Decolonising the Mind of the Antipodean Author: Gothic Tropes and Postcolonial Discourse in Peter Carey's *My Life as a Fake*

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Abstract This article analyses Peter Carey's novel *My Life as a Fake* (2003) through the lens of genre fiction, focusing on how the Gothic mode combines with key concepts in postcolonial studies. Intertextual references to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and analogies with Stephen King's *The Dark Half* (1990) and "The Importance of Being Bachman" (1996) are investigated to contextualise Carey's postcolonial Gothic. Furthermore, taking a cue from Frantz Fanon and Oswaldo de Andrade's theoretical studies, I argue that the main characters of this novel display attitudes that allegorically reflect the stages through which the national literature of a former settler colony is shaped.

Keywords Australia. Peter Carey. Postcolonial Gothic. Cultural cannibalism. Intertextuality. Decolonisation.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Ern Malley Hoax and The McCorkle Hoax. – 3 Intertextuality in Carey's Postcolonial Gothic. – 4 When the Monster Writes Back.

1   Introduction

In his narratives, Australian author Peter Carey has widely investigated the complex relationship between reality and invention, exploring the ideological, cultural and moral labyrinths that surround the author and their work. Furthermore, by rewriting history from marginal perspectives or turning historical events into fantastic stories set in dystopian worlds, Carey has challenged the purported objectiveness of historical accounts, giving voice to those subaltern subjects who were misrepresented in Western colonial metanarratives.

Carey often draws on the Gothic mode to depict Australia as a land of oddities, a Western world turned upside-down where there is neither justice nor sense of belonging. His 1970s short stories often begin as fairytales to gradually turn into horror narratives where destitute characters struggle against invisible powers. His novels *Bliss* (1981) and *The Tax Inspector* (1991) deal with death, resurrection and violence, depicting a dreadful and merciless world where Australian outcasts challenge an establishment perceived as a dark and overwhelming presence. In *Jack Maggs* (1997), Carey rewrites Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* using Gothic conventions to parody the stereotype of Australians as people of convict descent longing to be recognised as children of the Empire. Another example of the use of Gothic features in Carey's fiction is *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994), a postmodern Gothic novel in which the main character is a circus freak who turns his monstrosity into an advantage, struggling against the pernicious influence of American cultural models in 1990s Efica/Australia.

This article investigates Carey's use of Gothic themes and structural principles in his novel *My Life as a Fake* (2003). Developing the Gothic motif of the Doppelgänger in two postcolonial contexts, namely 1940s Australia and 1970s Malaysia, Carey investigates the dark side of colonisation on a political and cultural level. In *My Life as a Fake*, Australia's "particular susceptibility to hoaxing and fakery" (MacFarlane 2005, 340) is depicted as a condition connected with its self-perception as a second-rate culture, which in Carey's view is an ideological legacy of cultural imperialism.

I argue that this novel represents a turning point in Australian postcolonial Gothic, since Carey shifts the core discourse from the trauma of colonialism to the cultural position of the postcolonial author. Firstly, I will provide an overview of the historical event that inspired the novel, namely the Ern Malley Hoax which was perpetrated in Melbourne in 1943. Secondly, I intend to focus on intertextuality, showing how Carey draws on a Frankensteinean narrative pattern to rewrite one of the founding myths of Australian contemporary literature. Contextually, I will highlight the proximity of Carey's novel to Stephen King's Gothic metafiction, exploring how Carey develops the theme of the authorial double to reveal deep-seated

insecurities of Australian authors in the postcolonial era. Thirdly, drawing on Franz Fanon's tripartition of the process of cultural liberation of former colonies and Oswald de Andrade's notion of cultural cannibalism, I will read the main characters of *My Life as a Fake* as representatives of different steps in the process of cultural decolonisation of Australian literature.

