



“Borrowed Words, Borrowed Worlds”: Intertextual Identity Formation in *Mister Pip* by Lloyd Jones.

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ABSTRACT

Transformative aspects of literature are described in *Mister Pip* (2006) by Lloyd Jones, in a distant Pacific setting. The novel is garnered in the blood-soaked Bougainville civil war, and the story revolves around a young girl, Matilda whose imagination and identity are shaped heavily by the *Great Expectations* of Charles Dickens. This paper will analyze how Jones employs intertextuality to create the so-called borrowed worlds that allow the formation of identities. The Dickensian discourse that Matilda is exposed to gives her something to comfort her and offer a sense of agency in the constraining reality, a concept that Julia Kristeva had theorized in her belief that any text is made up of a mosaic of quotations. The paper is based on Bakhtinian dialogism and demonstrates how the various voices of the novel combined into one as the local legends, the prose used by Dickens and the storytelling of Mr. Watts.

A postcolonial prism sheds light on the power relationship that surrounds the discovery that Matilda identifies herself with a white English text and that she would later be able to write. Comparisons of *Mister Pip* and *Great Expectations* reveal that Matilda and the Pip of Dickens are similar: both orphans without fathers who need to find love with their fathers and self-identify. Matilda, on her part, notes that of Pip, we had something in common; I was eleven when my father left. This recognition is not that of a mere imitation, but a kind of mash-up creation: Matilda digests the Dickensian story to define her own ambitions and rebel against the fundamentalism of her mother. Meanwhile, narrative risk and misreading can be seen

when the literacies come into conflict; when Mr. Watts is confused with Pip by the rebels, when schoolchildren expect a miracle of Dickens to deliver the supplies, the novel is able to comment on metafictionalism. Eventually, Matilda acquires the power of narrative- Matilda literally writes her story, and synthesizes words that are borrowed into a brand-new voice. The paper adds to the existing knowledge on *Mister Pip* by stating that the intertextual design that the novel uses is primarily involved in the construction of postcolonial identities. The results emphasize the idea that literature, although borrowed, turns into the means of creating agency and belonging between cultures by Matilda.

KEYWORDS:

Intertextual Theory; Identity Formation; Postcolonialism; Lloyd Jones; *Mister Pip*; Charles Dickens.

INTRODUCTION

Mister Pip (2006) by Lloyd Jones is an account of a teenager, Matilda Laimo, who is living on an island called Bougainville in a civil war that is rife in the 1990s. Having an absent father in Australia, and a strict and religious mother back at home, Matilda realizes that she can only escape and have some hope as her teacher, Mr. Watts, starts reading to the students a book by Charles Dickens titled *Great Expectations*. The Victorian novel turns into an acquired world where Matilda devotes her feelings and possibility. In a touching scene Matilda is thinking how *Great Expectations* used to provide her with the world that was complete and made sense, unlike our one. In this case, literature is not only entertainment, but also a psychological survival and a way of self-definition.

This paper analyzes the way *Mister Pip* employs intertextuality - the dialogue and dialogue between texts - to show the identity formation in postcolonial circumstances. In the analysis, it will be demonstrated that Matilda can be described as having developed her worldview and personality through her involvement in the story of Dickens. Based on theoretical constructs like Kristevan intertextuality, Bakhtinian dialogism, and postcolonial theory, this paper suggests that Jones creates a hybrid literary space where a colonized subject redefines a colonial canonical text. By analyzing closely *Mister Pip* (and also selected passages of *Great Expectations*, as necessary), we will demonstrate how Matilda is able to consider *Great Expectations*, her own story, internalizing Dickensian themes to make her own statement. The boundaries of such borrowing are also pointed out in the novel: instances of misunderstanding and narrative danger (when the local villagers confuse Mr. Watts with the fictional Pip) cut the fantasy up and remind us of the actualities of difference.

