

Between the Metropolis and the Antipodes: Rewriting Magwitch's Return in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*

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This article concerns the representation of Australia as the antipodean penal colony of Empire in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and its appropriation in recent Australian rewriting, Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997). It is an attempt to read *Jack Maggs* not only comparatively but also contrapuntally¹ to *Great Expectations*. My reading focuses on the ways in which Carey rewrites the plot of a convict's return from the Antipodes and considers the implications of textual subversion. Magwitch's return from New South Wales makes an important plot development in the canonical pre-text. The plot presupposes the condition of Australia as the antipodean depository of delinquency from which people do not return. Magwitch is the figure that represents such ideology. However, as recent discussions in postcolonial criticism consider that the colonial representation of the European other reflects the material reality of Europe but not the periphery, Dickens's representation of Australia can be re-examined as the product of his Eurocentric point of view. As the means to interrogate textual dominance of the canonical text, postcolonial writers' rewritings of the pre-text constitute an important critical and creative practice to transform the representation in the canon because it continually influence readers' imagination. In Carey's rewriting of *Great Expectations*, Jack Maggs, the character which is equivalent to Dickens's Magwitch, returns to both London and Sydney. What does Carey's reconstruction of Dickensian plot signify? As Carey's Magwitch figure eventually settles in New South Wales, it is tempting to read *Jack Maggs* as a novel about the convict founding fathers of Australia. But I argue that *Jack Maggs* frustrates easy identification of the novel with anti-colonial or pro-nationalist point of view and presents profoundly ambivalent subject position of the white settler writers who produces their narrative from the interstices of the colonial and the national.

I. Magwitch Returns to London

¹ See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage, 1994, p.51.

Pip narrates the scene of Magwitch's reappearance to London with an image of ascent from darkness underneath the antipodean hell to the top surface where Pip holds the light.

'There is some one down there, is there not?' I called out, looking down.

'Yes', said a voice from the darkness beneath.

'What floor do you want?'

'The top. Mr Pip.'

'That's my name - there is nothing the matter?'

'Nothing the matter,' returned the voice. And the man came on.

I stood with my lamp held out over the stair-rail, and he came slowly within its light.² Pip describes the scene of Magwitch's return as coming back from the darkness underneath. The scene makes a striking contrast of upstairs and downstairs in the light and darkness. The location of light upstairs seems to be associated with the idea of enlightenment which positions Pip as the civilised European who could turn the savage and subordinate other into a moral subject. Furthermore, Magwitch is first recognised, by Pip, as 'a voice', the invisible in the darkness, then as the man. From the first scene of his return to London, Magwitch's ontological condition is epistemologically controlled into the given discourses of fearful other who comes back from the darkness underneath the antipodean penal colony.

In *Great Expectations*, Magwitch is represented as a potentially subversive figure. He possesses the power to literally and figuratively turn the world upside down. From the beginning chapter, he is depicted as a figure of a 'fearful man, all in coarse grey'³ who turned Pip upside down and asked him for 'terrified charity'.⁴ Indeed, it can be said that Pip's narrative is haunted by his childhood experience. However, Dickens's *Great Expectations* also exemplifies how such excessive energy can be domesticated and contained. First, Magwitch is transported to New South Wales for life. But he comes back to the Metropolis with good fortune and a claim of beneficiary relationship between convict father and gentleman son, to subvert the relationship constructed by the colonial rhetoric of Empire's parenting. When Magwitch reappears in the centre, it restages the scene for his morally and physically subversive power to become a threat to the people around him. For example, prior to Magwitch's reappearance, Pip refers to him as 'my convict'; but when he comes back, 'my

² Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.310.

³ Dickens, *Great Expectations*, p.314.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 99.

horrors'.⁵ That is, Magwitch becomes the real fear. As observed above, Pip attempts to conceptually marginalise Magwitch by the existing discourse of European self and the other in order to protect his integrity against the return of the repressed fear.⁶ But Magwitch's subversive power is eventually subsided. Pip finally reconciles with his fearful man because Magwitch is identified as Estella's father. In public level, the authority imprisons him again, sentences guilty and confiscates all the remaining wealth. Eventually, Magwitch dies in prison. So, in the end, his subversive potential and his wealth are systematically recuperated into the dominant ideology.