2   The Ern Malley Hoax and The McCorkle Hoax

My Life as a Fake is inspired by the Ern Malley Hoax, a literary forgery which inflamed Melbourne's cultural and intellectual scene in the 1940s. The hoax was perpetrated by James McAuley and Harold Stewart, two young conservative poets who opposed the sterile emulation of European avant-garde by contemporary Australian authors. "Much of the poetry they saw around them in Australia and despised was either debased Victoriana or second hand-modernism" (Heyward 2003, 67); rather, they wished for a new national poetry based on Australia's own history and cultural tradition. Blaming those Australian publishers who supported European aesthetic tendencies and neglected local forms of artistic expression, they decided to play a trick on one of the most popular literary journals at the time. To unveil the lack of meaning and sensibility at the core of what they saw as transient literary trends, they created a fictitious poet, Ern Malley, and crafted a series of pseudomodernist poems for the purpose of parody. The fake collection, entitled *The Darkening Ecliptic*, was a literary pastiche consisting of verses by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, passages from Shakespeare's *Pericles* and random sentences from an army brochure. Accompanying the 17 poems with a cover letter purported to be from the author's sister, Ethel Malley, McAuley and Stewart submitted the manuscript to *Angry Penguins*, a Melbourne art and literary magazine edited by Maxwell Henley Harris. Harris hailed the poems as a first example of Australian modernism, "a new extraordinary voice in Australian poetry" (Heyward 2003, 81) and published them in the next issue of his magazine. Seven months later, the *Fact* in Sydney unveiled the hoax as "an experiment to debunk what was regarded as a pretentious kind of modern verse-writing" (171). Not only was Harris professionally discredited for failing to spot a fake, but later he was also taken to trial on charges of publishing obscene poetry because of the erotic content of some compositions. Despite the public humiliation of Harris and the consequent failure of his magazine, *The Darkening Ecliptic* paved the way for avant-garde poetry in Australia, regardless of the fictitiousness of its author.

Taking a cue from the Ern Malley Affair, *My Life as a Fake* tells the story of the unsuccessful Australian poet Christopher Chubb who, exacerbated by countless professional failures, mocks Melbourne's

literary establishment by means of a fraud. He creates a fake working-class poet, Bob McCorkle, and writes a collection of poems combining European modernist verses and scientific prose. After creating McCorkle's fictitious biography and even a photomontage to make the fake more believable, he submits the poetic manuscript to *Personae*, a renowned literary magazine edited by his former schoolmate David Weiss. Weiss, who has always despised Chubb's works, is otherwise dazzled by McCorkle's oeuvre, which he sees as a pioneering modernist work in Australia, and publishes the poems in his magazine. Some months later, the hoax is revealed by Melbourne journals and Weiss is taken to court for the same reason as Harris. During the trial, a shady figure appears out of nowhere claiming to be the author of the fake poems. The mysterious character is Bob McCorkle, who begins to harass Chubb claiming for a birth certificate which would provide evidence of his existence. Since Chubb is unable to fulfil his request, McCorkle takes his revenge by kidnapping Chubb's daughter Tina and escapes to Malaysia. Thirty years after these events, Sarah, the young director of a London poetry magazine, meets Chubb in Kuala Lumpur and gets involved in the hunt for the manuscripts written by McCorkle during his self-exile in the Malaysian jungle.

Chubb and McCorkle's story, which is readable as a metafictional revisitation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, is intertwined with excerpts from the original court transcript of the trial of Max Harris, fragments of *The Darkening Ecliptic*, famous modernist verses and Conradian descriptions of the Malaysian jungle. Furthermore, the novel is imbued with Carey's own reflections on Australian cultural history, which give voice to the author's profound scepticism about essentialist definitions of national literature and identity. Through an intricated web of intertextual and metatextual references, Carey expands the possibilities of postcolonial Gothic, defamiliarising traditional genre conventions and tropes to unveil those contradictions and insecurities that have characterised Australia's self-perception as a periphery of the British cultural empire.

