

POSTCOLONIAL BODIES AS AGENTS OF DECONSTRUCTION IN *M.
BUTTERFLY AND JACK MAGGS*

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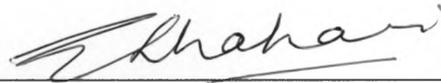
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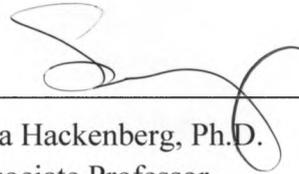
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Postcolonial Bodies as Agents of Deconstruction* in *M. Butterfly* and *Jack Maggs* by Samantha Stronge, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in English: Literature at San Francisco State University.



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POSTCOLONIAL BODIES AS AGENTS OF DECONSTRUCTION IN *M.*
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This project puts into conversation two postcolonial texts that “write back” to Western canonical works: David Henry Hwang’s play *M. Butterfly* and Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs*. It focuses specifically on the figures of colonized subjects who are pulled from their marginalized positions in *Madama Butterfly* and *Great Expectations*, respectively, and centralized in their own texts. Both texts reconstruct the underlying imperial binary of colonizer/colonized that form the foundations for the canonical works. By doing so, the texts seek to exploit and perform this hierarchical relationship to deconstruct it from the inside, out. The figures of colonized subjects are given the power to resist, and even reverse, the binaries through their ability to alter, manipulate, and disguise their bodies. But this only takes them so far; while Hwang and Carey demonstrate the efficacy of deconstruction through the apparatus of the postcolonial body, they simultaneously show its limits in providing an alternative to the imperial binary structure. It is only through Mercy Larkin, a minor yet crucial character in *Jack Maggs*, that Carey offers Maggs a path toward decolonization.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

12/21/16

Date

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Postcolonial Bodies as Agents of Deconstruction in *M. Butterfly* and *Jack Maggs*

I

This project is an exploration of two postcolonial texts that “write back” to Western canonical works. Peter Carey’s 1997 mystery novel, *Jack Maggs*, reimagines Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* from the perspective of the returned convict and secret benefactor of Pip, Abel Magwitch. Carey pulls Dickens’s character from the margins and transforms him into Jack Maggs, centralizing him within his own narrative. Crucial to his rewriting is Mercy Larkin—a character for whom no analogue exists in *Great Expectations*, but whose presence in the text is essential to Carey’s project. David Henry Hwang’s 1988 play *M. Butterfly* responds to Giacomo Puccini’s opera *Madama Butterfly*, and in doing so, responds to an entire canon of “Butterfly” texts—both fictional and real—by rearticulating the relationship between B.F. Pinkerton and his Japanese lover, Cio-Cio-San. The “Butterfly” figure gets replaced in Hwang’s text by Song Liling, a male Chinese opera singer who challenges and subverts the stereotype. Both postcolonial texts re-construct the imperial binarisms that form the foundations of their respective canonical works. The underlying binary—colonizer/colonized—gets transposed and then dismantled in *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly*, as the two texts seek to exploit and perform this hierarchical relationship so as to deconstruct it from the inside, out.

Abdul JanMohamed defines colonialist literature as “an exploration and a representation of a world at the boundaries of ‘civilization,’ a world that has not (yet)

been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology” (18). Such works of literature purport to represent “specific encounters with specific varieties of the racial Other,” however, the “subtext valorizes the superiority of European cultures” (19). On the surface, the “Butterfly” texts certainly attempt to represent Oriental culture through an encounter between a Japanese geisha and a Western man. However, Butterfly’s actions—indeed her very identity—work towards this very valorization of the superior Western culture. *Great Expectations* does not make any such attempt to represent this “Other” world in detail, and indeed the narrative never leaves England. But the text assumes Australia to be at the “boundaries of civilization” and therefore a suitable place to banish society’s criminals. By ridding itself of Able Magwitch, the unsuitable, unwanted Englishman, England works towards the (impossible) purification of its society.

As two such texts that feature these representations of colonial worlds and subjects, *Madama Butterfly* and *Great Expectations* are open to postcolonial rewrites. But, of course, there are any number of such colonialist texts—many that are even more explicitly colonialist, like E.M. Forester’s *A Passage to India*. So why, then, do Hwang and Carey choose these texts to revisit? For Hwang, the pervasive influence of the Butterfly literary tradition was exemplified in a real-life story of a French diplomat who, for twenty years, believed his male Chinese lover to be a woman. He was quoted saying: “I thought she was very modest. I thought it was a Chinese custom” (Hwang 94). This (perhaps willful) misunderstanding stems from what Said defines as latent Orientalism—

that “distillation of essential ideas about the Orient—its sensuality, its tendency to despotism...its backwardness” (“Latent” 205). These ideas form, in the Western mind, an unconscious uncertainty about the Orient that is fixed, “morally neutral and objectively valid” (205). Given the stark reminder, through the story of Mr. Boursicot and Mr. Shi, that such Orientalist assumptions still permeate the minds of Westerners, Hwang takes on the literary giant that perpetuates these stereotypical and racist views.

Carey chooses his own literary giant to bring into conversation with his rewriting. But in the case of *Great Expectations*, Dickens creates a complex character in Abel Magwitch—one who has the potential for such postcolonial reinterpretations. While Magwitch is largely absent from the action of the narrative, he nevertheless occupies a powerful position in Pip’s life. From his exiled position in Australia, Magwitch singlehandedly, and secretly, constructs Pip’s identity as a gentleman by providing for him as a benefactor. By giving this criminal/colonized subject such profound control over the protagonist’s life, Dickens demonstrates the constructed nature of the identity category of “English gentleman.” What Dickens leaves unexplored is the possibility that Magwitch’s identity as criminal/colonized subject may, too, be a construction. So Carey explores the possibilities for this complex yet marginalized character in his own story.

The deconstructive moves that both Carey and Hwang make in their rewritings play out through the colonized subjects who resist their binary structures. Western imperialism depends upon these oppositions of colonizer/colonized, or West/East, to establish a relation of dominance with the colonies. Those who “write back” from within

the colonies often employ deconstruction within their narratives as a form of resistance to the underlying colonial binaries. But these two texts offer a particular apparatus for the deconstruction of the colonizer/colonized relationship: both *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly* locate the *postcolonial body* as a crucial site for resistance.

Within the colonizer/colonized binary, the perceived physical differences of the latter are ascribed meaning by the former. These perceptions of otherness authorize the subjugation of the colonial subjects, as their differences mark them as inferior. The body, then, becomes a site of representation and control. What makes the body in postcolonial discourse so interesting is that it is a text—“a space in which conflicting discourses can be written and read”—but it is an especially material text, “one that demonstrates how subjectivity, however *constructed* it may in fact be, is ‘felt’ as inescapably material and permanent” (Ashcroft 166, my emphasis). *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly* highlight the constructed nature of the body by giving the figures of colonized subjects—Jack Maggs, Mercy Larkin, and Song Liling—the ability to alter, manipulate, and disguise their own bodies. This subversive agency destabilizes the colonizer/colonized binary and opens up a space for the colonized subjects to re-construct their identities.