Pip's rhetoric to control Magwitch's subjective position signifies not only his repression of fear, but also the energy of repression in Victorian society that Dickens could utilise to develop his plot. *Great Expectations* includes two contradictory colonial discourses of Australia: that is firstly, the vision that sees Australia as the workman's Arcadia; secondly, the convict hell.⁷ Both discourses are conflated in the character of Magwitch. On the one hand, Magwitch is a fallen man who is given a second chance for success in the world outside the British Isles. With his hard work and patience, he creates good fortune and realises the ideal of self-made man. On the other hand, the spacial identity of the place of New South Wales provides Pip and the Victorian readers alike for resources to fix Magwitch's subject position within the existing discourse of antipodean hell. The image of Australia located in deep down under the Metropolis was popular among the people in Victorian England thus Wemmick points his pen to the office floor and says "deep ... as Australia" which is positioned "symmetrically on the opposite spot of the globe".⁸ Australia's geographical position is further associated with the history of transportation which translates the given geography into the convict hell. Accordingly, Australia is conceptualised as the antipodean prison: that is, the depth and distance between the Metropolis and the Antipodes should not morally and materially allow the convicts to return to the centre. Dickens incorporates both ideologies into his novel but his

5 Dickens, *Great Expectations*, p. 335.

6 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1927), in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Vincent B. Leitch et al (eds.), New York: Norton and Company, 2001, pp. 929-56.

7 For more detailed analysis of the Dickens's view of Australia, see Michael Hollington, 'Dickens and Australia', *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, 33 (1991), pp.15-32; Leon Litvack, 'Dickens, Australia and Magwitch Part I: The Colonial Context', *The Dickensian*, 95 (1, 447, Spring 1999), pp. 24-50; Leon Litvack, 'Dickens, Australia and Magwitch Part II: The Search for *le cas Magwitch*', *The Dickensian*, 95 (1, 448, Summer 1999), pp. 101-127.

8 Dickens, *Great Expectations*, p. 197.

plot particularly relies on the ideology represented in the discourse concerning the antipodean convict hell. As Dickens was a supporter of free migration scheme at the time he wrote *Great Expectations*,⁹ it can be said that Dickens utilised the repressed fear among Victorian readers for his plot development.

Pip's epistemic violence¹⁰ on the representation of Magwitch is facilitated by his ability to write, and it is the author Dickens that constructs Pip's dominant narrative position through a first person point of view. Indeed, Pip's ability to compose his self-representation far exceeds Magwitch who possesses extremely limited ability to write. Therefore, though Magwitch's return to the metropolitan centre can give him visibility and the stage to tell the story, he always has to depend on someone else to compile his narrative. Magwitch keeps reticent about his life in New South Wales, except the remarks of his hard labour, success and loneliness in the stock farm. He is particularly secretive about how he made his fortune.¹¹ But Magwitch's reticence is also Dickens's and the latter is the author's creative decision. As Kirsty Reid claims that it was Dickens's wish to differentiate him from popular fiction writers such as Newgate Novels so that he could deal the crime less sensationally.¹² In other words, Dickens controlled what to be included and not so as to sustain his authority. It is true that Dickens had never travelled Australia but he was well informed of the condition of life in Australia through existing resources, for instance, public reports on the system of transportation or his private correspondences with Miss Angela Burdette Coutts or Mrs Caroline Chisholm in Sydney whose charity organisations Dickens took his part in.¹³ Therefore, Magwitch's marginalised position is so conceived in the narrative of *Great Expectations* due to his little ability to produce self-representation. Magwitch's lack of ability to write reflects the social condition of Victorian England which constructs his inevitable position of subjectification.

I have discussed so far that in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, the plot of Magwitch's return to the centre is so developed that his subversive potential is eventually subsided. Pip's various

9 Leon Litvack, 'Dickens, Australia and Magwitch Part I: The Colonial Context', *The Dickensian*, 95 (1, 447, Spring 1999), pp. 24-50.

10 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reasons: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 266-311.