3 Intertextuality in Carey's Postcolonial Gothic

Peter Otto underlines the shaping role played by intertextuality in Gothic fiction:

> Gothic seems to be a labyrinth in which texts echo, plagiarise, but also recontextualise and transform their precursors and competitors. (Otto 2003, 47)

Thanks to this dynamic referentiality, Gothic is a literary mode that suits changing times. Through the Gothic mode contemporary au-

thors interrogate and deconstruct existing social norms and beliefs, revealing the darkest side of the self and the sociocultural milieu that lies hidden within. From this perspective, Gothic provides

> an important, multi-layered, and profoundly symbolic scheme for dealing with Western culture's most fundamental fears and concerns. (Hogle, Smith 2009, 1)

Intertextuality and recontextualisation are distinguishing features of Carey's fiction, which investigates the themes of identity, (in)authenticity and creativity, highlighting the nature of history as a hypertext consisting of truths interwoven with lies. *My Life as a Fake* is a literary work which overflows with intertextual references. Not only does Carey insert in his novel fragments from Milton's *Areopagitica* and *Paradise Lost*, verses from Ezra Pound and entire poems from *The Darkening Ecliptic*, but he also develops a storyline which shows great thematic and structural similarities with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) and with two works by Stephen King: the novel *The Dark Half* (1989) and the essay "The Importance of Being Bachman" (1996).

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a key intertextual reference in *My Life as a Fake*. A first significative analogy between the two works lies in their shared philosophy of composition. In the 1830 preface to her novel, Shelley discussed the composite nature of a work of art:

> Invention [...] does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. (1969, viii)

Discussing *My Life as a Fake*, Robert MacFarlane points out that

> One reason why Shelley's *Frankenstein* provides a peculiarly relevant counterpoint to Carey's is that her novel was itself patched together from numerous textual sources, including Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* and Erasmus Darwin's field notes. (2005, 342)

In Carey's novel, which Silvia Albertazzi renames "*Postmodern Prometheus*" (2008, 68), a failed Australian poet named Chubb creates a fictitious character, Bob McCorkle, and gives him a photographic identity by patching together the pictures of three different men. His artistic performance echoes the creative act of Shelley's Frankenstein, who restores life by combining and galvanising parts of different corpses. Despite drawing on *Frankenstein* as myth rather than literature, Carey directly quotes from the novel to signal his literary

debt to Shelley. When McCorkle complains about his miserable condition as a character trapped between the manuscript world and the real world, he recites *Frankenstein*'s epigraph, which is itself a quotation from Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

> Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay | To mould me man, Did I solicit thee | From darkness to promote me? (Carey 2003, 95)

MacFarlane argues that Carey draws on *Frankenstein* "to provide the theme (or, rather, the mood) of Australian Gothic" (2005, 341), a literary mode Gerry Turcotte traces back to colonial fiction, underlining the connection between Gothic tropes and Australia's colonial experience:

> The Gothic is a literature that deals with alienation, disjunction, terror, and conflict [...] The colonist is uprooted, estranged, terrified, on alien territory, and pursued (if sometimes only in the imagination) by a daunting predator: which in Australia was alternatively perceived as the Bush, the convict past, bush rangers or the Aboriginal population. (Turcotte 1993, 129)

In his essay on postcolonial Gothic fiction, Turcotte maintains that in contemporary Australian novels the Gothic mode usually reflects

> the impact of putatively superior old world values over the unsophisticated 'new world' space. (2017, 210)

In most Australian postcolonial narratives, this conflict between old and new values results in the representation of spatial displacement and the uncanny, a concept which reminds of a condition of "unsettledness [folded into a] taken-for-granted mode of occupation" (Gelder, Jacobs 1998, 24). By turning familiar places into alien settings that are perceived as dreadful by their supposed rightful owners, contemporary authors such as Richard Flanagan, Kate Grenville, Tim Winton and Alexis Wright call into question the assumptions of nation, identity and sense of belonging. Carey too has often used Gothic tropes to depict disturbing colonial and postcolonial realities in his narratives. For instance, in the short story *Do you Love me?* (1975) displacement is taken to its extreme when entire portions of Australian peripheral areas begin to vanish, with the phenomenon gradually extending to human beings. Another example of Carey's postcolonial Gothic can be noticed in his novel *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), where he depicts a Conradian and perturbing journey into the heart of Australia's indigenous territories.

