

Rewriting History of the Marginalized Voices in Peter Carey's Oscar and Lucinda

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Abstract

This article examines the exclusions inherent in official Australian history as addressed by Peter Carey in his novel Oscar and Lucinda . Drawing on Edward Said's Orientalism and Gayatri Spivak's theory of the subaltern, the study critiques the colonial narratives that marginalize aboriginal people, transported convicts, and women . These groups, often silenced in historical accounts, are reimagined in Carey's historiographical revision, which endeavors to construct a more inclusive history that amplifies the voices of the oppressed . Through a qualitative methodology and an interpretative framework informed by Linda Hutcheon's A Poetics of Postmodernism, the analysis situates the novel as a critique of the dominant colonial discourse . Carey's narrative interrogates the mechanisms of historical erasure by highlighting the contributions and sufferings of marginalized groups, particularly the violence endured by aboriginal peoples and the systemic oppression of women . The novel critiques the colonial framework that perpetuates domination and exclusion while re-centering those traditionally relegated to the margins . Themes such as cultural destruction, patriarchal control, and the alienation faced by marginalized groups are explored through the lives of the protagonists, Oscar and Lucinda, who embody the intersection of these struggles . Carey's work positions aboriginal people and convicts not merely as historical subjects but as integral witnesses to and agents in Australia's interconnected history . By weaving their voices into the narrative, the novel challenges the authority of official histories and offers a more nuanced and ambivalent perspective on the colonial past . Ultimately, Oscar and Lucinda critiques the orientalist and patriarchal

underpinnings of Australian historiography while advocating for a reimagined historical consciousness that acknowledges and integrates subaltern voices.

Keywords: *Colonial discourse, Mimicry, Historiography, Aboriginal people, Subaltern, Silence of the marginalized, Comparative historiography*

Introduction

Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* challenges the official narratives of Australian history by giving voice to marginalized groups, particularly aboriginal people and convicts, through postmodern historiographical techniques and personal meta-narratives.

Oscar and Lucinda is a landmark example of historiographical metafiction that challenges traditional historical narratives by giving voice to the marginalized and interrogating colonial discourse. The textual analysis of this novel gains depth when examined through the lens of Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* and Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory. Both frameworks enable a critique of the ways colonial histories suppress or exclude Indigenous and marginalized voices, and how Carey reconstructs Australian history to amplify these silenced perspectives.

The objectives of this paper are to explore *Oscar and Lucinda* as a postmodern historiographical metafiction that critiques colonial narratives by examining how Carey subverts traditional historical accounts. First, the analysis focuses on the representation of marginalized voices, including aboriginal people, convicts, and women, who are often overlooked or silenced in official histories of Australia. The study also investigates how Carey reconstructs Australian history by incorporating personal family narratives and memory, thereby providing a more nuanced and inclusive version of the past. Furthermore, the research delves into the interplay between nation, gender, and trauma, exploring how these factors shape a multicultural identity in postcolonial Australia, particularly within the context of the country's colonial legacy. Through this, the analysis highlights Carey's effort to challenge the dominant historical narratives and amplify the voices of those historically excluded from official accounts.

This analysis focuses on two central research questions. First, it explores how the novel challenges official Australian historical narratives by deconstructing the traditional, exclusionary accounts of the nation's past. The novel critiques colonialism and its associated power structures, offering alternative perspectives on history. Second, the study examines how the novel highlights the experiences of marginalized groups, such as aboriginal people and convicts, emphasizing their struggles, silences, and often-overlooked contributions to Australian history. By addressing these questions, the analysis aims to understand how Carey amplifies the voices of those excluded

from mainstream historical accounts, and how these voices are central to the novel's postcolonial critique.

This study is significant as it contributes to the understanding of how postcolonial literature reshapes historical narratives to include marginalized voices . By examining *Oscar and Lucinda*, this research highlights the transformative power of fiction in challenging hegemonic histories and fostering a more inclusive multicultural identity . It underscores the importance of acknowledging diverse experiences and perspectives in rethinking Australia's colonial past, ultimately offering insights into broader discussions on history, identity, and social justice in the postcolonial world.