11 Michael Noonan explores the mystery of Magwitch's fortune in his *Magwitch* (1986).

12 Kirsty Reid, 'Exile, Empire and the Convict Diaspora: The Return of Magwitch', in Michael Hanne (ed.), *Creativity in Exile*, Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1994, p. 62.

13 Litvack, 'Dickens, Australia and Magwitch Part I: The Colonial Context', p. 35.

attempts to control the return of the repressed fear continually brutalise the representation of Magwitch. As is shown in Pip's marginalisation of Magwitch, the identity of the place provides him for the terms to locate his fear back to New South Wales. The plot of the returned convict was also a kind of popular narrative in Victorian England that Dickens can utilise for his plot development without presenting much details. The crucial aspect of Pip's narrative dominance is that it is Magwitch's lack of ability to write that prevents him from producing his self-representation. So, his return to the centre enables him to gain the visibility and opportunity to gaze back, but not to write back. In the following section, this article investigates how Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* rewrites the plot of Magwitch's return and make his routes of return to both London and to Sydney. I will first focus on the ways in which Carey rewrites the episode of Magwitch's return to London. Then I will examine the story of Magwitch's second 'additional' journey to Sydney. What is the significance of each return? But first of all, how does Jack Maggs returns to the centre?

II. Jack Maggs Returns to London

Jack Maggs returns to London wearing a red waistcoat and carrying a silver-capped cane.

It was a Saturday night when the man with the red waistcoat arrived in London. It was, to be precise, six of the clock on the fifteenth of April in the year of 1837 [...].

The *Rocket* (as his coach was aptly named) rattled in through the archway to the inn's yard and the passengers, who had hitherto found the stranger so taciturn, now noted the silver-capped cane — which had begun to tap the floor at Westminster Bridge — commence a veritable tattoo.¹⁴

Jack Maggs marches on to London. The use of the military terms such as 'rocket' or 'veritable tattoo' suggests that Maggs has not just come back, but to strike back. The narrator's intervention is already suggested here. It is the narrator who associates the taps on the floor, which might just be a sign of irritation, with the marching sounds. The narrator also describes how Maggs's mood dominated the coach car all the way from Dover, forcing the other passengers into a tensioned silence. His belligerent and dominating attitude in engaging with people is already visible from the start.

Carey's rewriting of the plot of Magwitch's return can also be read as a criticism toward recent development of postcolonial criticisms, particularly Edward Said's conceptualisation of

14 Peter Carey, *Jack Maggs* [1997], St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001, p.1.

colonial Australia in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Said rightly points out that the representation of Australia in Dickens's *Great Expectations* is homogeneously constructed: it reflects metropolitan concerns, but obliterates the voice of the indigenous Australian. However, Said's analysis tends to simplify the dynamism of colonial relationships into a dualism of the coloniser and the colonised, and discusses the issue concerning the subject position of the white settlers in similar disabling contexts as the indigenous Australian. Following Robert Hughes's counter-argument toward Dickens which states that Magwitch's return to London was fictional improbability in Victorian time,¹⁵ Said writes:

The prohibition placed on Magwitch's return is not only penal but imperial: subjects can be taken to places like Australia, but they cannot be allowed a 'return' to metropolitan space, which, as all Dickens's fiction testifies, is meticulously charted, spoken for, inhabited by a hierarchy of metropolitan personages.¹⁶

Said's explanation reads like contradicting to his argument. That is, this section can be read from the perspective that Said actually advocates imperial ideology which contains the transported felon in the antipodean depository for the excess of Victorian society. In so doing, Said seems to subscribe colonial ideology that encouraged the convicts to stay in Australia. Contrary to Said, Patrick Brantlinger argues that the returned convict was a recurrent motif in Victorian fiction, creating social and cultural unease among Victorian readers.¹⁷ Indeed, Dickens had written about the returned convict in *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37).

The return to metropolitan space and time signifies, for the white settler subject, a coming back to their home: it is where their old home was or it is where their ancestors came from. Examining 'return' in Australian fiction, Gay Raines writes that Australian authors seem to be more preoccupied with the themes of 'return' than such themes as 'exile' whether it is the return to home in England or an imaginative return to the past or earlier texts.¹⁸ Postcolonial rewriting of the Victorian classics can be considered as one of those imaginative returns to the past. As such the critical perspectives on *Jack Maggs* can be divided into two areas: firstly, the

15 Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*, New York: Vintage, p. 586.