In *My Life as a Fake*, Chubb defines Australia as "a dreadful, dreadful country" (Carey 2003, 52) which has been plagued by injustice and mendacity since its founding. He describes the Supreme Court

of Victoria as a cold place evocative of a "dark, merciless world" (54), while McCorkle questions Australia's level of civilisation, since it is a country where police is able to harass an editor and where

> we seldom understand that we must be prepared to fight for is- sues bigger than an umpire's decision at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. (77-8)

In Carey's novel, Malaysia is also a place reminiscent of a dramatic colonial history. Kuala Lumpur is depicted as a labyrinth where "the British colonial past [is] still almost the present" (11) and Sarah's de- scription of the city – which expresses the imperialists' view of their dominions – connotes annoyance and disgust. As Graham Huggan suggests, this novel can be read as a polyphonic narrative, "a site for competing narratives of national belonging" (1996, 50). In *My Life as a Fake*, English and Australian characters express views of nation- ality which are intimately related to their perception of their polit- ical and cultural position with respect to one another. While Sarah and her English friend Slater embody the Imperial gaze[1] over Brit- ish former colonies, Chubb perceives his Australian identity in terms of political and cultural marginality. It's the stateless fantastic char- acter McCorkle who expresses a new idea of nationality which orig- inates from his knowledge of Western culture and his total immer- sion in Malaysia's natural landscape. McCorkle's 'nation' is a place of the mind, a Rushdian imaginary homeland which resembles Ma- laysia but is covertly inhabited by stories and myths from all over the world. Carey's use of Gothic tropes to depict Kuala Lumpur's ur- ban reality and Malaysian treacherous jungle contributes to high- lighting McCorkle's idea of nationality as a cross-cultural construct which sometimes generates insecurity and self-doubt.

Furthermore, Carey draws on Gothic motives to investigate the darkest recesses of the mind, creating a "psychic drama about a writ- er haunted by his own creativity" (MacFarlane 2005, 342). Taking a cue from MacFarlane's considerations, I argue that in *My Life as a Fake* the theme of the monstrous double contributes to encouraging reflection on the process of ideological emancipation that antipode- an authors have gone through in the postcolonial era.

Nathalie Martinière underlines how McCorkle's in-betweenness is representative of Australian authors' difficulty in finding a place in the world of literature:

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1 The postcolonial concept of 'Imperial gaze' was introduced by E. Ann Kaplan in her book *Looking for the Other Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (1997). It implies a unidirectional movement from the imperial agent to the colonial subject: "In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonized is continually located in the gaze of the Im- perial Other, the *grand autre*" (Ashcroft et al. 2013, 187).

> English literature is responsible for the creation of such 'monsters' as Australian literature and the Australian writer: physically, Mc-Corkle is a cross between Shakespeare and an Australian footballer. But even monsters may want their freedom. The story thus becomes a metaphor for the question of literary filiation and alienation between England and Australia, dramatized in the novel […] in terms of human filiation. (Martinière 2009, 159)

Carey's monster can be seen as a dreadful materialisation of the repressed, or the visible symptom of the distressing sociocultural alienation suffered by an author from a former colony who feels trapped in a second-rate sociocultural milieu.

Even though Carey has never mentioned Stephen King's Gothic metafiction as a source of inspiration for his novel, their works show a common interest in exposing the sociopolitical and cultural anxieties of the postmodern world. While King's narratives display the private and social fears of American people and intellectuals in the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate and post-Cold War era, Carey's fiction explores Australia's postcolonial condition as a precarious state of mind related to ontological insecurity.