But these acts of construction and re-construction imply a fixity and unity that, I argue, Carey and Hwang are pushing against—not just on the level of bodies, but on the (meta)narrative level as well. In the coda, I explore the metafictional play that both authors employ in their intertextual dialogues with their canonical predecessors. In the chapters, I look specifically at the bodily (re)constructions enacted by the colonized

subjects. Judith Butler's re-articulation of "construction" is a useful one here, as it helps characterize the deconstructive moves both authors are making. She posits construction as "neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both 'subjects' and 'acts' come to appear at all" (xix). This reiterative practice produces the effect of boundary, fixity:

What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter not as a site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*. Crucially, then, construction is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects...As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. (10).

Butler's redefining "construction" as a "process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity" insists upon the impossibility of a person's sex, (or, for purposes of this project, a text or a body) to be constructed—that is, complete, final, fixed. This re-articulation has implications for the literary canon to which Hwang and Carey respond: *Great Expectations* and *Madama Butterfly*, as canonical texts,

are themselves “unstable objects” that appear fixed; yet they are constructed anew by these postcolonial authors, calling into question the “boundary” of canonicity (Thieme 2).

Into Butler’s discussion of “sex” can easily be substituted “imperial binarisms” like colonizer/colonized or West/East, insofar as these binaries are constructions too—processes of reiteration that produce the effect of fixity, of authority. As such, these binaries are likewise porous, and it is precisely from these “gaps and fissures” that postcolonial authors seek out “that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm.” In *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly* Carey and Hwang not only demonstrate how the colonized subjects Jack Maggs and Song Liling are not fixed by the “repetitive labor” of Western hegemonic discourse, but how *none* of the figures within the colonizer/colonized binary can be “wholly defined or fixed.” The assertion that there is nothing fixed about bodies or identities gives the figures of colonized subjects the agency to navigate their binary relationships by manipulating and masking their own bodies.

While able to navigate their respective hierarchical relationships, none of the figures of colonized subjects attempt to re-construct themselves *outside* the binary systems in which they’ve been placed. They all construct their bodies within the framework that they’ve inhabited their entire lives. While this allows them to resist the one-dimensional, stereotypical categories that seek to fix them in place, they do not imagine their resistance as leading to an alternative structure outside or beyond the binary.

For Jack Maggs and Mercy Larkin, this inability to envision a “self” outside their binaries is caused by their inability to *see themselves* within binary systems. Both are blind to the fact of their colonized positions until they recognize it in each other. For most of his life, Maggs’s identity had been shaped for him; raised a thief by his family and made into a convict by his country, Maggs had always occupied the colonized position. After he returns to England—with the hope of reclaiming the country and “son” he built up in his mind—he unknowingly begins reversing the hierarchical relationships he inhabits (with Tobias Oates, specifically, but also with his family and England) by physically rewriting his identity. The subversiveness of this act is lost on Maggs, and he cannot actualize his power because he clings to the fictional image of a country and son that accept his presence. Like Maggs, Mercy is also unaware of her colonized position; she does not see her relationship with her “savior” Percy Buckle, as problematic (175). He exploits her trust in him and uses her body for his own pleasure; yet Mercy is not completely oppressed by Buckle, as she is able to use her body’s influence over him to navigate their hierarchical relationship. But, like Maggs, she does not imagine a (better) life for herself outside of this relationship. Her ultimate goal is marriage to the man who abuses her. It is not until their two parallel storylines intersect that they begin to recognize their disadvantaged positions, as they recognize it in each other. And it is because of Mercy’s deep empathy for Maggs and for his two children in Australia—as well as her bodily sacrifice—that they both escape their colonizers and enter a new a structure that is not binary but multiple.

Song Liling is not only acutely aware of the binary ze¹ operates within; ze works to maintain it. Hir deceptive performance of a “submissive Oriental woman” forces Rene Gallimard, hir French lover, into playing the only role available to him: the “cruel white man” (17). Song’s subversive act seemingly allows hir to gain all power over the Westerner. But while Song successfully undermines the binary, ze does not use this success to position hirself outside of it. Deconstruction fails to provide hir with a means of escape from hir colonized position. While the ending suggests a path out of the confining system through a homosexual relationship, Gallimard rejects this option and instead chooses the fantasy, thus reestablishing the (now reversed) hierarchy.

While Carey and Hwang successfully demonstrate the importance and efficacy of deconstruction as a postcolonial strategy—and of the body’s role in this process—both texts also reveal the limits of deconstruction. The shifted focus onto the colonized subjects who possess the agency to re-construct themselves allows Carey and Hwang to show the colonizer/colonized opposition to be itself a construction; the hierarchical ordering of colonizer over colonized, West over East, to be fundamentally unstable, full of inconsistencies, and usually contradictory. The process of deconstructing these oppositions relieves the colonized subjects of their fixedness—but it does not necessarily offer any alternative to the binary structures. Once the imperial binarisms are dismantled, there is no clear path to decolonization, to a “self” outside the constrictive relationship. For Song (and Gallimard), there is only a profound understanding of hir colonized

¹ I use gender neutral pronouns to acknowledge and maintain Song’s ambiguous gender identity.

position and of the structure ze operates within. This self-awareness leads to a shift in power dynamics, as Song uses hir “knowledge” of Western imperialist desires to gain control over Gallimard. But in the end, they reach an aporia, as Gallimard refuses to accept the reality of Song’s biological sex. Instead, Gallimard chooses to remain in the fantasy, and they revert back to a binary structure.

Jack Maggs almost comes to a similar end—with Maggs facing an inevitable death as the inferior, threatening outsider, trapped within a binary relationship he too late recognizes as such. But Maggs does not die; nor does he remain fixed within his oppositional relationships. Carey ensures Maggs’s escape by introducing Mercy Larkin, another colonized subject whose storyline parallels his own. Her tenacity, boldness, and keen awareness ultimately saves them both from their colonized positions, as she recognizes their potential to establish “selves” beyond the binary. So while both authors demonstrate the limits of deconstruction, it is Carey who creates a path towards freedom by recognizing the impossibility of any one person overcoming colonization, of authoring their own decolonization.

II

The body of postcolonial works that “write back” to classic English texts—what Helen Tiffin identifies as *canonical counter-discourses*—take up a “character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes” (Tiffin 97). This particular postcolonial strategy is perhaps most familiar in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel

written as a prequel and response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In it, Rhys tells the story of how Bertha Mason (previously Antoinette Cosway, Creole heiress) came to be the "madwoman in the attic." It is not, of course, the literal story of Bertha Mason: "it is in no sense a pastiche of Charlotte Brontë and exists in its own right, quite independent of *Jane Eyre*" (Rhys 6). As such, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and other postcolonial counter-discourses are dynamic, not static. They do not necessarily seek to subvert their respective canonical works with the aim of replacing them, but to expose and erode the assumptions and biases of the dominant Western imperial discourse that form the implicit foundation from which such canonical texts operate (Gugelberger 759).

Inherent in the dominant Western discourse are oppositions that are "binary" or "hierarchical," involving a pair of terms in which one is assumed primary or authoritative while the other is secondary or derivative. Colonialism as a practice relies upon such binary systems of "white and black, good and evil...self and other, subject and object" to maintain the illusion of control, of superiority, over the native (JanMohamed 4). JanMohamed describes the "manichean organization of colonial society" from which emerges the colonizer/colonized relationship. The colonial society "embodies a rejection of the colonizer by the colonized and vice versa (4). This opposition, however, is accompanied by a profound dependency, particularly on the part of the colonialist...On the other hand, the colonized person too is simultaneously attracted and repelled by the colonialist" (4). The relationship is far from simple; indeed, rather than being fixed in

their respective positions, the two exist within an ambivalent relationship, characterized by a complex mix of attraction and repulsion, complicity and resistance.