Methods

This article followed document analysis method. The detailed procedures of this study are below .

Historiographical Metafiction

Historiography examines the knowledge of the past, its transmission, and the methods used to interpret and record historical events, analyzing narratives while scrutinizing the methodologies that shape them (Cheng 4).

Lorenz (1999) notes that historiography is often confined to specific spatial-temporal settings, following a chronological, nation-state framework that "tends to localize explanation for historiographical developments within national contexts and to neglect international dimensions" (p . 38) . This reflects how historical narratives often prioritize national perspectives over universal ones.

Official history, based on government-sponsored records, often lacks objectivity and balance . Blumenson (1962) critiques its limitations, arguing it produces a "bland, cautious, diluted version of the truth" due to political constraints and suppression of critical information (p . 153).

In contrast, unwritten histories among common people capture lived experiences and marginalized voices, providing an alternative to official accounts . These oral narratives challenge omissions and biases, fostering a more inclusive and authentic understanding of history.

This discussion highlights the tension between selective, politically influenced official history and inclusive history, which seeks to reflect diverse societal experiences . Historiography emerges as a tool for critiquing and revising narratives to capture the complexities of the past . On the honesty of official history, Blumenson asserts:

Historians in the employ of the government, they say, are court historians, "kept" men who allow their work to be censored or who censor it themselves before publication. This historian was conscious of his official role that he could not hear include material unfavorable to the government and to high-ranking officials and commanders. Officials influence officials, they raise legitimate issue, many academicians continue to have reservations, and still others remain entirely dubious of the value of an official product (pp.153-155).

Carey critiques official histories as partial and sanitized, shaped by government interests that exclude marginalized perspectives. As Blumenson (1962) notes, "Historians in the employ of the government...allow their work to be censored or censor it themselves before publication" (pp. 153-155). This leads to histories that prioritize the powerful while ignoring groups like aboriginal people and convicts.

In *Oscar and Lucinda*, Carey subverts official narratives by centering the traumas of those excluded. Through this novel, he explores religious conflict, gender inequality, and cultural displacement to critique colonial power structures. He also highlights the erasure of aboriginal perspectives and the injustices they endured under colonial settlers.

Carey portrays aboriginal people as the "Other," drawing on Said's *Orientalism* to show how settlers dehumanized them to justify subjugation. The massacre at "Darkwood," a fictionalized atrocity, exemplifies how aboriginal people were depicted as barriers to progress.

Lucinda's recognition of her inheritance as "stolen" exposes the myths of colonial narratives. Carey uses her awareness to critique the foundational lies of Australia's history and the enduring legacy of colonialism in societal attitudes.

Subalternity and the Silenced Voices

Gayatri Spivak's assertion that the subaltern cannot speak within hegemonic structures finds resonance in Carey's novel. The aboriginal people, portrayed as silent victims of colonial violence, embody the subaltern condition. However, Carey challenges this silence by incorporating their presence in the narrative, even as secondary characters. Smith's internalized guilt for his complicity in aboriginal massacres illustrates the suppressed recognition of colonial atrocities within settler narratives.

Similarly, the plight of women, particularly Lucinda and Miriam, aligns with Spivak's exploration of gendered subalternity. Their marginalization within patriarchal and colonial structures highlights the intersection of gender and colonialism in maintaining oppressive power dynamics. For instance, Lucinda's entrepreneurial spirit

and her defiance of societal expectations subvert patriarchal norms, but her agency is constrained by the societal limitations imposed on women of her time.

Deconstructing History through Narrative Techniques

Carey employs metafictional elements, as Hutcheon explores in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, to question the reliability of historical narratives. Unreliable narrators and fragmented storytelling critique the singular "truth" of official histories, aligning with Spivak's call to recognize history's constructed nature.

The glass church symbolizes colonial ambition and fragility, with its destruction representing the unsustainability of exclusionary narratives and the need for inclusive histories that embrace marginalized voices.

Carey humanizes convicts, often reduced to laborers in records, and critiques gendered exclusions through Lucinda's complex characterization, emphasizing intersectional approaches to historiography.