16 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. xvi.

17 Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 120-21.

18 Gay Raines, "'Return' in Australian Fiction", in *"Return" in Post-colonial Writing: A Cultural Labyrinth*, Vera Mihailovich-Dickman (ed.), Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1994, p. 42.

Australian appropriation of the convict figure, Magwitch; and, secondly, the use of the meta-fictional narrative structure, which includes the fictionalisation of the author Charles Dickens into the figure of Tobias Oates. Among criticisms, my discussion is particularly indebted to John Thieme's close analysis of the literary con-texts and inter-texts. Thieme carefully charts out the intertextual relationship of *Jack Maggs* with both English and Australian texts. His analysis illustrates complicated textual relationships that *Jack Maggs* engages with other texts, which frustrates 'any attempt to construct linear genealogies'.¹⁹ Thieme also mentions the difficulty of claiming Dickens simply as a colonialist because of his criticisms on Victorian society. His observation that Jack Maggs, in both the title and the character of the novel, focuses on writing against the 'negative representations of Australia as antipodean penal colony'²⁰ captures the ambivalence of the white settler writings which is situated between the interstices of colonialism and nationalist sentiments. Such ambivalence, I think, best demonstrated in the brief last chapter. I will come back to this point later.

Jack Maggs returns twice: he returns to London, and eventually to Sydney. Carey's Magwitch figure comes back to London in order to claim his position as a successful Englishman at home in the centre: London is not only his place of birth; he is the foster father to English gentleman Henry Phipps, and now holds a freehold property. The most important aspect of Carey's rewriting is Maggs's ability to write, which allows him to make London as his home not solely by birth but also by pen. As Jonah Raskin discusses that in Victorian England, the centre was considered to be the only location where the plot was developed.²¹ Accordingly, Jack Maggs's return to London sets the stage where he writes back to the author figure in the centre. I will examine, in the following sections, the ways in which Carey refigures the characters, textual authorities and history of literary production. However, to what extent Maggs's self-representation effective is best described as unsettling. I argue that Carey's playfulness with the idea of truth as a discursive construction²² can unsettle the dominant representation by providing the alterity, yet it also suggests a limited possibility of textual subversion which is infinitely rehearsed but difficult to achieve. That is, the possibility

19 John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing back to the Canon*, London: Continuum, 2001, p. 7.

20 Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, p. 107.

21 Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism: Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Foster, D. H. Lawrence, and Joyce Cary*, New York: Random House, 1971, pp. 17-18.

22 Michael Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Vincent B. Leitch et al (eds.), New York: Norton and Company, 2001, pp. 1667-1670.

of turning the world upside down is suggested but seems never to realise. It is also the problem inherent in the practice of rewritings of the canonical text which must continually upset the literary relationship between the centre and margin by presenting alterity which is 'almost the same, but not quite'.²³

i) Refiguring the Characters

One of the crucial differences from *Great Expectations* is the characterisation of Abel Magwitch. Overall, Carey refigures the characterisation of Magwitch from Pip's devoting father and 'my convict' to a confident and self-asserting character. Though Magwitch and Jack Maggs have some similarities, such as their project to create the English gentleman by their fortunes, their shared demeanour as a 'fearful man',²⁴ and their physically overwhelming presence, they are represented differently. As examined, while Magwitch comes back to London very quietly, Maggs returns to London wearing an attention-grabbing sleek red waistcoat that contrasts nicely with his ornamental silver walking-cane, to make the scene of the return of successful Englishman. The differences between the two characters proliferate: Magwitch continued to work in the sheep farm to which he was assigned when he was pardoned from prison and gains success. On the other hand, Maggs establishes his brick manufacturing business from 'mucky clay'.²⁵ While Magwitch is marginalised both geographically and socially in the New World, Maggs is closer to the centre of a colonial society—living in a 'grand house' in Sydney and possessing the freehold property in the heart of London.²⁶ He is also the father of 'that race',²⁷ that is, Maggs's term to refer to the Australian born children.