Such binary systems suppress ambiguous or interstitial spaces between the opposed categories, leaving no room for basic human complexity, changeability, or variety (Ashcroft 18). Therefore, according to binary logic, anything that falls between the categories of colonizer and colonized does not exist. It is precisely these ambiguous spaces of nonexistence that postcolonial writers seek out in English canonical works, with the aim of uncovering the gaps and inconsistencies in the binary system that undergird the narrative. Once exposed, the writer subverts the hierarchical binary so as to point out what was missing in previous analysis of the work. What emerges from these gaps forms into an alternative reading, one that imposes a correction, or—as in Carey’s and Hwang’s texts—a *complication* that both undermines and erodes the colonizer/colonized binary and challenges the authoritative status of the canonical texts.² Within *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly*, this process of “writing back” offers an effective means of *resistance* to these imperial binarisms that fix the figures of colonized subjects into inferior positions.

Both texts demonstrate the highly complex process of responding to canonical works by focalizing the figures of colonized subjects. However, neither author is simply “writing back” to their respective canonical texts, but “to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds”

² This latter point will be taken up in the coda.

(Tiffin 98). Carey re-works Dickens's *Great Expectations* by reclaiming the convict Abel Magwitch from his marginalized position, transforming him into Jack Maggs and affording him "textual centrality" (Thieme 107, emphasis in original). From the beginning, *Jack Maggs* promises a narrative that involves a rewriting of the second half of *Great Expectations*, after Magwitch returns to England and reveals himself as Pip's secret benefactor—but from the "Magwitch" point of view. And indeed the novel opens upon a particularly Magwitch-like "man with the red waistcoat," "big in chest and broad in the shoulder" with "dark, inquiring...belligerent" eyes, arriving by Dover coach to 1830s London. But from here the narrative splits off from its supposed source; we learn that Henry Phipps (the "Pip" character) not only knows his benefactor, but has been informed of his immanent return and, instead of waiting to greet him with open arms, flees before Maggs arrives. This abrupt departure from the plot of *Great Expectations* opens the novel up to other storylines that have roots in different source texts—or that are, of course, original. "The unitary storyline," as John Thieme points out, "is replaced by a multiplicity of plots, most notably those of the Dickens-like novelist, Tobias Oates, and the maid of the household into which Jack is taken in as footman, Mercy Larkin" (Thieme 109). While there is, notably, "no character like Mercy Larkin" in *Great Expectations*, Carey pulls from the material of Dickens's own life to construct the author-character, Tobias Oates (355). Oates's obsessive use of Mesmerism to extract and appropriate other's stories, (to make money, but also to reconstruct his identity at will)

while an exaggeration, mirrors Dickens's own practice of reinventing himself through his characters' stories.

Maggs himself offers an alternative, and certainly fuller, narrative to the "short and handy" version that Dickens gives Magwitch (Dickens 270). In a series of letters intended for Phipps, Maggs gives an account of his early years: "discovered lying in the mud flats 'neath London Bridge," Maggs was taken in by his benefactor, Silas Smith, and foster mother, Ma Britten, who raised him as a thief (83). The content of Maggs's letters "owes more of a debt to *Oliver Twist*" than it does *Great Expectations* (Thieme 110). Unlike Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Jack Maggs* does not just tell the "other side" of *Great Expectations* from the "Magwitch" perspective so as to expose inherent biases within the text and draw different conclusions. Carey's project overlays this alternative reading of the character Magwitch with a plurality of stories, presenting readers with an alternative postcolonial reading experience.

Hwang's play *M. Butterfly* similarly draws upon various textual sources, most notably Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*. While Puccini certainly popularized the story of the Japanese geisha, Cio-Cio-San, and her American lover, Benjamin Franklin (B.F.) Pinkerton, the story of *Butterfly* has a long history. First written as the semi-autobiographical account of French travel writer Pierre Loti's explorations of 1880's Japan, *Madame Chrysanthemum*, the supposedly "first Western romance to be set in Japan," was part of the Western fascination with (and fetishization of) Japanese culture (Loti v). In 1898, five years after the publication of Loti's work, American writer John

Luther Long produced a strikingly similar short novel that substituted the French lieutenant for the American naval officer, Pinkerton. Playwright David Belasco adapted it for the stage in 1900 and Puccini, who attended the British premier later that year, was so inspired by the story that he composed what would become his most famous opera (Long ix).

Hwang adds his play to the long list of adaptations of the Butterfly story, but returns to a French protagonist and creates a Chinese (male) Butterfly—and shifts the context to 1960s Beijing. While all of these adaptations inform *M. Butterfly*, Hwang found inspiration to write the play in a scandalous news story: in 1986, former French diplomat Mr. Boursicot was accused of passing classified information to his lover Mr. Shi, a male Chinese opera singer, who he believed for twenty years to be a woman. The scandal, of course, resides in Mr. Boursicot's (perhaps willful) ignorance of Mr. Shi's disguised body. This real-life love story fuels the action of Hwang's play, as Song similarly dresses and acts like an Oriental woman to deceive Gallimard. Hwang, then, is writing back to an entire canon of "Butterfly" literature, as well as the true story of Mr. Boursicot and his lover. But he is also responding to the now pervasive cultural stereotype derived from this literary canon: as Hwang explains, to act like a "Butterfly" is to "play the submissive Oriental number" (95).

This unitary storyline (of the unwavering love of an Oriental woman for her Western man) that endures through several adaptations is disrupted by the introduction of Song Liling, the subversive, gender-bending individual who attempts to create a plural

identity within a binary system that insists upon rigid uniformity. Hwang creates a radically alternative reading of the Butterfly character by giving Song this manifold, ambiguous identity and making hir the agent of deconstruction, with hir body as the locus of this power. Song self-consciously performs the “Butterfly” stereotype, disguising hir body and gaining mastery over Gallimard, her seemingly gullible lover (Lee 107). The actor’s performance challenges the fixity of this stereotype: “the enactments of the Oriental stereotype by the Asian body further trouble this performance of stereotype because the Asian body has the potential to push the stereotype into excess or demonstrate it as one of many possible roles” (Lee 106). This potential for “many possible roles” forms the basis for Song’s resistance to the single, fixed identity.

Carey employs a similar strategy of resistance by giving Maggs the narrative space in which to rewrite his own identity (his *textual* body) in a more nuanced way than afforded him by Dickens. Despite their ability to navigate, resist, and, in Song’s case, reverse their respective binary relationships, neither is able to use their power to reconstruct themselves outside these oppressive colonial structures. It is only through Mercy Larkin that Maggs finds a path toward a new structure that is not binary but multiple. So while these figures of colonized subjects get the chance to rearticulate more complex identities and resist colonization in the process, Carey shows the insufficiencies in this approach to lead to their decolonization.

