this Freudian theory of unconscious trauma, of "depriving history of its referential literality" (186), and then they suggest that "consequently we may not have direct access to others" (181). Against these post-structuralists, Caruth's survey of Freud's writing indicates that he has focused on the insight that "events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others" (Caruth 188). She examines it through the context of his own writing; Freud wrote this book in Vienna from 1934 to 1937, when the Nazi invasion and persecution had occurred, and finished it in England in 1937 after he had left his birthplace. She recognises a repetition of unconsciousness and trauma in history within the overlapping of life stories of Moses and Freud:

... Freud tells of his own work—of a history whose traces cannot be effaced, which haunts Freud like a ghost, and finally emerges in several publications involving extensive repetition—it is difficult not to recognize the story of the Hebrews—of Moses' murder, its effacement, and its unconscious repetition (189).

In the repetition, one can see another person's unconscious sphere.

Caruth's idea is applicable to our argument of *Mister Pip*. In Matilda's story of the process of trauma, another trauma is repeated; it is Mr Watts's. Matilda narrates few events of his past because she does not have any means to find it; in reality, what she learns about his former life except his own explanations is that he has once married a white woman, lived in a dull and motionless place, known Grace who was his neighbour next door, and played in an amateur theatre with her. Mr Watts, however, emphasizes Pip's liberation from the marshes in *Great Expectations*. He repeats the following sentences in his comments on Pip:

“Pip is an orphan who is given the chance to create his own self and destiny. Pip's experience also reminds us of the emigrant's experience. Each leaves behind the place they grew up in, each strikes out on his own. Each is free to create himself anew. Each is also free to make mistakes. . . .” (78)

Mr Watts focuses on Pip's transformation and liberation from the motionless marshes to London in his reading, removing all terrible and murderous scenes. Accordingly, Matilda identifies the situation of Pip with her waiting and immobile island. In short, it can be said that his emphasis of Pip's wish to migrate transcribes onto Mr Watts' traumatic experience, within which he desires liberation. As Freud's experiences are assimilated in his writing into the Jewish history, Mr Watts's past trauma is indicated by Matilda's narration of liberation from her trauma. A phenomenon encountered by a character in a text is unconsciously reflected on another text of the writer. It is the repetition of trauma in the text that underpins the act of knowing the otherness and associating with the other text.

IV

The most effective element of this novel seems to be Mr Watts's oral reading. However, orality is incompatible with revisionary texts based

on post-modern ways of thinking. Gadamer's theory is not involved in the vocal theatre of Mr Watts because oral practice has timeless continuity, where there are no horizons with limitations. Indeed, Gadamer states, "In the form of writing, all tradition . . . involves a unique co-existence of past and present, insofar as present consciousness has the possibility of a free access to everything handed down in writing" (390). He requires written texts, which "always express a whole," for our understanding (390). Furthermore, Matilda's act of writing the events in the island is caused by trauma. An inducement to write the past is an anxiety about the unknown nature of the former events, as Mary Poovey discusses: ". . . the anxiety that signals our vexed relation to the past we partly construct also provokes us to write" (171). It seems that healing Matilda's trauma and oral reading have a strained relation, too. In other words, writing is virtually essential to realize Gadamer's interpretation of horizon and a theory of trauma. Although both twentieth-century ways of thinking have led to the coming together of two separated objects in a place, in no case do they provide any connection with orality. These ideas have emphasised written languages, as opposed to vocal words. However, the island of *Mister Pip* is full of orality: Mr Watts's oral reading of *Great Expectations* and the villagers' anecdotes.

Orality and literacy are different forms of communication; the former depends on the duration of time, a seamless continuum, and the latter is characteristic of distinction of the past from the present. "One of the most important results of this homeostatic tendency is that the individual has little perception of the past except in terms of the present," Jack Goody and Ian Watts analyse, "whereas the annals of a literate society cannot but enforce a more objective recognition of the distinction between what was and what is" (310). Goody and Watts do not place reliance on oral tradition. "Historians in modern, mass-literate, industrial societies—that is, most professional historians—are generally pretty sceptical about the value of oral sources in reconstructing the past" (114)⁴: this is the first sentence of Gwyn Prins's paper of oral

history. Prins urges the importance of oral and visual culture against the present document-driven world. In his thesis, Prins interestingly asserts that “oral data cannot explain change, and that change is what historians mainly study” (120). The idea of transformation belongs to a written world while orality is located in the continuation of things.