My Life as a Fake presents interesting analogies with King's *The Dark Half*, a horror novel based on the 'Bachman affair', in which King was exposed as the real author of the books published under the pseudonym of Richard Bachman. *The Dark Half* deals with the story of Thad Beaumont, a successful author who writes under the pen name of George Stark. When his identity is unveiled, Thad stages a mock funeral and burial service for his pseudonym, but Stark emerges from the grave as a physical entity to avenge his own death. Thad is unable to explain how his alter-ego has come out to become "a separate person" (King 1990, 206) and the same goes for Carey's character Chubb, who has no idea of how he "has brought McCorkle forth" (Carey 2003, 98). Thad sees his pseudonym as a demon who should be taken "back to hell where he belongs!" (King 1990, 456). Similarly, Chubb supposes he has brought McCorkle forth "from hell" (Carey 2003, 98). Furthermore, McCorkle shares the same fate as King's alter ego Bachman, who dies of "cancer of the pseudonym" (see King 1999, v). In Carey's novel, McCorkle dies of a rare form of cancer, but there is little doubt that the real cause of his death is the disease his creator Chubb "invented" for him (Carey 2003, 253).

4 When the Monster Writes Back

Carey has often discussed Australia's obsession to define its national and cultural identity in his narratives. Asked in an interview for his reason to write a novel based on the Ern Malley Hoax, he replied that he was interested in "the effect of the fake on an 'anxious self-doubting culture'" (Gaile 2005a, 15). His idea of "self-doubting culture" is intimately connected with Australia's protracted emulation of overseas models as a compensation for its supposed cultural lack of sophistication. In *My Life as a Fake* this cultural cringe[2] is expressed by Chubbs' words when he tries to give a reason for the hoax he staged:

> we have a terror of being out-of-date. [...] They call it the Tyranny of Distance[3] now, so I am told. (Carey 2003, 29)

In his reconfiguration of the Frankensteinean myth, Carey investigates the psychological struggle of an Australian writer who tries to emancipate himself from a sterile imitation of foreign models by experimenting with new styles and techniques. Appropriating Chubb's literary work and investing it with new meanings, McCorkle is representative of the phenomenon of "*cultural anthropophagy*" that Albertazzi (2013, 48) associates with the third phase of cultural self-determination in a former colony.

According to Frantz Fanon, the creation of a national culture and literature in former colonies moves through three main phases: "the period of unqualified assimilation, the literature of just-before-the battle, and the fighting literature" (1963, 222). In the first phase, native intellectuals tend to emulate the mother country's literary trends; in the second phase, they turn to the past of their people, recalling lost or inert cultural traditions; in the third phase, they become able to reach a "zone of occult instability" (227) where social and cultural values are ceaselessly re-negotiated to shape a new national identity. Fanon's theoretical framework – which was designed to discuss the political and cultural emancipation of Indigenous peo-

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2 The concept of "cultural cringe" was developed by Australian author and critic Arthur Angell Phillips in a famous essay published in *Meanjin* in 1950. Using this expression to describe an Australian tendency to judge national literature and art as inferior to British and American models, Phillips considered this 'inferiority complex' a legacy of "colonial situation" (Phillips 1950, 301). According to Phillips, this psychological and cultural conditioning hindered the development of a genuinely Australian national literature, making Australian authors and intellectuals feeling immersed in a second-rate culture emulative of the overseas giants of literature.

3 The term "tyranny of distance" was coined by the Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey in his book *The Tyranny of the Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (1966). The book explains how Australia's "isolation from Europe" (Blainey 1966, viii) has been central to shaping the country's historical and cultural identity.

ple in invaded colonies – must be partly revised to be applied to settler colonies. The second phase identified by Fanon is absent in the history of non-Indigenous Australia, since the sociocultural milieu of white Australian authors and intellectuals was and still is primarily European. Richard White points out that

> The [Australian] national identity is not 'Born of the lean loins of the country itself' [...] but is part of the 'cultural baggage' which Europeans have brought with them, and with which we continue to encumber ourselves. (1984, ix)

My Life as a Fake presents three characters who are representative of Australia's challenging search for cultural recognition in the postcolonial era. David Weiss is the embodiment of the cultural cringe suffered by a former colony bogged in the copying phase. In his magazine, he promotes works which are second-rate imitations of English and American modernist poetry. Chubb opposes this trend which, in his view, results in a sterile levelling of style and content in the national literature. His terror of being ridiculed as 'out of date' results in the invention of McCorkle:

> He had been born into a second-rate culture, or so he thought, and one can see in that austere bookshelf all the passion that later led to the birth of Bob McCorkle – a terror that he might be somehow tricked into admiring the second-rate, the derivative, the shallow, the provincial. (Carey 2003, 84)

Chubb's concerns are justified by the attitudes of the other characters, who look down on him as an example of mediocre intellectual. John Slater, an English poet and Sarah's friend, depicts Chubb as an "Aussie brawler", a man endowed with "the most awful Irish pugnacity" and "the vulgar certainty of the autodidact" (109), while Sarah wants to test Chubb's "tiny antipodean brain" (21) by making him read an English translation of Stephan George. Slater and Sarah's considerations reflect a typically English, paternalistic – and imperialistic – idea of Australian men of letters as second-rate authors unable to either understand or create literature. This is a cultural bias Carey himself was subject to at the beginning of his career:

> When I started to write I believe in London people would say there wasn't any Australian literature and that an Australian author was a freak, a dog standing on hind legs and singing. (Carey 2001, 55; Author's translation)

Despite criticising Australia's cultural paralysis, Chubb himself is bogged in a phase of literary emulation like his editor Weiss. Their

divergences are just a matter of taste. Whereas Weiss is a supporter of modernism, Chubb claims for a symbolist national poetry which could measure up to the works of Donne, Shakespeare and Mallarmé.

From a Freudian perspective, McCorkle is a kind of Gothic double who "realises […] the virtual potential of the self, the unwalked paths of existence" (Fusillo quoted in Albertazzi 2008, 66, my translation), writing the poetic masterpiece Chubb would never been able to write and creating a family which actively takes part in his artistic enterprise. From an allegorical perspective, McCorkle is a new kind of intellectual in a postcolonial reality dominated by Western models. His "disruptive, mischievous, un-pretty antipodean voice" (Ashcroft 2004, 37) turns Chubb's poems into the manifesto of a national self-determination. McCorkle is like an antipodean Caliban who speaks his condition distorting the language of the cultural establishment:

> And the voice, which its original author had always imagined to be some variation of the standard BBC English, was here so fierce and nasal, hoarse, ravaged by failure and regret. […]
> This was and was not the poem Chubb had written. It had been conceived as a parody and the first key to the puzzle of the hoax, but this lunatic had somehow recast it without altering a word. What had been clever had now become true, the song of the autodidact, the colonial, the damaged beast of the antipodes. (Carey 2003, 81-2)

Not only does McCorkle invest Chubb's literary pastiche with historical and ideological implications through a dramatic performance, but he also writes his own works. After kidnapping Chubb's daughter Tina as a revenge for the childhood he was deprived of, McCorkle escapes to Malaysia, where he creates a poetic masterpiece that dwarfs Chubb's trivial poetry.

According to Andreas Gaile,

> in Carey's variation of the Frankensteinean narrative pattern, his monster strikes back by writing back. McCorkle's literary testament, says the narrator, bears the 'fierce sarcastic title' […] *My Life as a Fake* and is perceived by Chubb as an 'accusation' […] levelled against the exercise of his artistic mastery. (2005b, 45)

In his Malaysian poems, McCorkle embeds Western culture into a new form of transcultural and translingual poetry. One of these works is depicted by Sarah as an astonishing juxtaposition of familiar and foreign images:

> nothing felt the slightest bit false or old fashioned. It slashed and stabbed its way across the page, at once familiar and alien. (Carey 2003, 26)

McCorkle has neither a past nor memories because he was created at the age of 24. When he arrives in Malaysia, he lacks the words necessary to speak the world around him:

> Bob McCorkle had his country stolen […]. He came here, knew no names, nothing. Our job has been to gather all the names for him. (232)

In the jungle, Tina and McCorkle encounter Mrs Lim, a vagrant Chinese woman who joins them. During their wandering across Malaysia, Tina and Mrs Lim collect the names of plants and flowers which McCorkle turns into a poetic natural encyclopaedia of the country. Various Indigenous characters give them the native names of national botanical species, contributing to a collective reconceptualisation of nature and space through the Malaysian language. Reading McCorkle's manuscript, Sarah judges the poems as