In the chapters that follow I will explore each text individually, starting with Hwang’s “deconstructivist Madame Butterfly” and then moving on to Carey’s rewriting

of *Great Expectations*. In the coda, I discuss the two texts together, focusing on the metafictional, intertextual interactions that each engage in with their “originals.” My aim in this project is to put these two postcolonial texts in conversation with each other to highlight their mutual focus on the postcolonial body as the apparatus of deconstruction. Both texts engage in a radical deconstruction of the underlying imperial binaries that form the foundation of the canonical narratives that they are writing back to. *M. Butterfly* is particularly subversive in its representation of the relationship between a male “Butterfly” and his “Pinkerton.” Song, as Butterfly, uses his body to successfully deconstruct and reverse the oppressive binary that relegates him to an inferior position. Yet, by the end, the two lovers reach an aporia from which they cannot move forward. So while Hwang’s play demonstrates the importance of deconstruction as a strategy for resistance to imperial binarisms, it also shows the impossibility of relying on deconstruction to offer an escape from these binaries. Carey’s novel conducts a similarly subversive deconstruction of the colonizer/colonized relationship, giving Maggs the power to rewrite his textual body. But Carey does not rely solely upon deconstruction to push Maggs beyond the binary: instead, he offers the colonized subject a path forward by introducing a third figure, Mercy Larkin, into the binary structure. Before exploring Carey’s non-canonical third figure, I look first at Song and his lover Gallimard, as they navigate their hierarchical relationship without their own path forward—forcing them into an aporia by the play’s tragic end.

Within the Binary: The Limitations of Song Liling's Subversive Performance

In his play *M. Butterfly*, David Henry Hwang performs a deconstructive reading of the "Butterfly" literary tradition. His text is a response to the damaging Asian stereotypes that the Western Orientalist discourse perpetuated and maintained through the same binary systems that supported formal colonialism. In particular, Hwang examines the hierarchical relationship that parallels the colonizer/colonized binary that Carey deconstructs in *Jack Maggs*. Song himself identifies these two figures as the "cruel white man" and the "submissive Oriental woman" (17). They emerge, as Song indicates to Gallimard, out of the Western "fantasy" for the sensual, willing, and exotic Oriental other (17).

Edward Said explains how the Orient (that appears in Orientalism) became a "system of representations" in which it was characterized in opposition to the West: the Orient, in its "sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness" allowed for the maintenance of the Western perception of its own identity: its masculinity, its strength, its superiority as a civilized race ("Latent" 205). From this dominant position, the West views the Orient as "a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, and even redemption" (206). But, at the same time, the Orient's "feminine penetrability" and promise of sexual adventure entices the Western (male) traveler with its exotic charms (206). In the writing of such travelers (and novelists), "women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing" (207).

This pervasive and enduring system of representations takes root in Puccini's immensely popular opera, *Madama Butterfly*.³ While the operatic form survived more than a century and remains the most well-known adaptation, it is important to remember that the first two versions of the story were written by men—a travel writer and novelist. And their representations of Cio-Cio-San, or Butterfly, fit precisely with the characteristics of the women Said observed in his study of Orientalist texts. As the wife of Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton, Cio-Cio-San is utterly devoted to her American husband. Once married, her identity becomes inseparable from his own. She lives only for him; and because she has no “self” outside their relationship, she kills herself after realizing he abandoned her. Essentially, she, like Mercy Larkin, is a figure of a colonized subject. She is marginalized within a text that bears her name, her body used as a mere “plaything” for a Western man. Cio-Cio-San exists only within the West/East binary which relegates her to the inferior position as the “submissive Oriental woman.”

Within Long's adaptation (the short novel that inspired Belasco's play, which in turn inspired Puccini's opera) Cio-Cio-San's swift transformation into Pinkerton's wife signals the loss of her individual identity, as she becomes completely dependent on him. “For lack of other amusement” Pinkerton purchases, with the “aid of a marriage broker,” a “wife and a house in which to keep her” (31). For Pinkerton, there is no distinguishable difference between his new house and new wife, as both are mere objects that simply

³ In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said devotes a chapter to another enduring operatic work: Verdi's *Aida*. As with *Madama Butterfly*, “*Aida* does a great many things for and in European culture, one of which is to confirm the Orient as an essentially exotic, distant, and antique place in which Europeans can mount certain shows of force” (111).

require updating: “He called her an American refinement of a Japanese product, an American improvement on a Japanese invention, and so on” (36). His objectification of Cio-Cio-San intersects with the process of her dissociation from her Japanese filial ties, as Pinkerton finds her family “a trifle wearisome” (32). He forces her to cut all ties with her family, giving no thought to the importance of this concession for Cio-Cio-San, as her “ancestors” provided “the sole link to such eternal life as she hoped for” (33). Without trying to understand the complex connection between her ancestors and her religion, Pinkerton simply inserts *himself* into both positions of importance—a move which solidifies her complete dependence upon him. His flippant demands, coupled with the fact that he never intended to stay for longer than a month, indicates an underlying assumption of superiority. Cio-Cio-San completely internalizes this racist stereotypical identity that Pinkerton has constructed for her. And as a sign of her unending devotion to him, she attempts to commit ritual suicide⁴ choosing “To die with Honor when one can no longer live with Honor” (78).

Like Carey, Hwang centralizes and reconstructs the colonized subject, Cio-Cio-San. But he doesn’t just give her the narrative space in which to tell her own side of the story—his project is much more complicated in that a *female* Butterfly never actually enters the text. Instead, Song Liling, the male Chinese opera singer/government spy takes on the guise of a woman to deceive the French diplomat, Rene Gallimard. As a play that appears to “write back” to the canonical work, Hwang’s omitting a female Butterfly is

⁴ Puccini alters this ending: Butterfly succeeds in her suicide at the end of the opera.

troubling. There is an expectation that Cio-Cio-San would be given the voice, the body, and the control refused her in *Madama Butterfly* so as to respond to her stereotypical, one-dimensional construction as the “submissive Oriental woman.” Instead, Butterfly is yet again constructed by men, and yet again silenced.⁵ While this can certainly be read as problematic, *M. Butterfly* is not simply a response to Puccini’s opera. Hwang’s play adapts the real-life drama of a French diplomat and male Chinese opera singer who were convicted of espionage. Theirs was a “story of clandestine love and mistaken sexual identity”: Mr. Bouriscot, “was accused of passing information to China after he fell in love with Mr. Shi, whom he believed for twenty years to be a woman” (Hwang, Playwrights Notes). With no further insight into their relationship, Hwang rationalized Mr. Bouriscot’s seeming ignorance: “He probably thought he had found Madame Butterfly” (95). Interestingly enough, Hwang had never seen Puccini’s opera, nor read any of the older adaptations of *Madame Butterfly* until after he had gotten the idea to write the play. His knowledge of the Butterfly character was not rooted in the text itself, but stemmed from what has become a pervasive cultural stereotype: to be a “Butterfly” was to play the “submissive Oriental number” (95). From this blend of reality and fiction Hwang constructs a complex, gender-bending, “deconstructivist *Madame Butterfly*” (95).

Unlike his author, Song Liling is intimately familiar with Puccini’s opera, as he performs the role of Butterfly for the French diplomats living in China. Hwang is an entirely self-conscious performance, as he is acutely aware of the “Butterfly” stereotype and of

⁵ See Andrew Shin’s essay for an alternative perspective on Song’s use of the masquerade as a form of feminine power.

the Western perception of Oriental women as the “creatures of a male power-fantasy.” Song understands that the discourse surrounding the West/East relationship—in which the West is strong, masculine, superior and the East “weak, delicate, poor”—shapes the Westerner’s perception of hir identity (83). Upon their first meeting, Song tells as much to Gallimard; after hir performance of the Japanese geisha, Gallimard expresses his newfound appreciation for the opera’s tragic ending. Song swiftly rebuffs him:

Gallimard: No! I was about to say, it’s the first time I’ve seen the beauty of the story.