Intertwining Said's *Orientalism* with Spivak's subaltern theory, Carey deconstructs colonial historiography. His use of historiographical metafiction amplifies oppressed voices, urging a reimagining of history that is inclusive and truthful.

Drawing on Hutcheon, Carey reconstructs history with meta-narratives and personal memory, presenting a multifaceted and contested account. This counter-narrative dismantles hegemonic histories and advocates for a pluralistic understanding of Australia's past.

Carey critiques omissions and biases in official history while affirming the value of diverse narratives for a more equitable record. As Thompson (1993) observes, Australian history contains omissions that exclude aboriginal voices:

Australian history replicates that of America in some significant ways. Both were originally established as colonies. In both cases, this establishment entailed the displacement and subjugation of an indigenous people by a predominantly Anglo-Celtic Population. Both grew as a result of migration from the fraught places of the world. Australia is perhaps more confusing to Americans than to the English because to the English Australian has always had a colonial identity. A vision of a narrative that does not exist but it is surely imminent. This would be narrative written in the manner of working back through the layers of colonial and projecting an aboriginal view of the immensely complex net in which we are all, without exception, entangled (pp.61-63).

Carey's revision mirrors Australian history's colonial trajectory, sharing similarities with the U.S., as both nations displaced indigenous populations under Anglo-Celtic settlers. While migration shaped both societies, Australia's distinct colonial identity

remains entangled in narratives that obscure indigenous perspectives.

Carey envisions a history that excavates these colonial layers, projecting an aboriginal worldview and disrupting dominant colonial discourse . As noted, "A vision of a narrative that does not exist but is surely imminent" highlights the potential for inclusive storytelling (pp . 61-63) . His novel embodies this vision by amplifying silenced voices.

Aligned with Hutcheon's postmodernist approach, Carey challenges official history's authority, presenting the hardships of aboriginal people, convicts, and women . *Oscar and Lucinda* serves as a counter-narrative advocating for a historiography that reflects Australia's diverse and entangled history.

Aboriginal people's exclusion from official history highlights significant flaws in documenting their culture and contributions . As a postmodern nation, Australia must integrate diverse voices into its historical narratives, but this inclusivity remains insufficient.

Historiographical metafiction, a narrative technique critiquing and rewriting history, employs layered storytelling to uncover biases and omissions . By reevaluating the past, such narratives emphasize plurality and subvert traditional historiography.

Jameson (1972) argues historical representation faces a crisis akin to the linear novel, shaped by subjective interpretations and power dynamics . Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* critiques traditional histories, advocating for an inclusive and multifaceted understanding of the past:

The most intelligent "Solution" to such a crisis does not consist in abandoning historiography altogether, as an impossible aim and an ideological category all at once, but rather as in the modernist aesthetic itself in reorganization . Its traditional procedures are on a different level . Althusser's proposal seems the wisest in this situation: as old fashioned narrative or "Realistic" historiography becomes problematic, the historian should reformulate her vocation but any longer to produce some vivid presentation to history "as it really happens" but rather to produce the concept of history (Jamson 1972, cited in Hutcheon,1988, p . 112).

Jameson (1972), as cited by Hutcheon (1988), suggests that historiography, rather than being abandoned, should evolve by conceptualizing history as a constructed narrative rather than presenting it as objective reality (p . 112) . This approach aligns with Carey's reformulation of history, where he centers marginalized perspectives, such as convicts, aboriginal people, and women, exposing biases in official accounts through historiographical metafiction.

Carey's layered storytelling critiques traditional narratives, presenting history as dynamic and contested . By amplifying marginalized voices, his novel challenges

colonial power structures and advocates for inclusive historiography that recognizes diverse perspectives.

Historiographical metafiction reflects modernist plurality, addressing limitations of traditional historiography . Hutcheon (1988) notes it distinguishes between "events" and "facts," highlighting the constructed nature of documented history, which is shaped by state narratives and often lacks reliability.