> clearly superior to the nineteenth-century accounts of Raffles and even of Wallace. (238)

In this passage, Sarah mentions two examples of those British statesmen and travellers who, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, created taxonomies of Malaysian flora and fauna, cancelling native nomenclatures and encoding colonial aspirations of expansion in their journals. Following Stephen Greenblatt's suggestion that renaming has much to do with the "linguistic appropriation of the land" (Greenblatt 1991, 103), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue that colonisation began as mapping, re-classification and renaming of reality:

> In all cases the land so colonized are literally reinscribed, written over, as the names and languages of the indigenes are replaced by new names, or are corrupted into new and Europeanized forms by the cartographer and explorer. (Ashcroft et al. 2013, 39)

Self-exiled in the remotest areas of Malaysia, McCorkle renames and therefore ideologically decolonises the physical and spatial reality of his chosen land, turning it into a transcultural space of belonging. McCorkle performs what José Oswald de Andrade identified as "Cannibalism. Absorption of the sacred enemy" (Bary 1991, 43), namely the assimilation, contamination and cannibalisation of Western languages and stories in the artistic output of the colonies. Using the English language and combining it with the Malaysian patois, McCorkle rewrites the natural history of Malaysia within a global revisitation of the World's story. When Sarah describes McCorkle's poetry, she uses a metaphor which evokes macabre images from Gothic narratives:

> He had ripped up history and nailed it back together with its vis-
> cera on the outside, all that glistening green truth showing in the
> rip marks. (Carey 2003, 235)

McCorkle has dismembered and reassembled the story of the World.
He has created fifty manuscripts instilled with myths, histories and
theologies, a monstrous literary oeuvre cannibalising the hegemo-
nic stories through which power is legitimised. McCorkle's manu-
scripts are a philosophical and literary testament in which the au-
thor shows how art – like history – always implies a falsification of
reality. Indeed, the only truth exposed in his poetry is a 'glistening
green truth', the truth of the matter, the fact that Malaysia exists as
a physical reality different from its descriptions.

In the last passages of his novel, Carey draws again on intertextu-
al references to develop the theme of the search for truth, a search
that is typical of Western cultures founded on the tyranny of the sin-
gle story. After Chubb's death by poisoning, Sarah returns to Eng-
land, where she has a mental breakdown trying to discover whether
McCorkle really existed or was a mere invention:

> I was now above such scrapes and hurts for I had turned into one
> of those 'sad friends of Truth' Milton describes in his *Areopagitica*:
> 'such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made
> for the mangl'd body of Osiris'. The body of truth, he meant, dis-
> membered and scattered – in Greek, *sparagmos*. (265)

In presenting the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris filtered through
John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), Carey focuses on the most horrif-
ic part of that story to depict the end of Sarah's futile search for the
truth and to reassess the compositive principle of his novel: each lit-
erary work revisits previous stories, themes and modes, taking the
shape of a monstrous intertext where nothing is truly 'original'.

While from a metaliterary perspective *My Life as a Fake* is a man-
ifesto of the (in)authenticity and hybridity of every work of literature,
from a postcolonial perspective it is a counternarrative which disman-
tles cultural stereotypes and challenges hierarchies between centres
and peripheries. Carey's novel turns the cultural history of Australia
into a Gothic narrative in which an author from a former colony reach-
es a new national and cultural awareness, and wherein the supporters
of a purported first-rate culture are led to change their view of high
literature, history, and reality as well. Sarah, who hopes that the dis-
covery of a foreign literary masterpiece could save her magazine from
financial ruin, can be seen as an intellectual type of imperialist will-
ing to appropriate an antipodean work of art for the sake of the Brit-
ish cultural Empire. Furthermore, her belief that only by publishing
them in her London-based literary magazine can McCorkle's poems

be saved from oblivion is illustrative of the mother country's paternalistic attitude towards its colonies. However, the only truth which emerges at the end of Sarah's desperate search is that an antipodean work of art and the genius that created it can exist even without the recognition from the centre of Europe's cultural Empire.

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