Song: Really?

Gallimard: Of her death. It’s a...pure sacrifice. He’s unworthy, but what can she do? She loves him...so much. It’s a very beautiful story.

Song: Well yes, to a Westerner.

Gallimard: Excuse me?

Song: It’s one of your favorite fantasies, isn’t it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man. (17; 1.6)

Song’s acerbic reaction to Gallimard’s romanticizing the opera’s ending seems to indicate hir complete rejection of such a stereotypical reading. Ze openly resists the fantasy, setting the trap for Gallimard by declaring: “I will never do Butterfly again” (17). But, of course, Song does “do Butterfly again”: indeed, does not drop the act until the play’s final scene. Ze recognizes Gallimard’s susceptibility to the fantasy, of his desire to have it fulfilled for himself. So Song boldly embraces the role of Butterfly, exploiting

Gallimard's misperception and his romantic sensibilities—all to manipulate and control him.

While no one ever asks Song why ze *really* maintained the illusion for over twenty years (as ze claims it was merely an act of patriotism, hir “greatest acting challenge”), ze seems to be motivated by a desire for power. By manipulating and controlling Gallimard, Song actively resists the West/East binary that constructs hir as weak, feminine, and inferior and works to reverse the hierarchy so as to put hirself in the position of power. Hir successful enactment of the stereotype gives hir control over Gallimard while it “reveals the vulnerability of the system that produces it” (Lee 106). Through Song, Hwang demonstrates the importance of deconstruction as a postcolonial strategy for resistance. Although *M. Butterfly* “deconstructs stereotypes, it does so by evoking the power that the stereotype still wields” (109). Song's body is the apparatus for this deconstruction, as ze consciously appropriates and enacts the very identity created by the “male power-fantasy.” These fictionalized women are “sensual,” “stupid,” and “willing”; their bodies, like Mercy Larkin's, are sites of control. But by enacting the stereotype and constructing the fantasy *for* Gallimard, Song undermines the binary system and uses hir body as a site of resistance. However, hir performance does not lead to an escape from the binary. Instead, ze and Gallimard reach an aporia from which they cannot move forward. In this way, Hwang's play shows the possibilities of deconstruction as a method of resistance to colonial structures, but also demonstrates its limitations in offering a next step, a path forward from the now-dismantled binary.

The exceptional power of Song's deceptive performance lies in his ability to not only construct his own identity, but Gallimard's as well. By purposefully inserting himself into the submissive position and upholding his half of the hierarchical binary, Song opens up the space for Gallimard to step into the only role available to him. He becomes Pinkerton: Song is his mistress who he refuses to marry; he cheats on her with another woman; he demands to see her naked despite her "modesty" (59). While Gallimard may think he has found the power he desires, (and, as a Westerner, inherently belongs to him) it is a façade; their entire relationship a construction built and maintained—or so Song believes—by an Oriental man.

Despite Gallimard's participation in their relationship as the "cruel white man," he is certainly uncomfortable in this position that Song coaxes him into. Gallimard is uncertain of his supposedly inherent power over the "submissive Oriental woman." His identity never quite syncs up with the one he finds himself inhabiting. In the beginning of the play, before we are even introduced to Song's character, Gallimard, as the narrator, introduces the audience to his favorite opera:

Madame Butterfly. By Giacomo Puccini. First produced at La Scala, Milan, in 1904, it is now beloved throughout the Western world... And why not? Its heroine, Cio-Cio-San, also known as Butterfly, is a feminine ideal, beautiful and brave. And its hero, the man for whom she gives up everything, is...not very good looking, not too bright, and pretty much a wimp: Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton of the U.S. Navy. (5; 1.3)

As he describes Pinkerton's character, the stage directions indicate a costume change that transforms him into Pinkerton: "*He pulls out a naval officer's cap from under his crate, pops it on his head, and struts about*" (5; 1.3). Gallimard's friend Marc enters, playing the character Sharpless; and suddenly we are transported into a mock play-within-a-play. They enact a scene meant to comically represent the personalities of these two characters in *Madame Butterfly*: Pinkerton, the brash womanizer, and Sharpless, the concerned voice of reason. But while the brief scene appears to foreshadow Gallimard's relationship with Song, Gallimard himself immediately dispels this suggestion. As he effortlessly transitions out of his Pinkerton performance, Gallimard again addresses the audience: "In the preceding scene, I played Pinkerton, the womanizing cad, and my friend Marc from school...played Sharpless, the sensitive soul of reason. In life, however, our positions were usually—no, always—reversed" (7; 1.3). Before we are even introduced to Song, Gallimard makes explicitly clear that he was never a "womanizing cad," that he could never fit comfortably in the role of Pinkerton. His and Marc's positions were "usually—no, always—reversed"—a clarification that he makes absolute, despite the story he is about to tell. And so he returns us to "*my version of Madame Butterfly*" in which he ultimately *becomes* Butterfly because he was never meant for the role of Pinkerton (9; 1.5, my emphasis).

But who would want to be Pinkerton? From the way Gallimard represents him in the mock scene he seems crude and disrespectful, excited at the prospect of having—and then abandoning—an Oriental woman as a plaything. Gallimard's description of the

opera's "hero" further calls into question Pinkerton's appeal: what makes him appear heroic is his ability to be unattractive, unintelligent, "and pretty much a wimp" and yet still find a "beautiful and brave" woman who "gives up everything" for him. Indeed, Gallimard's reading of *Madame Butterfly* suggests that the actual hero of the story is Butterfly herself, as she dies for love after the cowardly Pinkerton abandons her. This reading has interesting implications for the ending of the play in which Gallimard, realizing he has been Butterfly all along, embraces his role and plays it out to its end. And if Gallimard is Butterfly, then of course Song is Pinkerton—the role ze always wanted; but if, in Gallimard's "version" of the opera, Pinkerton lacks actual heroic qualities, and simply has a false sense of power, then where does this leave Song?

The West/East binary that Song upholds in hir attempt to reverse it has already started wavering before ze even enters the play. Roles are reversing, identities blurring; and the question of who controls who has no clear answer. Before the audience meets Song, Gallimard reveals his uneasy relationship with the potential power he holds over women: "In real life," he says, women who sell themselves for mere pennies are "quite hard to find...the closest we come is in the pages of these magazines" (10; 1.5). These "girlie" magazines Gallimard first encounters "as a boy of twelve": "The first time I saw them...all lined up—my body shook. Not with lust—no, *with power*. Here were women—a shelfful—who would do exactly as I wanted" (10; 1.5, my emphasis). The audience gets a glimpse of this power that Gallimard exercises over these fictional women, as one of the magazine pinup girls materializes on the stage and strips for him:

Girl: I know you're watching me...

Gallimard: I can't move...I'm shaking. My skin is hot, but my penis is soft. Why?

Girl: I stand in front of the window...I toss my hair, and I let my lips
part...barely.

Gallimard: I shouldn't be seeing this. It's so dirty. I'm so bad.

Girl: Then, slowly, I lift off my nightdress...I stand there, in the light, displaying
myself.

Gallimard: No. She's—why is she naked?

Girl: To you...Without shame.

Gallimard: No, she must...like it.

Girl: I like it.

Gallimard: She...she wants me to see.

Girl: I want you to see.

Gallimard: I can't believe it! She's getting excited!