Another important aspect of Carey's rewriting is the creation of Tobias Oates, a fictionalised character of the author, Charles Dickens. Carey does not recreate the author of the canonical pre-text by name or the association with name, but by the author's biographical details.²⁸ An interesting aspect of Carey's reconfiguration of Dickens is that he does not depict

23 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 86.

24 Dickens, *Great Expectations*, p. 4.

25 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 305.

26 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 250.

27 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 340, 355.

28 As to the biographies of Dickens, I referred to the following books: Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens*, London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990; Paul Schlicke (ed.), *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; or Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women*, London: J. M. Dent, 1983.

Oates as an unquestionably authoritative father and author figure: Oates inherits the flaws and scandals that punctuate Dickens's biography. The reader can quite easily trace the features of Dickens that Carey wishes to recycle in the figure of Oates: a popular author, a previous journalistic career, financial difficulties, an interest in mesmerism, and a more than sibling-like relationship with his sister-in-law. Indeed, Carey seems to be most interested in Dickens's biography between the years of 1836 and 1837, particularly those three weeks following the 15th April 1837 when his novel is set. The novel's chronological setting allows Carey to create a narrative climax on the premature death of Mary Hogarth due to heart failure as Oates's trauma of losing his mistress and sister-in-law Lizzie Warriner and their baby. Carey's representation of Oates upsets the authority of the author figure who is supposed to possess a superior moral standard to the colonial subject: the author himself is struggling to sustain his position defined by the dominant ideology. Adapting Dickens's biographies into the characterisation of Tobias Oates, Carey uses Dickens's biographical discourses as the resources to try out possible sub-versions of the author's history. While this method of demystifying the authority of the author figure may be considered voyeuristic, and the process of subverting the authority of a body of Dickens biographies can be endless, it can be useful in challenging the authority of the conventional author figure.

ii) The Authors and the subjects: Contesting Authorities

Among the borrowings from Dickens's biographies, Carey probably invests most in Dickens's obsession to animal magnetism. This allows Carey to set the stage on which the possible relationship between Dickens and Magwitch is re-enacted in the form of Oates and Maggs as the author and the subject. As Fred Kaplan writes, Dickens was interested in mesmerism and practiced it because of its potential to gain a clearer understanding of the hidden human psyche: mesmerism enabled him to describe the psychology of his characters more realistically.²⁹ In *Jack Maggs*, experiments of animal magnetism is conducted by Oates as the technique to reveal what is hidden in the memory of his subject. When mesmerised, Maggs speaks the words such as 'double cat', 'flogging', 'Captain Logan' or 'pelican'.³⁰ These words

29 Kaplan suggests Dickens's depiction and the use of hands were influenced by his interest and practice in mesmerism. For example, Mrs Joe brings Pip up 'by hand', and it is through the resemblance of hands that Pip guesses that Jaggerd's maid Molly is Estella's mother. Fred Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism: the Hidden Springs of Fiction*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 133-134.

30 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, pp. 89-93.

give enough information for Oates to identify Maggs with a returned convict from Australia and disseminates such knowledge among the spectators of his session.³¹ According to Oates who is versed in science of criminal mind, double-cat is a “punishment invented in New South Wales”.³² Authority of his knowledge is further proved by the scars on Maggs’s back. This inscription of punishment on the body, Oates calls “the hallmark of New South Wales”.³³ In such a way, truthfulness of information he gained from Maggs’s blurry confession is doubly secured by the visible sign on the back.

More importantly, the final authorisation of Maggs’s national identity is warranted by Tobias Oates, who declares his audience that “this *Australian* of ours holds his life in his cerebrum”.³⁴ In excitement of finding a “treasure house”³⁵ of criminal resources from which he can freely steal to exclusively write about, he makes heroic statement to study all the narrow street in a world of criminal psyche, maps them out and becomes, “the first cartographer” of the criminal mind.³⁶ By employing such biographical details, Carey alludes the space of human unconscious to the space of the exploitative colonial geography, particularly to Australian continent which was declared *Terra Nullius* by Captain Cook. Just as the colonial expeditions achieved territorialisation by conceptualising the land of the unknown in the map form, Oates justifies his aim of practicing mesmerism. As such, Oates’s experiments of pseudo-scientific technique can be read as an allegory of colonisation, which proceeds with the mapping of the unknown world of unconscious to locate the place of treasure (raw material) for the use of the coloniser. In such a manner, Oates reduces Maggs’s identity by only relating him to a particular history of Australia. It is such an identification with inferiority that consequently justifies his theft of the resources.