Pandey (2011) elaborates that archival traces, transformed into 'facts,' can be buried or contradicted, lacking the authenticity of collective memory (p . 23) . Similarly, Bhabha (1994) emphasizes subaltern groups' potential to subvert hegemonic structures (p . 6), while LaCapra (1983) describes "de-totalized" narratives that counter imperial histories (cited in Hutcheon, 1988, p . 62).

Brydon and Tiffin (1989) discuss how Australian authors reimagine history, addressing the lingering colonial legacy through inclusive and pluralistic approaches (p . 13) . Historiographical metafiction, therefore, reinterprets and deconstructs dominant narratives, creating space for marginalized voices in historical discourse.

Oscar and Lucinda: An Official Historical Narrative

This paper analyzes Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* as a key example of historiographical metafiction, a genre that reimagines historical narratives and critiques their authority . The novel blends a fictional 19th-century Australian tale with historical details, using unreliable narration, fragmented structure, and metafictional commentary to challenge the notion of historical "truths." Oscar and Lucinda's glass church symbolizes the fragility of colonial ambitions and the constructed nature of historical legacies, urging readers to question official histories.

Hutcheon connects imperialist and humanist subjects, noting how postmodernism and feminism critique their patriarchal roots . In *Oscar and Lucinda*, Anna is marginalized due to her gender and race within the Dawe expedition, initially serving as a servant and later reduced to a sexual role . Dawe excludes her, stating, "We have no place for women" (p . 9), reflecting her ostracization.

By the narrative's end, Elizabeth Leplastrier defies colonial norms by staying in New South Wales and developing an agricultural system despite societal scorn: "Non-ladies will not be having your pretty heads about such things in Gravest" (p . 88) . Similarly, Miriam's role as a servant, discussed in "A Cheque Amidst Her Petticoat is Talking," highlights women's contributions and subversion of colonial attitudes, positioning them as integral but historically silenced contributors.

There is no disputing that you are a thief, but a thief, I think, made so by fear and weakness and as i too understand the terror you have felt in your soul to contemplate a woman's life alone in New South Wales, then I forgive you" knowledge of the poor woman's situation, it is alter all, who was brought to this town thought ill fortune was shipwrecked and although a governess have had to suffer the indignity of a life better suited to an Irish servant . I know better than she knows, that her situation must mean to her" (p.374).

This passage exemplifies Carey's use of historiographical metafiction to critique history . By focusing on the experiences of a marginalized governess, the narrative challenges colonial histories that often excluded women, particularly those of lower socio-economic status . The portrayal of her hardships—shipwrecked, impoverished, and degraded—acts as a counter-narrative, revealing gaps in traditional historiography.

The speaker's reflection, "I too understand the terror you have felt in your soul to contemplate a woman's life alone in New South Wales," exposes the harsh realities of colonial life for women . Their survival depended on navigating a patriarchal, classist society, making them vulnerable to exploitation and erasure . Carey's metafiction draws attention to these omissions, reframing history to include marginalized perspectives.

The passage, "There is no disputing that you are a thief, but a thief, I think, made so by fear and weakness then I forgive you," (p . 374) humanizes marginalized individuals . The speaker acknowledges the theft while recognizing the complex socio-economic conditions that led to it . This understanding emphasizes that historical figures-often seen as criminals-are shaped by their circumstances . The woman's plight, more suited to an Irish servant, highlights her marginalized position due to gender and class.

Carey amplifies the voices of those traditionally left out of history, critiquing exclusionary practices and offering a more inclusive portrayal of Australia's past . His focus on marginalized figures exposes the tensions between survival and dignity within the rigid social hierarchies of colonial life.

Drawing on Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, this analysis shows how Carey's text subverts traditional historical narratives . It challenges established power structures and reimagines historical representation, giving marginalized voices the agency to reshape history.

Carey uses Lucinda's words to convey the sensation of hatred as exclusion from society, prompting readers to reconsider Australian history, particularly its sexism, and call for a more inclusive narrative . Lucinda, constrained to leave her subdivided farm for the city, is determined to experience the working world . As a child, she witnessed the explosion of a glass ornament, symbolizing her disillusionment.