Girl: I can't see you. You can do whatever you want.

Gallimard: I can't do a thing. Why?

Girl: What would you like me to do...next? (11-12; 1.5)

This exchange plays out in front of the audience, but this girl emerges from Gallimard's mind. She is not real; merely a picture from a "girlie" magazine. As such, Gallimard should have control over her within his imagination. And yet, he cannot devise a fantasy woman who fulfils his desires (he ends up relying on Song to do this for him), as he finds

it impossible to get aroused by her naked body. He asks why “my penis is soft” and why “I can’t do a thing” to this woman who exposes herself “without shame.” He knows his “body shook...with power” when confronted with the possibility of controlling these fictional women; yet when given the opportunity to exercise his power, Gallimard is paralyzed. He is unsure how to use—or if he even *wants* to use—such power.

The pinup girl’s complete willingness to give herself over to him shocks Gallimard to the point of inaction. Song, yet another fictional woman, does the opposite, feigning modesty and keeping her clothes on while they engage in sexual activities. Of course her humility is out of necessity: she cannot actually expose her body without exposing the lie. But even before they consummate their relationship, he tests his power over Song by abandoning her for weeks (in Pinkerton-like fashion). During this time she sends desperate letters, finally confessing: “I can hide behind my dignity no longer. What do you want? I have already given you my shame” (35; 1.11). Song’s admission sickens Gallimard: “I had finally gained power over a beautiful woman, only to abuse it cruelly” (36; 1.11). Retribution for his disgusting abuse was imminent, he believed. Instead, Toulon, French Ambassador to China, promotes him to Vice-consul, citing his “new aggressive confiden[ce]” and ability to “get along with the Chinese” as his qualifications. This validates Gallimard’s conduct in his relationship with Song, who in turn confirms his treatment by admitting: “I am your Butterfly” (40; 1.13).

Although he finally captures his own Butterfly, he very shortly after embarks on his “first extra-extramarital affair” with a French student, Renee. According to Gallimard,

“Renee was picture perfect. With a body like those girls in the magazines. If I put a tissue paper over my eyes, I wouldn’t have been able to tell the difference” (54; 2.6). And what’s more, unlike Song, Renee “wasn’t afraid to be completely naked”—a quality that now excited Gallimard. “But is it possible” he asks, in reference to his bold new mistress, “for a woman to be *too* uninhibited, *too* willing, so as to seem almost too...masculine?” (54; 1.6). Renee’s unrestrained body and loose tongue threaten Gallimard’s fragile masculinity; her very name a mocking reminder that he has inhibitions and uncertainties while she has none. This “picture perfect” feminine ideal acts more “masculine” than the man who found himself a “lotus blossom” (46; 2.3). Unlike Song, Renee does not act like the “sensual,” “stupid,” and “willing” women who exist only within male fantasies. She is in complete possession of her body—and, it seems, of Gallimard’s, as evidenced by her unabashed compliment: “You have a nice weenie” (54; 2.6). Yet he keeps up the affair; not for Renee, but for how he believed it affected Song: “I saw Pinkerton and Butterfly, and what she would say if he were unfaithful...nothing. She would cry, alone, into those wildly soft sleeves...It was her tears and her silence that excited me, every time I visited Renee” (56; 1.6). His humble and submissive Oriental woman does not threaten his masculinity, but bolsters it.

Unfortunately, his conflating Puccini’s Butterfly with his own makes him blind to Song’s manipulative performance. But this blindness begins to seem purposeful, as Gallimard and his friend Marc continually express their preference for interacting with *obscured* women’s bodies. Gallimard notes Renee’s “picture perfect” body so closely

resembles the women from the magazines that if he “put a tissue paper over [his] eyes, [he] wouldn’t have been able to tell the difference.” And he clearly would have preferred blurring the line between the fictional women and the “too masculine” Renee, as her personality—and the fact that she *has* one—unsettles him. Similarly, Marc’s impassioned recounting of a party that included “babes” who were brought in “[o]n trucks. Packed in like sardines” underscores this desire:

Before you know it, every last one of them—they’re stripped and splashing around my pool. There’s no moon out, *they can’t see what’s going on*, their boobs are flapping, right? *You close your eyes*, reach out—it’s *grab bag*, get it? Doesn’t matter whose ass is between whose legs, whose teeth are sinking into who. You’re just in there, going at it, *eyes closed*, on and on for as long as you can stand...Some fun, huh? (8; 1.4, my emphasis).

These men find women desirable only if their bodies are hidden from sight or are obscured to the point of homogeneity. By purposefully obscuring them, women become wiped of personhood, are reduced to mere bodies or parts of bodies. This delusion opens up the possibility for men to dominate them, to indiscriminately use their bodies as “grab bags” to fulfill their desires—for lust or for power. But this willful blindness also provides an imagined barrier between that which is real/has real consequences, and that which is fictional. If, through a simple piece of “tissue paper” these women can become “like those girls in the magazines”, if, by simply “clos[ing] your eyes” they become just

“boobs,” “ass[es],” “legs,” and “teeth,” then the men’s actions have no real consequences because these women are unreal, fictional, and disconnected from an actual person.

Song is yet another man who practices—and encourages—this purposeful obscuring of women’s bodies, as it is paramount to the maintenance of hir and Gallimard’s relationship. To achieve this effect, Song of course uses women’s clothing to uphold Gallimard’s perception of hir as a woman. But ze also uses literal darkness to navigate Gallimard’s desire for power and need for sexual gratification. Song keeps the specifics of their love-making hidden from him, a fact that has become common knowledge among those who know their story: “He says...it was dark...and she was very modest” (3; 1.2). So when Gallimard suddenly demands to see Song naked, ze must quickly decide how best to deter this new need. And ze realizes that Gallimard does not want hir to put up a fight, but to merely submit to his wish—which ze does unwillingly and by heaping guilt onto hir fragile lover:

Gallimard: I just mean—

Song: Yes?

Gallimard: —that it will remove the only *barrier* left between us.

Song: No, Rene. Don’t couch your request in sweet words. Be yourself—*a cad*—and know that my love is enough, that I submit—submit to the worst you can give me. Well, come on. Strip me. Whatever happens, know that you have willed it.

Our love, in your hands. I’m helpless before my man. (60; 2.6, my emphasis)

But Gallimard, as Song (and he) well knows, is not a “cad”; ze knows he won’t actually go through with it. Hir plan works quite effectively, as Gallimard immediately crumbles and begs for hir forgiveness. Song completes this deception by telling him that ze is pregnant—an obvious lie, but one that successfully quells Gallimard’s desire to see hir naked. However, Gallimard glimpses the reality awaiting him beyond the “barrier” that exists between them—a barrier which, if taken down, would remove the pretense of fantasy, forcing him to enter a reality in which he “gained power over a beautiful woman, only to abuse it cruelly.” But Gallimard suggests that he may have had more awareness of the *actual* truth than Song suspects. As he crosses the stage towards hir, Gallimard addresses the audience: “Did I not undress her because I knew, somewhere deep down, what I would find? Perhaps. Happiness is so rare that our mind can turn somersaults to protect it” (60; 2.6).