The line of reasoning goes as follows. Section II will place *Mister Pip* in the context of critical and situate it in relation to applicable literary theory and postcolonial views. The third section discusses *Great Expectations* as the borrowed canon of the core of the novel, and how Mr. Watts is able to incorporate Dickens into the local lore. Part IV then follows as Matilda identifies with the character of Pip in the works of Dickens and how reading influences sense of self in the context of war and the colonial past. Part V deals with mediation and misreading: how one tells the stories and how they have been misread, and the narrative risks involved by the narrator. Part VI is devoted to the transformation of Matilda as a reader into a writer demonstrating how the borrowed words bring her the power to tell the story of her own. In the whole text, both literary intertextuality in *Mister Pip* and *Great Expectations* and critical commentaries confirm the argument that identity development in the novel revolves around literary intertextuality. Conclusively, the paper argues that *Mister Pip* depicts the strength of storytelling in forming new hybrid identities - a Pacifician adaptation of the Dickensian experience - across cultural barriers.

CRITICAL CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intertextuality is a concept presented by Julia Kristeva and it forms the basis of the analysis of *Mister Pip*. Kristeva claims that any text is made up as a collage of quotations; any text is assimilation and metamorphosis of another. Here, in this general meaning, no novel is self-suitable but it forms itself within a web of previous and subsequent text. *Mister Pip* takes himself as an example of this concept by directly appealing to *Great Expectations*. Instead of being a faint allusion, the novel by Dickens becomes a part of the narrative: it is read to Mr. Watts, discussed by the characters, and its topics reflect the lives of islanders. According to Kristeva, no text is independent but rather it is in response to previous texts. Therefore, *Mister Pip* is asking the readers to believe that the story about Matilda is in a dialogic relationship with the story about Dickens. It is in the light of this intertextual approach that we can observe how Matilda lives through the text of Dickens and finally melt into it as she internalizes the world of Pip. The same can be said of a distinction between intertextuality (direct quoting or allusion) and other forms of textual relationship: *Mister Pip* has explicit intertextuality (chapter titles, passages of *Great Expectations*) and can be considered a hypertext of Dickens (a later story based on an older one). Although the taxonomy of Genette would be effective, this paper is guided by the general perspective of Kristeva which considers any conversation between Dickens and Jones as intertextual.

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin is an addition to this approach, his concept of dialogism. Bakhtin insists that a novel is made up of several voices that are heteroglossic that is, characters, narrators, social ideologies, etc in a state of continual dialogue. *Mister Pip* is multi-vocal: there is the voice of Dickens (through Mr. Watts) together with the voice of child-narrator Matilda, the basicist religion of her mother Dolores, and gossip amongst the villagers. The meaning of each voice is tinged by the other, bringing a deep dialogue. As an example, theatrical narration of Dickensian scenes by Mr. Watts brings a sense of comedy and compassion to those who are terrified, and the moralizing of the novel by Dolores brings about a conflict. This dialogic play emphasizes the non-determined nature of meaning, rather than the involvement of such negotiations across perspectives. According to one commentator, the story of Jones focuses on an array of various texts which are in some way interwoven during a complicated process of intertextuality, which is linked to the concept of Bakhtin who believed that any utterance relied upon what was already said and how it was to be accepted by other people. The voice of Matilda in *Mister Pip* later turns to be a response, which at one point serves in the dialogue through retelling the content the girl takes in and, thus, seems to establish her agency.

One more: postcolonial theory: At last, the actual setting and the characters of *Mister Pip* can be read in a postcolonial way. Bougainville was a colonial area (initially German, then Australian) and the action of the novel takes place a little bit after the independence of Papua New Guinea. In this regard, the legacy of colonial culture is transmitted in the *Great Expectations* by Dickens, which is a typical Victorian English novel. Theorists like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said have demonstrated the internalization or resistance of the colonized subjects to the values of the colonizer. Among the concepts is that identity is usually being created in contrast to the image of the colonizer of the other. In *Mister Pip*, Matilda and her contemporaries are ethnically varied (mostly Melanesian with some Polynesian), and their idea about the English literature is naive and romantic at first. Indicatively, the children stupidly anticipate Dickens to bring supplies, and this is one of the manifestations of innocence that was instilled through colonial education. However identification of Matilda with a white male character brings in a hybrid identity: Matilda is a black girl who makes Dickensian Pip her story.