Hutcheon's irony subverts colonial and societal norms, highlighting pressures that enforce hegemonic ideologies . Carey uses Lucinda and Oscar's gambling habits as a metaphor for breaking these norms, symbolizing the creation of a new history for Australia.

Carey also explores identity through the term 'orphan.' In one chapter, Marian declares, "our history is the history of orphans" (p . 390) . Both Oscar and Lucinda's parents die, emphasizing the voicelessness of orphans, who fight for identity and nationalism in their own country.

Another layer of irony appears when Oscar says, "the world is a gamble" (p . 261) . Carey uses gambling as a metaphor for the quest for liberty, illustrating the stakes involved in shaping a new, inclusive identity for Australia.

It was at this moment a Lucinda began to gather these triumphantly proportioned notes together . She played cards with a cool elegance and skill and she did fancy shuffle the card and invites Oscar to shuffle cards she called Oscar . "Crab" has lost its bones and colour she enjoyed it as much as she had enjoyed the dizzy lightness of losing at fan-tan . Oscar watches all with almost as much astonishment as Lucinda . He has hardly been aware, so nervous was he, of what he had been saying and invites Juds to play it and one was not compelled as one did it . (pp.227-229)

Lucinda's actions-playing cards with skill and inviting Oscar to shuffle-symbolize her mastery over a male-dominated space . Her enjoyment of gambling, "she enjoyed it as much as she had enjoyed the dizzy lightness of losing at fan-tan," subverts traditional gender roles . Lucinda asserts her autonomy, defying societal expectations and becoming a symbol of empowerment for marginalized individuals often silenced in history.

Oscar, in contrast, is astonished, reflecting how those in privilege fail to recognize subversion within the marginalized . His surprise at Lucinda's command highlights how history has overlooked the agency of women like her, who challenge conventional norms.

Carey's historiographical revision, viewed through Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, challenges linear historical narratives by presenting history as shaped by power dynamics . The act of playing cards, with its themes of risk and chance, becomes a metaphor for rewriting Australia's history . Lucinda's actions disrupt norms, just as the novel disrupts traditional historical narratives, highlighting marginalized voices often excluded from official accounts.

Carey amplifies the voices of those historically relegated to the margins, using the gambling scene to reflect societal shifts toward recognizing the agency of the oppressed . Through this, he calls for a more inclusive history that acknowledges the

experiences of those silenced in official narratives.

Through the imagery of playing cards, Carey gives voice to those silenced by societal norms . Oscar's attempt to rewrite gambling as a sin is ironic; while he seeks reform, Lucinda finds freedom and ecstasy in gambling, challenging societal values . The card game deconstructs societal "good" norms, highlighting their arbitrary and restrictive nature.

Carey portrays liminal characters reflecting both indigenous and non-indigenous Australian identities . Oscar embodies this ambivalence, demonstrating both positive and negative attitudes toward societal constructs . He defies his father's religion, later returns to faith, and confesses his gambling . His internal struggle is shown in his statements, "the true will be God" (p . 108) and "we bet that there is God; he believes in it" (p . 261) . Despite this, he criticizes Lucinda for finding gambling less troubling, revealing his complex relationship with morality and sin.

Carey introduces liminal characters like Oscar, whose identity is marked by ambiguity . The character Smith reflects communal guilt, comparing his failure to help Oscar with his failure to assist indigenous Australians . This equates Oscar's suffering with indigenous oppression, aligning him as both a colonial victim and symbol of indigenous suffering . Smith's acknowledgment of his guilt connects personal and collective responsibility for the violence and ongoing impact of colonization.

He [Smith] was a counterfeit and a coward . He had fortune'd Oscar Hopkins with a funnel . He had not understood up to defend him . He had gone along" He had persuaded himself it would do not harm . And he had sat there-how dimmable this was-which native's mere slaughtered . And when Mr . Hopkins [Oscar] had protested [against the Aboriginal massacred he had been the one of those who tied him to a tree-on Jeffris's orders-so that he would cause no harm . All his anger and disgust, all that which should have decently gone outwards, was driven inwards (p . 406).