Gallimard’s admission that he perhaps knew, “somewhere deep down” that Song was actually a man disrupts the very foundation of Song’s absolute power over him, as it suggests that he was not only aware of the façade, but complicit in maintaining it. He feigned ignorance of the truth so they could stay in their bizarre relationship that nevertheless brought him happiness. But of course Gallimard’s willful blindness is not the only indication of Song’s unstable power: his uncertainty in the role of “cruel white man” meant that it was never an identity that completely fit him. But Song never considers the possibility that for Gallimard, the “cruel white man” is yet another role, not an absolute identity category. Song constructs himself as the “submissive Oriental

woman” because ze believes ze has Gallimard—and indeed all of the West—figured out. Ze relays as much to the Parisian judge who demands an explanation for exactly how ze deceived Gallimard:

Song: The West thinks of itself as masculine—big guns, big industry, big money—so the East is feminine—weak, delicate, poor...Her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes. The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated—because a woman can’t think for herself...

Judge: But why would that make it possible for you to fool Monsieur Gallimard? Please—get to the point.

Song: One, because when he finally met his fantasy woman, he wanted more than anything to believe that she was, in fact, a woman. and second, I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never completely be a man...

Judge: Just answer my question: did he know you were a man?

Song: You know, Your Honor, I never asked. (83; 3.1).

Song could never have completely “fooled” Gallimard—not without his help. Yet ze believes ze understands the dynamics between the “dominant” West and “submissive” East well enough to build the foundation of hir entire plan upon it. But Song fails to see this binary as a construction; while ze performs and exploits it, ze treats it like a fixed framework, and does not consider anything outside of it. Song merely regurgitates the Orientalist discourse that not only simplifies the East, but the West as well. Ze reduces Gallimard to the stereotypical “cruel white man.” Ze assumes broad generalizations that

ze considers absolute, and fails to leave room for individual, human complexities, for the possibility of fluid identities.

Song's absolutist thinking is ironic, considering hir own ambiguous gender identity and sexual orientation—which begs the question: what exactly motivates Song to carry on a twenty-year-long relationship that appears to be based on a lie? Hir explicit motivation is political: ze is a spy who gathers information from Gallimard and passes it along to the Chinese government. But of course Song also desires power, as ze works to reverse the hierarchy and gain the dominant position over the Western man. Are simple patriotism and power enough to justify Song's prolonged performance? It seems impossible to rule out genuine love. Song may certainly have wanted to control Gallimard, but after twenty years of a sustained romantic relationship, perhaps Song simply fell in love with hir "cruel white man."

The play's ending supports this reading of Song's motivations as a blended desire for power and love. Ze not only wants absolute control over her lover, but wants him to *know of* hir power—that ze constructed and maintained a false identity to deceive him, and that it worked. Song's desire signals the ambivalent nature of their relationship; while reversed, there is still the fluctuating dynamic of attraction and repulsion, complicity and resistance. So Song boldly strips down naked, despite Gallimard's pleas—a perverse variation on the earlier scene. Ze wants Gallimard to understand the brilliance of hir performance, to "see through [the] act" and come out the other side knowing he was

duped by an Oriental *man*. But Gallimard's reaction—to laugh in the face of the truth—shatters his illusion of total control:

Gallimard: Oh god! What an idiot! Of course!

Song: Rene—what?

Gallimard: Look at you! You're a man! (*He bursts into laughter again*)...I just think it's ridiculously funny that I've wasted so much time on just a man!

Song: Wait. I'm not "just a man."

Gallimard: No? Isn't that what you've been trying to convince me of?

Song: Yes, but what I mean— (88; 3.2).

In this moment of revelation, Song destroys Gallimard's own illusions of power and love, as both dissipate instantly once he sees he is "just a man." This belittling of Song's performance offends him and he desperately tries to convince Gallimard that he is still his Butterfly by telling him to "close your eyes" and feel the face, the skin, the hair that he "wasted so much time on." But for Gallimard the "tissue paper" has been removed and he can never un-see the truth of Song's body: "You," he asks, "who knew every inch of my desires—how could you, of all people, have made such a mistake?" (89; 3.2). The answer he supplies is ego. Before his revelation, he boasts: "You think I could've pulled this off if I wasn't already full of pride when we met? No, not just pride. Arrogance. It takes arrogance, really—to believe you can will, with your eyes and your lips, the destiny of another" (85; 3.2). Blinded by his arrogance, Song failed to see Gallimard's complicitous role in the maintenance of their relationship. But he also admits to him that "maybe...just

maybe—I want you”—no longer as a man disguised as a woman, but as a man (who perhaps enjoys dressing and acting like a woman) who loves another man. Uninterested in this proposition, Gallimard rejects Song’s attempts at reconciliation. Instead, he embraces his position as Butterfly, declaring: “Tonight, I’ve finally learned to tell fantasy from reality. And, knowing the difference, I choose fantasy” (90; 3.2). He plays out his role to its canonical conclusion, his final act the ritual suicide that ends Puccini’s opera.

While Song’s constructing hir body to deceive Gallimard demonstrates hir ability to navigate the complex relationship between the West and the East, ze does so without considering that such a relationship, when concentrated on two people, could *be* complex. Instead of working hir way through and ultimately out of such a seemingly rigid binary, Song seeks only a reversal of authority, to show Gallimard, and the West, that despite being “just” an Oriental man, ze can usurp Western dominance and place hirself in the position of power. Yet despite hir agential performance, Song does not construct hir identity *outside* the confines of this colonial relationship. Instead, ze works within the binary in an attempt to reverse it. Song has always been acutely aware of hir subject position and potential for domination at the hands of a “cruel white man.” Hir actions, then, suggest an anticipation of this supposed inevitability. But because ze deceives Gallimard, tricking him into believing hir performance as the “submissive Oriental woman,” ze has the upper hand in their relationship. Despite hir keen powers of self-construction, Song never attempts to construct an alternative self that exists beyond the binary. Too late ze offers Gallimard a homosexual framework—one they might inhabit

together if only Gallimard can accept hir love despite hir betrayal, and hir ambiguous identity. But hir declaration that “maybe—I want you” comes too late. Gallimard has already chosen “the fantasy” that Song foolishly shattered.

Song’s brief suggestion of a homosexual relationship, while rejected by Gallimard, contains within it a potential truth behind hir decision to play the “submissive Oriental number” over the course of their decades-long affair. The foundation of hir identity stems directly from the Orientalist discourse that relegates hir to an inferior position. Ze recognizes that to a Westerner “being an Oriental” meant ze “could never be completely a man” (83). To prove that ze is, in fact, a man, ze donned the overly-simplistic identity that was expected from an “Oriental”: ze played the feminine woman all to demonstrate hir masculinity. However, there is the unsettling possibility that Song actually feels that ze is not “completely a man” and that ze enjoys playing the “submissive Oriental woman”—that she derives pleasure from acting feminine. This possibility is unsettling because all hir life ze was made to feel that these traits made hir inherently weak and open to the control of another. Hir own inner turmoil mixing with the external (negative) perception of hir body and identity could certainly cultivate confusion and anger—and with these feelings a strong desire to reverse the power dynamic. Ze wants to show that despite the negative discourse surrounding Orientals, hir ambiguous gender identity and sexual orientation do not make hir weak. On the contrary, ze has the advantage insofar as ze can successfully obscure hir body and identity to trick Gallimard into giving hir what ze actually wants: a partner.