According to the scholar Rafał Łyczkowski, Jones attracts the reader to the British culture/traditions without making the colonial oppression the central theme, demonstrating that the white man (Mr. Watts) can possess some positive qualities as well, including those of a Dickensian gentleman. This "in-between-ness" demonstrates the idea of hybridity Homi Bhabha once presented: Matilda does not remain a black person or an English woman, it is a mixture. Towards the end of the novel, literature is used as an instrument of creative memory and drawing past identities and present identities, indicating that intertextual reading enables postcolonial subjects to mediate between worlds.

To conclude, the theoretical framework is a mixture of the intertextuality of Kristeva, dialogism of Bakhtin, and postcolonial discourse. The pair of lenses will inform our interpretation of *Mister Pip* as a text on textuality: how reading *Great Expectations* enables its characters to create new discourses about themselves. The following sections use this framework to the details in the novel to demonstrate how the borrowed words of Dickens give rise to the borrowed worlds to form identity.

INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE BORROWED CANON

Great Expectations is the core of *Mister Pip* since it is the so-called borrowed canon organizing events and ideas in the novel. Mr. The classroom of Watts is a place where the world of Dickens Victorianism is moved to 20 th century Bougainville. It starts in the first stages: when rebels threaten the village Mr. Watts introduces himself as Pip, which helps him to save his life, and he starts to retell *Great Expectations*. Mr. Watts incorporates autobiographical facts, Dickensian plot, and community folklore in his story. According to one of the critics, the story of Mr. Watts is visible with so many different texts: the past of this person (his family, his migration experiences), the prose by Dickens and indigenous legends all intertwine. The intertextuality of the story telling of the teacher is overt - the reader literally watches the chapter after chapter of *Great Expectations* in the fiction.

It is a two-sided Pacific form of Dickens. According to Monica Latham, Mr. Watts brings his hybrid narrative of survival into the world and transforms *Mister Pip* into a collection of postmodernist and postcolonial novels. In fact, the acting of Watts is intended to be anachronic: he wears shabby props (e.g. a clown nose) and accents to represent the characters of Dickens. His narration is slightly more complicated since he combines Western traditions and cultures with the established standards of the island. As an example, reading about the adventures of Pip in the English marshes Matilda visualizes the marshes with her Papua setting, as it is told in the novel: "slip inside the skin of another... travel to another place with

marshes). According to Bakhtinian terminology, the recital by Watts produces a carnivalesque moment: the hierarchies of colonialism are shaken for a moment when the world of literature of Dickens invades the life of the village.

Such intertextual overlay also points out instances of disjunction. The villagers at the beginning fail to comprehend the world of Dickens: the children believe that Mr. Dickens himself will bring food and medicine. The fact that they were literally misread explains the alien nature of the borrowed canon. But Jones actually predicts the transmission of the literature. The characters are frequently called upon to reflect on the act of telling the story, and the title of some chapters in *Mister Pip* is reminiscent of Dickens (One of the quotations there is by Umberto Eco: Characters migrate, the characters of Dickens finding afresh their second home in the Pacific island). On the occasion, Lyczkowski cites the novel of Jones: I will be straightforward with you. I have no wisdom... Oh, and of course Mr. Dickens" admitting Dickens as their only hope of another world.

This meta-narrative aspect has been pointed out by critics. According to the study by Lyczkowski, the narrative of Jones is self-consciously interested in the Victorian literature. The literary critic Dolores Aicega and Mercedes Vernet also refer to *Mister Pip* as a novel (re)finding and (re)inventing the Victorian novel to a new generation. Genettianly, *Mister Pip* is a hypertext that changes *Great Expectations*; Kristeva sees it as a text that is conversational. Either way, it leads to the fact that *Great Expectations* is not only being mentioned but also being re-created in the story of Jones.

This Dickensian canon, in its turn, is a feed-back to the world of the novel. According to what Bakhtin predicted, the introduction of the voice of Dickens alters the perception of reality by characters. Matilda gets carried away by the promise of escaping in the story, Dolores is taken aback at the lack of morality, and Mr. Watts finds the heart of Pip. The intertextual mosaic of *Mister Pip* is the reason why it appears in the plural form: it is again literally a story about stories. The important thing is that Jones does not use Dickens as a background scenery; the Victorian novel actively influences the plot. This part has demonstrated how *Great Expectations* fits in the texture of *Mister Pip*, giving the very space in which the identities of the novel can be constituted. The following part will analyze the way Matilda acquires identity with the help of this reading in particular.

THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH READING

The fact that Matilda is deeply involved in the story of Dickens makes a great impact on who she is. In several aspects she identifies with the main character of Dickens, Pip - a boy orphan who suddenly has a sister and does not know his father. Both Pip and Matilda are longing after some love and a future outside their lives. Matilda makes this parallel very clear: Me and Pip were different in one point, I was eleven when my father left, so we had no idea about our fathers. It is significant in this identification: it makes Pip more than a literary character to herself, to her own narrative. Bakhtinianly speaking, Matilda has slipped inside the skin of a different voice and has already taken that of Pip to make sense of her own experience.

This discovery gives Matilda some meaning and relief. The narrator shows that reading Dickens is a relief to her, an escape of anarchy. When she remembers, *Great Expectations* was full of a whole and sensible world, as opposed to the one that they live in. In the Bougainville of war, the linear, coherent narration of Dickens gives Matilda a certain amount of structure and hope which reality does not provide. The story that Jones tells us therefore demonstrates the concept of Kristeva that the text is able to absorb and transform another: Matilda absorbs *Great Expectations* and turns it into a world of her own where she can name her anxieties. In fact, Dickens remains dear to Matilda even after trauma (bombing of the school, losing her classmates) and as Łyckowski points out, she still does not relate Dickens to the traumatic events even though she is exposed to so much brutal events. She is always helped out by her Dickensian story when she is feeling desperate and in need of some companionship, solace and respite.

Significantly, this reading develops self-consciousness in Matilda. Through the study of the life of Pip, Matilda learns to have a better voice of her dreams and expectations. The closing of the novel is that *Great Expectations* provides her with a pattern of reentry. At one time she makes an assertive statement, she writes, Pip is my narrative, though I used to be a girl, and my skin as black as the dark star. This is my story of Pip, and I would attempt the following day what Pip had been unable to accomplish. I would try to return home". This is a definite co-opting of the story by Matilda: she makes it her story, the story of Pip, and even makes a determination to do something more, which Pip had failed to do (go home). Her statement is an identity statement: the literary borrowed story has turned into the model of her own aspirations. Through such a gesture, Jones presents texts that allow a colonized girl to redefine her role in the world in terms of imperial classic. The words spoken by Matilda also reflect the title of the novel and the style used by

Dickens itself, letting us know that by the very end of this novel, the voice of Dickens has been completely absorbed by her own.

It is a two-way process: when Matilda identifies with Pip, the latter will be redefined in herself. The similarity of their plots, orphanage, cruelty of parents, cruelty of their trips, etc., offer Matilda to the feeling of kinship and legitimacy. Simultaneously, by reading, Matilda starts redefining her role in the society. The postcolonial theory notes that colonial subjects are usually grappling with the hybrid identities. This is demonstrated by the way Matilda swallows the story of Pip: she is still Bougainvillian in hue and girlhood, but psychologically, she is going through Victorian England. This duality gives her some third-space identity. Frederika Uggla rightly observes that *Mister Pip* is mostly one of identification, existence by a text and dissolving into it. The development of Matilda as a self-conscious individual (as the term is used by Łyczkowski) cannot be separated with her borrowing of the world of Dickens. Her identity goes beyond the village and it includes the emotional geography of Pip England.

The other characters such as Matilda also have their changes as Jones compares this transformation to their reading. To use an example, Mr. Watts himself actually takes up a Dickensian identity when confronted with a threat, calling himself Pip to diffuse the situation. Dolores, the mother of Matilda, is more or less of a Miss Havisham type a ruined female who is rejected by the world and could have been redeemed through the Dickensian forgiveness. Where possible (Matilda and Pip, Dolores and Miss Havisham, Watts and Dickensian goodness), Jones emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between reading and being. With this confidence, 2s Matilda starts to write her own story (in later chapters, she types a description of her experiences), which means that by means of Dickens, she gets to know how to create her identity through a narrative.