In this passage, Carey connects Mr . Smith's personal guilt with the broader history of colonial violence, particularly the massacre of indigenous Australians . Smith represents the moral decay and complicity of colonialism . His failure to defend Oscar and his passive acceptance of violence against indigenous people reflect the silent complicity of individuals within oppressive systems.

Smith's inaction mirrors the historical erasure of indigenous voices . His internalized guilt, "all that which should have decently gone outwards, was driven inwards," highlights the psychological burden of colonial violence on both the oppressed and the perpetrators, who suppress their conscience to maintain their place in the system.

Through Smith, Carey critiques the colonial mentality that disregarded indigenous

lives, amplifying marginalized voices in official history . Smith's arc explores the tension between personal responsibility and systemic complicity, urging readers to reconsider the moral consequences of colonial actions . This highlights how official histories have silenced indigenous experiences, contributing to Carey's broader historiographical revision.

Carey's historiographical revision, informed by postmodern frameworks like those in Hutcheon's work, emphasizes the plurality of historical representation . The fragmented narrative undermines the singular, official history, giving space to marginalized voices . Through this, Carey reimagines Australian history as a more inclusive, multifaceted narrative.

Oscar is an ambivalent character, both weak and brave, serving as a counterpoint to the exaggerated masculine history often celebrated in official narratives . This mirrors Australia's history, which fails to fully incorporate the suffering of aboriginal people and convicts . Carey evokes sympathy for the indigenous population, particularly through Jefferis and Mrs . Burrows, raising the lost voices of those silenced by history.

The novel also critiques the relationship between religion and colonialism . Carey challenges the exclusive history told by colonial powers, especially through Oscar, who rejects his father's religious teachings, subverting colonial tools of control and giving voice to the silenced.

Meta-fictional Self-consciousness in *Oscar and Lucinda*

In the novel, meta-fictional self-consciousness addresses settler-indigenous relations, exposing the lie at the heart of Australian history-that the land was "empty" when settlers arrived . The character Mrs . Business, advocating for poisoned food to remove aboriginal people, and the massacre witnessed by Jefferis and his party highlight this false narrative . The name "Darkwood" comes from "Darkies Point," where aboriginal people were massacred, exposing the erasure of the land's original inhabitants.

Lucinda acknowledges that her inheritance was "stolen" from aboriginal people, recognizing even her father, who could "kill blacks," as complicit in this exclusionary narrative . Helen Daniel's observations of cracks in the glass church emphasize the link between colonization and the destruction of aboriginal cultures . Carey suggests that the spread of Christianity, symbolized by the glass church, is tied to the demise of indigenous cultures.

The novel illustrates the suffering of aboriginal people, with the glass church factory symbolizing their destruction . Settlers not only imposed their rule but also created a historical narrative that excluded the indigenous population . Carey challenges this

exclusion, aiming to give a voice to aboriginal people and create a more inclusive, truthful history of Australia.

Conclusion

In *Oscar and Lucinda*, Carey critiques Australia's official historical narrative by portraying marginalized characters whose stories have been excluded from mainstream history . Through Lucinda, an industrial female settler, Carey challenges patriarchal values, exposing how women's contributions were erased . Oscar, an ambivalent gambler, contrasts exaggerated masculine ideals and embodies the complexities in Australian history, revealing its falsities.

Carey explores aboriginal and Irish convict experiences, confronting the inauthentic nature of official history . By portraying silenced voices, he critiques exclusionary narratives and provides a platform for the oppressed, highlighting the destruction of lives, the brutalization of women, and the erasure of aboriginal cultures overlooked by official history.

The novel deconstructs the "master narratives" shaping Australia's identity, offering a more inclusive, nuanced view . Carey challenges the myth of a nation built on equality and liberty, exposing the systemic violence of colonization . *Oscar and Lucinda* presents a more interconnected history that includes oppressed voices and questions the narratives crafted by those in power . Through his characters, Carey calls for a reevaluation of Australia's past, urging readers to confront buried complexities and injustices.

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