Why is orality important to *Mister Pip*? This may be examined by a consideration of the situation of written narrative in the Victorian period. According to Walter Ong, a radical transformation from orality to written words occurred around the nineteenth century through the transition of narrative from travelogue to detective story; this is to say that the written mode had been internalised within a sense of almost all of the people in England (145–8). Within the change, the Victorian narrative had been dominated by a form of printed novel, which has a linear plot, while the narratives of oral culture do not have a climax and a forward-moving plot and are constructed by a medley of episodes (Ong 142–9). In this situation, Ong estimates Dickens’s novel to have an oral world as well as a written form (149). The plot of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* is chronological, but there are some places where the writer’s consciousness of accumulation of episodes is indicated; “We went on our way up-stairs after this episode. . .” (Dickens 68). Here, Dickens combines two episodes although the plot proceeds linearly. After the transitional period in the nineteenth century, the twentieth-century’s scholars have tended to focus on writing as Prins mentions. On the contrary, the use of Victorian *Great Expectations* in the rewritten text appears to effectively bring oral culture back into the writing.

The text has no borders demarcating between Pip’s story and Mr Watts’ life, the villagers’ anecdotes, superstitions and myth and Dickens’s written novel. All of these stories received by the kids in the classroom, including Pip’s life, are poured into Mr Watts’s life by his storytelling. All fragments present piles of episodes, which is a qualification for oral narratives. Furthermore, for the local kids, “reading” *Great Expectations* in the classroom is the same situation as “listening” to the local myth and believed superstitions of their mothers and grandmoth-

ers. The Dickensian world is provided by the sound: “When Mr Watts read to us we fell quiet. It was a new sound in the world. He read slowly so we heard the shape of each word” (17). Therefore, Dickens’s plot is carried exactly like Mr Watts’s story in Matilda’s ears by him as she finally discovers that “[her] Mr Dickens used to go about barefoot and in a buttonless shirt” (219). The written cannon of Dickens and the oral tradition coexist in the twenty-first century text. In short, oral culture is revived in *Mister Pip* through Mr Watts’s reading of *Great Expectations*.

Accordingly, in the oral background of the Pacific island, the Victorian *Great Expectations*, which was written during the period of the decline of oral activities in the nineteenth century, is used by Mr Watts. After all, the past legacy of orality, which has been rejected by Gadamer and Freudian interpretation of trauma, is operated to show the articulation of two irreconcilable situations. As Mr Watts’s story is created by a diversity of anecdotes and the fragments of Dickens’s novel, the text presents articulation of different spaces with a limited horizon. Each horizon extends its sphere, crushing the “curtain” of others. In the process of knowing the other, the past distinction melts into the present, as Matilda’s progressing story includes Mr Watts’s unknown past with a trauma. Although both the theories of repetition of horizons and unconscious trauma depend on writing acts as has been explored here, the written novel attains to another level of knowing the other. Oral culture is not just a bygone communication tool of the past but also is interwoven with the act of writing and its text. The past is the other, but it exists in a dynamic way in the present and offers a means of achieving a synthesis between the oral tradition and the literary theory in the rewriting. The contemporary text is essential for us to understand other periods with different spaces.

Note

1. See Eugene Ogan about Bougainville and the historical events.
2. For further details of revisionary fictions, see Peter Widdowson. He men-

tions, “Re-visionary fiction. . . is a crucial component of that contemporary ‘counter-culture of the imagination’ which, in writing back to the still potent literary texts of the past, seeks to revise cultural history by way of re-visioning its master-narratives” (506). The term of “revision” arises from Adrienne Rich’s “When we dead awaken”; “Re-vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history. . .” (90). Also, see Cola Kaplan. She examines adaptations of the Victorian culture and literature as “Victoriana”; “The variety and appeal of Victoriana over the years might better be seen as one sign of a sense of the historical imagination on the move, an indication that what we thought we knew as “history” has become, a hundred years and more after the death of Britain’s longest-reigning monarch, a kind of conceptual nomad, not so much lost as permanently restless and unsettled” (3).

3. For a discussion of *Jack Maggs* as a revisionary text, see Sanders. She explains that it exposes the problem of colonialism, sexual repression, and violence hidden in the Victorian text (132–6). Also, George Lettissier mentions that Carey dispatched Dickens’s text from his work and takes Magwitch’s voice from the English canon (124–6).
4. See McKenzie about print culture and orality in New Zealand. McKenzie also refers to scepticism to oral culture; “Historians. . . are generally pretty sceptical about the values of oral sources” (114).

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