To sum up, the identity formation of Matilda is motivated by the contact with *Great Expectations*. The intertextual connection provides her with emotional nourishment and a way of constructing herself. It enables her to define her wants and fright by making parallels to the life of Pip. In this section, we have demonstrated, by the word of text, how *Mister Pip* presents the way of reading Dickens as an escape by avoiding rather than an ultimate self-creation. In the following section, the complications that may result in the process will be taken into account, e.g., narrative risk and miscommunication.

MEDIA, MISINTERPRETATION AND NARRATIVE RISK.

Although *Great Expectations* gives Matilda a conceptual refuge, even *Mister Pip* brings to focus the difficulties of passing stories across cultures and contexts. Mr. Watts is acting as the interpreter, but the danger is that the recitations can be misunderstood. At the beginning of the novel, as rebels come, Watts literally transforms into his own fictional character: he introduces himself to the armed men as Pip and starts narrating the story of *Great Expectations*. This is a blatant literary dangerous game. When Watts identifies himself with the hero of Dickens, he risks a lot to appease a bloody crowd. The rebels who are not aware of *Great Expectations* view Pip as a myth. The fact that they mix up the story and reality puts Watts at risk because he must make up all the time to keep them quiet. In this manner, Jones refers to the idea that storytelling in the face of serious danger can be as dangerous as it is potent: the story literally helps Watt to live, yet only trivially.

At a smaller level the literal interpretations of the villagers are the misreadings. The children hummily anticipate that Mr. Dickens will come with practical provisions since they consider Mr. Dickens as a savior. To them, *Great Expectations* can solve the real world issues in the same way that the money makes Pip change his life. These misconception criticize the innocent belief of literature as magic. Equally, Matilda initially fails to decipher some of the Victorian terms; she asks how could people talk like pirates over centuries. This issue of cultural translation highlights the fact that this is a foreign text to them, which they have to mediate and decode. Another risk that comes out in the personal relations is narrative risk. Dolores prohibits the reading of the novel as she is afraid of the foreign ideas. One more form of textual authority that conflicts with Dickens is her fundamentalism. The fact that Matilda has a secret love affair with *Great Expectations* does not augur well with her relationship with Dolores. The misreading in this case is emotional: Dolores perceives Dickens as pointing to the corruption of Christian values, and Matilda perceives hope in the same lines. The conflict reaches the point where Dolores finds out Matilda had used Dickens to request the group to her case as well - once again, a mix of reality and fiction to the tragic effect. This mediation is observed by critical views. One of the critics notes that *Mister Pip* is (re)immersed in the process of (re)interpretation. Even the process of reading is depicted as being negotiation. Jones admits that the transmission of texts is selective and subjective. Even the retelling of the story as Matilda does it at the end of the novel when she writes her manuscript is an act of adaptation and potential Dickensian version of

events. Narratologically, the narrative is most untrustworthy, it is filtered through her memories, as well as

Dickens canon. Such layering of the story brings the reader to the question of how story mediates truth.

Overall, *Mister Pip* as a drama explores the dangers of cross-cultural borrowing of texts. Stories may be life lines, yet it may make reality a lot more complex. The misunderstanding of Dickens (the man) and Pip (the character), the risk to Mr. Watts in being the incarnation of fiction, the family feud about literature all demonstrate that there are narrative hazards to the *Great Expectations*. However, these are also the instances which emphasize the dialogic quality of the novel: even in the event of misunderstanding, the Dickensian text still invites thought and change. The conclusion will hold the argument that such borrowed words eventually enable Matilda to have her own narrative authority.

BETWEEN BORROWED WORDS AND NARRATIVE AUTHORITY.

At the end of *Mister Pip*, Matilda ceases to be a passive reader and becomes an active storyteller. The theme of this evolution is that using literary words to borrow can result in new self-created worlds. Once she survived the war and relocated to Australia, Matilda writes her own kind of memoir novel (the events of *Mister Pip* itself). Her experience as a writer is the result of her intertextual education. After absorbing the themes and style of Dickens, Matilda is now a power of narrative. The connection of writing to healing and identity is directly stated in the novel. According to Aicega and Vernet, towards the end, Matilda has to re-experience her childhood interest with *Great Expectations* when writing to overcome depression and heal herself. The message behind this line is a meta-critical comment: Matilda tells a story to help. The process of writing the story enables her to incorporate the past trauma into a meaningful story. According to the author, in such a process, Matilda reestablishes her identity due to the light of Pip and revisits her childhood identity and the amalgamation of her identity with that of Dickens. That is, to narrate her life is to assert it.