However, authority of Tobias Oates’s colonising discourse is challenged by Jack Maggs. Contrary to the people who tries to confine him in the stereotype of returned convict from Australia, Maggs insists that he is an Englishman. Though Dickens’s Magwitch never explicitly states his identity as English, Carey’s Magwitch figure claims his English identity. Such a portrayal of convict subject has an echo of the narrator of other convict narratives such

31 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, pp. 94-97.

32 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 96.

33 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 95.

34 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 96. Emphasis added.

35 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 94.

36 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 97.

as Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* (1872) who expresses strong nostalgia for England.³⁷ But unlike Clarke's convict narrator who regards the centre as the place where his disordered English self can be restored, Maggs has come back to fix current disorder in the centre: that is, to "have English things to settle".³⁸ He intends to reconnect him to Henry Phipps, re-establish family, properly become an Englishman father of an English gentleman and consequently, to remake London as his home. Similar to Magwitch, Maggs returns to see the grown up Pip, and possibly never to return as he expresses strong desire to stay saying in England by saying "I'd rather be a bad smell here than a frigging rose in New South Wales."³⁹ Immediately after he arrives, Jack visits his foster mother Ma Britain, who asks "What do you want?" ... "What are you doing here in London?", to which Jack answers, "It's my home," ... "That's what I want. My home.", suggesting ambivalent feeling that Jack still regards London as his home yet he feels alienated from it.⁴⁰ Therefore, his return to London can be understood as an attempt to re-make London his home as the one suitable for an extremely successful Englishman from Sydney, 'Mr Jack Maggs Esquire' as he is called there. Holding freehold property in the heart of London and having familial tie to his Englishman son Henry Phipps, Jack Maggs returns to extend his success to London and re-write his story of prosperous emancipist onto the metropolitan space from which his was readily excluded.

Maggs's letters to Phipps, therefore, can be read as a counter-discourse presented against the writings by Oates. Indeed, the most crucial difference between Magwitch and Maggs is the ability to write one's story. Carey further invests on this Magwitch's potential ability to write.⁴¹ Contrary to the canonical pre-text where Magwitch opts to tell the story of his life to Pip and Herbert Pocket rather than take authorial control over writing of his story, Jack Maggs writes incessantly, especially to his beneficiary, Henry Phipps. They begin correspondence well before Maggs returns to England, hiding his true identity. After coming back to England, Maggs begins to compose letters that tells the story of his upbringing so that

37 Jack Maggs plays with such a discourse for transported felon. He says "I was transported for the term of my natural life. Weren't those the words?", *Jack Maggs*, p. 137-8.

38 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 138.

39 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 251.

40 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 5.

41 The reader must be reminded that Magwitch is not completely illiterate. See Dickens, *Great Expectations*, where Magwitch says "a deserting soldier in a Travellers' Rest, ... learnt me to read; and a travelling Giant what signed his name at a penny a time learnt me to write. I warn't locked up as often now as formerly ..." (Volume III, Ch. 3, p. 343.) Quotation modified.

Phipps can have a clear understanding about Maggs before they eventually meet. This is his version of "I know'd my name to be Magwitch chrisen'd Abel".⁴² His letter begins:

You have known for many years that my name is Jack Maggs, although Maggs was not my father's name, but a name given to me by my foster mother who believed I talked too much. What my father's name was I cannot tell, for when I was just three days old I was discovered lying in the mud flats 'neath London Bridge.⁴³

His biography might read like a stereotypical poor orphan story: a nameless child of no certain genealogy was saved, named, adopted and drawn into the world of crime, as is illustrated in *Oliver Twist*. As is often the case of other poor orphan stories, there are many gaps in Maggs's story of his early life but such gaps are filled in by invented information. And he is conscious about this. Even if Maggs's story is not based on reliable source, his ability to craft his story is vital in the production of self-representation.⁴⁴ It is because self-representation can offer Maggs a kind of decolonisation from the confinement of dominant discourses, such as legal documents or Oates's *The Death of Maggs*.