Moreover, Matilda becomes free in the selection of stories worth telling. According to the LUP study, *Mister Pip* is weaving together a lot of texts, though Matilda ends up making a decision on which ones to continue with. It is not by passive obedience that she honors Dickens but rather incorporating the *Great Expectations* into her own voice. By calling her story *Mister Pip*, she indicates that she possesses the narrative: the world that was Dickens transforms to be the story of Matilda. This is important in postcolonial terms. The former colonized object takes the literature of the colonizer and rewrites it in her own terms. Writing is in itself a statement that she too sees herself as having a legitimate voice in the conversation. This

change also reverberates the ideal of authorial agency by Bakhtin. According to Uggla, *Mister Pip* attaches weight to the power of narrative that is affective. Matilda lives not only on the intellectual level but also on the emotional one; she understands that narratives can influence the mind and the heart. She assumes that power by narrating her own story. Chapter 10 and 11 show Matilda, who goes to London and visits the museum of Dickens and writes about her activities. These facts (implied in the novel) support the idea that Matilda has turned into a self-conscious individual with expectations of her future, and not of Pip.

More importantly, Matilda does not deny her origins, but rather combines them with the influence of Dickens. A Pacific setting and values merge with her writing though it has the Dickensian structure. Such hybridity as an islander and the Dickens scholar represents the concept of the borrowed worlds: the borrowed words have created a new world on their own. The postcolonial readings would highlight the fact that Matilda is no longer an unheard subaltern; her text talks back. She goes beyond the colonial script by gaining the privilege to narrate stories. In a nutshell, *Mister Pip* follows the path of narrative authority by Matilda. The novel also shows how she starts with borrowed words but the resultant effect has been a strong voice. Matilda is able to turn reading into writing. This metaphysical transformation severs the cycle of intertextual identity formation, the borrowed Dickensian narrative is the skeleton on which a new, independent self-expression organicizes itself. It reiterates the message that Jones conveyed that the power of literature is not just in its escapism but it should allow agency and resilience.

CONCLUSION

Mister Pip by Lloyd Jones is a dramatic presentation of the paradox of the reliance on literature and self-determination. Matilda, being a war-weary child, is willing to enjoy the borrowed world of the *Great Expectations* by Dickens, she finds consolation, identification and finally a vision of how her life should be. This paper has demonstrated that identity has been explicitly performed in the novel by incorporating theoretical approaches to intertextuality and postcolonialism. The clues Matilda identifying herself with Pip, language she uses reflects Dickensian style, and the fact that she finally resorts to writing prove that her identity can be defined as the palimpsest of stories.

These have been some of the major insights that have been revealed by the analysis. To begin with, intertextuality in *Mister Pip* is not accidental but structural; it is because of this, that the characters engage, aspire and change in Dickens novel. Second, the process of identity formation by reading takes place in the postcolonial context. The fact that Matilda adopts Dickens makes it hard to imagine the differences between

cultures in terms of cultural otherness: her mixed identity falls between the cultures of the Pacific-dark and the Victorian-white. Third, even though literature presents an alternative world, it has dangers of misinterpretation as well; *Mister Pip* admits that narrative mediation is simultaneously curing and dangerous. Lastly, the novel performs an act of transitioning to dependence on Dickens to empowerment. The fact that Matilda ends as a writer proves that the so-called borrowed words can create a unique voice, which can achieve the ideal of agency in narration.

Generally, *Mister Pip* addresses the role of literature in postcolonial identity. According to the novel, even a colonizing text can be rewritten in another situation and allow a previously marginalized person to remake him/herself. Through the intertextual path taken by Matilda, this paper can add to the discourse on how such classic texts as *Great Expectations* still find an echo and transform the readership across the cultures. Finally, *Mister Pip* shows how significant the intertextuality can be in transforming things: stealing a story can actually result in appropriating the story.

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