However, Maggs must compose his life story in a confidential manner because he was transported to Australia for life: if he is found back in the centre, he will be executed. As if to disguise the location of his writing, Maggs uses the technique of mirror writing and writes backwards, from right to left using special ink that becomes invisible to the human eye. To read Maggs's story, Phipps is required to first sprinkle lemon juice over the letter in order to render the script visible, and then pass a mirror over the letter so that the backwards script becomes readable in the reflection of the mirror. Such means of Maggs's writing offers several important considerations for the endeavour of self-representation. Firstly, Maggs's covert means of writing can be read as a metaphor of his status of legality in England, and secondly, the mode of writing backwards also signifies Maggs's status as a convict who has the possibility of threatening the centre by its invisible presence in the antipodean colony. In this mode of writing, it is disguised that the letters are inscribed from antipodean side with the special care for those who read from the opposite side. Moreover, reading the reflection in the

42 Dickens, *Great Expectations*, p.342.

43 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 82.

44 Maggs's story of his beginning as the orphan child has particular echo to the writing of Peter Carey who considers the white settler writings in Australia as a 'a palimpsest of altered images, with no "essential" self to return to or call unequivocally its own.' Graham Huggan, *Peter Carey*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 16. Quotation modified.

mirror creates an uncanny double that paradoxically corrects the order of his writing and gazes back from the periphery simultaneously. Most importantly, it suggests the very idea of subversion that the opposite becomes the truth. The implication of such a mode of writing critiques the Eurocentric point of view. Even though Maggs's text does not turn the textual hegemony between the Metropolis and the Antipodes upside down, it resists the dominance of Oates's writing.

Therefore, presenting both possibilities and limitations, Carey's novel reconsiders the idea that the self-representation always represents the truth. It can only present a constructed truth and that can be highly crafted. In *Jack Maggs*, two different accounts about the same person or events are presented. One is written by a reverend author and the other is written by the person himself. The question one might ask is 'which is the truth?' To which, Carey's text seems to respond by reforming the question as 'how is the truth created?' and offer two alternatives: by force, and by time. Maggs destroys two manuscripts composed by Oates. One is, the first draft of a novel in progress because it includes contradictory accounts of his tragic relationship with Sophina Smith and the scene of his death. His act of throwing the draft manuscript into the Severn can be understood as the act of eliminating these accounts from the canonical discourse. The other is Oates's chapbooks which record mesmerism sessions.

'All this is me?'

'One way or another.'

Jack Maggs, for his part, untied each bundle and, although he did not read everything, he did read a good deal, enough to cause a very great embarrassment to show upon his face.

'My boy must not read this,' he said.

'We burn it', agreed Tobias Oates. 'We burn it now.'⁴⁵

Maggs is upset. He realises he talked too much and much of his memory is stolen. The records of mesmerism sessions contain elements to associate Maggs to New South Wales which Oates can use to construct Maggs as Australian. Moreover, he probably sees the unknown but recognisable self in the transcription.

Yet Maggs's expression 'my boy must not read this' is still ambiguous. Whether Oates's records contradict with Maggs's own story of himself that he has previously sent to his son or it generally damages his reputation, it is not certain. Perhaps, Oates's manuscript contains

45 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 331.

some descriptions that Maggs can recognise as true but will work against his interests. His reaction indicates that Maggs fabricates his life story to some degree in the letters that he addresses to Henry Phipps. A few evidences can be drawn by comparing the Oates's draft novel and Maggs's letter to Phipps. Maggs writes in the letter to Henry that Sophina Smith was his true love. But Tobias Oates writes that Sophina was not an angelic figure: she was the wife of his brother Thomas; they had an affair but Sophina eventually betrayed Jack. Therefore, his forceful action to destroy the transcription is understood to be a kind of censorship that prevents undesirable materials from publication and sustains the authority of his own discourse as the truth. As it is the power of the author figure that constructs the subject as a character in the novel, Maggs's censorship reminds us the ethics of writing the Other by using literary resources, though, here, in a controversial and sinister way.

iii) Disrupting the History

Jack Maggs thus employs a similar strategy of writing back to the author figure to J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986). In *Foe*, Coetzee situates his narrative as the preceding text to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.⁴⁶ In doing so, *Foe* demonstrates that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* obliterates the many accounts and complexities of the stories that have constituted it. While most would think that Defoe referred to Alexander Selkirk's journal, *Foe* charges Defoe with the elimination of other stories in the composition of *Robinson Crusoe*—the most notable of which is the elimination of the female narrator, Susan Barton, and eventually her entire castaway story. Yet, it is also true that Susan Barton requires help from Mr Foe because she has 'no art'⁴⁷ with which to compose her own story. Once again, and much like the events proposed in *Jack Maggs*, Susan Barton must sell her story as raw material that Mr Foe can turn into a more valuable commercial commodity. Interestingly, just as Susan Barton is concerned about how her story is to be told, so too Maggs is concerned about how the author figure controls the writing process. Thus, a battle is fought over the necessity to turn Maggs into 'a fictional character'.⁴⁸

Using a similar meta-fictional strategy of creating counter-discourse to Coetzee's *Foe*,

46 Sue Kossew, *Pen and Power: A Post-Colonial Reading of J.M. Coetzee and André Brink*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996, p. 163.

47 J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*, London: Penguin, 1987, p. 40.

48 Anthony Hassall, 'A Tale of Two Countries: *Jack Maggs* and Peter Carey's Fiction', *Australian Literary Studies*, 18:2 (1997), p. 129.

Carey complicates the history of literary production. That is, if the canonical text is considered to be authoritative because it is a preceding original, Coetzee attempts to subvert the authority of the canonical text by having his *Foe* written prior to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Thus, it is Defoe that referred to Coetzee's *Foe*. In *Jack Maggs*, although there are no resemblance between the titles, *The Death of Maggs* can be considered as an equivalent to Dickens's *Great Expectations*, given that there are some distinct similarities between the texts, especially in terms of content and the shared history of production. As for content, both novels feature the transported convict figure Abel Magwitch and Jack Maggs whose histories and names bear some similarities. As for the history of literary production, the narrator of *Jack Maggs* explains that after the premature death of Lizzie Warriner in 1837, Oates abandons writing of the book about Maggs. He resumes writing it in 1859, which appears first in serial form in 1860, then in single book volume in 1861. According to Dickens's biography, he started writing *Oliver Twist*, one of Dickensian pre-texts to *Jack Maggs*, in 1837 and, significantly, *Great Expectations* in 1860.⁴⁹ *Great Expectations* was first made available to the public in serial form, from 1860 to 1861, and was subsequently made into a three-book volume in 1861 that was revised into a single volume in 1862.⁵⁰ *Jack Maggs* records the period of writing and the year of publication of the single volume of *The Death of Maggs* one year earlier than Dickens's *Great Expectations*, making Tobias Oates's writing of the novel pre-dates Dickens's. Slight discrepancy of the chronology suggests the possibility that *Great Expectations* can be a rewriting of *The Death of Maggs* from Pip's point of view. As a result, Magwitch figure had to become a marginalised character.

Carey further complicates the chronology of literary production. His *Jack Maggs* bears the same title as Oates's novel in conception *Jack Maggs*, which later developed into *The Death of Maggs*. According to Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*, Tobias Oates begins writing a novel temporarily titled *Jack Maggs* between April and May in 1837 and terminates writing later in the same year.⁵¹ It is the first draft of Oates's *Jack Maggs* that Jack throws into the Severn. Oates's *Jack Maggs* is also the title of the novel in conception of which copyright Oates sells at the price of sixty pounds.⁵² This suggests the possibility of making Carey's *Jack Maggs* as

49 Ackroyd, *Dickens*, pp. 215-219. The association of the poor orphan child and crime is a shared subject matter for *Jack Maggs* and *Oliver Twist*, in which Dickens criticise the New Poor Law.

50 George Worth, *Great Expectations: an Annotated Bibliography*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1986, pp. 17-19.

51 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 35.

52 Carey, *Jack Maggs*, p. 241.