Song's brief attempt to reconstruct himself and Gallimard outside the oppressive binary system fails because Gallimard refuses the reality of their homosexual relationship. He cannot let go of the fantasy they created for themselves: "I have a vision. Of the Orient. That, deep within its almond eyes, there are still women. Women willing to sacrifice themselves for the love of a man. Even a man whose love is completely without worth" (92). So Gallimard becomes this woman in the end, reestablishing the very opposition that Song so thoroughly deconstructed. Hwang's play, while successfully complicating this enduring and pervasive story of sentimental racism, does not offer the colonized subject a path to an alternative framework to the one he remains fettered within. This does not lessen the significance of Hwang's work; on the contrary, his play provides an entirely original and highly complex response to the *Madama Butterfly* tradition. But by way of comparison, the next chapter looks at Peter Carey's novel *Jack Maggs*, which presents an equally complex response to Dickens's *Great Expectations*. The titular character is confronted with a similar aporia by the end of the narrative, and yet he ultimately escapes the confines of his own restrictive binary. To find a path forward, Maggs cannot rely solely upon himself, as he remains stuck in his own delusions up until his near-death experience. What saves him from this Magwitch-like fate, and moves him beyond the oppressive structure, is Mercy Larkin's quick actions and keen emotional intelligence. This other colonized figure introduces Maggs to an alternative framework in which to construct an alternative self.

Beyond the Binary: Mercy Larkin as a Response to the Limits of Deconstruction

Peter Carey's novel *Jack Maggs* is a complex project that involves the rescue and reconstruction of Abel Magwitch, the infamous English criminal whose omnipresence in *Great Expectations* creates a psychic dissonance for Pip and threatens the power of the imperial center that rejected his claim to England and transported him to an Australian penal colony. In New South Wales, he was condemned to a life of mental and physical abuse at the hands of his fellow countrymen. However, from this disadvantaged position, Magwitch manages to free himself and make enough money to become the secret benefactor of the young boy who once showed him kindness. From this place of deprivation, Magwitch makes what he believes is a triumphant return to his "dear boy" and his beloved homeland, only to learn he is unwanted by both (Dickens 249). Magwitch's tragic life comes to an end imprisoned in the country that colonized him, his only witness at his death the faux son who would never accept him as a father.

This is the unitary storyline that Carey pulls Magwitch from, giving him the narrative space in which to "write back" to *Great Expectations*. More than a simple rewrite from Magwitch's perspective, *Jack Maggs* responds to and offers a corrective for the negative representation of Australia as a mere depository for English criminals. By recasting his home country as the place where Maggs and Mercy finally settle—a place in which they find refuge, happiness, and prosperity—Carey complicates *Great Expectations'* limited and stereotypical depiction of Australia. And their self-exile to the

British colony usurps colonial authority, as the place of imperial punishment and control becomes their chosen home.

But this would never have become Maggs's chosen home had it not been for Mercy Larkin. In fact, she more or less chose it for him. Hers is not, unfortunately, the main storyline; despite the fascinating and troubling glimpses we get of her past, Mercy's story remains largely untold. However, I argue that *Jack Maggs* cannot be read without acknowledging the importance of Mercy Larkin. Indeed, her presence in the text is essential to Carey's deconstructive project, in which Maggs resists the colonizer/colonized binary through his own rewriting. However, his resistance only takes him so far; in the end, he remains stuck within the now deconstructed binary, unable to move beyond it. And yet, the ending finds him and Mercy happily living lives unobstructed by colonial identity systems. And it is Mercy who identifies and pushes Maggs onto this path to decolonization.

Jack Maggs also demonstrates the power of intertextual play to disrupt the authority of a work that holds canonical status. The beginning of *Jack Maggs* suggests a rewrite of the later parts of *Great Expectations* with a shifted focus on Magwitch/Maggs. But instead we get a prequel of sorts, as Carey deviates from the plot of Dickens's novel and concludes with the suggestion that *Jack Maggs* tells the "true" story of how *Great Expectations* came to be. Oates, the Dickens analogue, writes *The Death of Maggs*, the *Great Expectations* analogue, after Maggs's death in Australia—this time surrounded by "his weeping sons and daughters" and "without ever having read 'That Book'" (356). By

offering an alternative narrative, one with multiple storylines that culminate in Maggs's escape from an undignified death, Carey ultimately usurps Dickens's canonical text. He reveals the inherent instabilities in such works, as the process of "writing back" uncovers "gaps and fissures," unexplored analyses, that undermine the assumption of absolute authority and unity.

At the same time as he destabilizes the canonicity of *Great Expectations*, Carey challenges the monolithic status of the author figure, as the individual constructor of unitary works, and as indivisible from those works. As the postcolonial re-creator of another author's text, Carey self-consciously deconstructs the notion of the singular author. But Carey also addresses this problematic on the level of the text by incorporating multiple author figures who seem to compete for the power to construct the identities of the two disadvantaged characters whose storylines run parallel to each other's: Jack Maggs and Mercy Larkin.

Dickens himself addresses the issue of authorship within his own narrative: as a figure of a colonized subject, Magwitch lacks the ability to construct his own identity. From as far back as he can remember he had the label of a "terrible hardened one...said to live in jails" (Dickens 271). Unable to shift this perception of himself, ("But what the devil was I to do? I must put something into my stomach, mustn't I?") Magwitch had no choice but to step into this reductive identity that had been shaped for him by a society unwilling to help (271). And yet Magwitch is anything but a simple character: he grows up on the streets of London, lives a life of crime, and is eventually caught and sent to

New South Wales where he labors for years to make enough money to become Pip's benefactor, giving himself the power to make, or *author*, a "brought-up London gentleman"—all from his exiled position. Quite a tantalizing story for a character who only gets one chapter to tell the "short and handy" version of his life story: "In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. There, you've got it" (270). With the revelation it was Magwitch, and not Mrs. Havisham, who had been supporting Pip, Dickens simultaneously shows the amount of power Magwitch possessed and takes it away, as Pip rejects Magwitch as his benefactor, and gives up his own (manufactured) identity as a gentleman. By dismantling Magwitch's authority, he is reduced from a powerful constructing force to a mere plot device, meant to serve the story arc of the protagonist. Carey clearly recognized the complexity of and potential in this character to tell a richer story, to regain the power to construct identities—even his own.

Carey transforms Magwitch into Maggs, the sharp and cunning ex-convict who fits, chameleon-like, into any role necessary for his survival. Despite the fact that his identity has been constructed for him—and his body used to control him—by his "family" Silas Smith and Ma Britten, by the colonizers at New South Wales, by Tobias Oates, he deftly navigates these hierarchical relationships that relegate him to the inferior position. With this agency, Maggs makes a gentleman, returns to England, and resists the simplistic and restrictive identity categories (criminal, convict, colonized subject) that fix his identity in place. And it is this resistance that opens up a space for him to reconstruct *himself*—which he does, by literally rewriting his character even as Oates writes the

“fictional” story of *The Death of Maggs*. These agential actions suggest that Maggs successfully subverts these hierarchical relationships, wresting himself from these restrictive binaries that have entrapped him his entire life. And indeed, he does expose the cracks in the foundation of Colonialism, with its dependence upon such binary systems, by not only constructing another’s identity from his own constructed position, but by returning to the country that exiled him and successfully re-writing his *own* identity.

However, while his revealing letters to Phipps certainly give readers a new, fuller perspective on Maggs’s character, and the act of writing down his own story directly counteracts Oates’s blatant attempts to appropriate Maggs’s identity for himself, Maggs does not see his actions as re-constructive. Indeed, after he first reads Oates’s chapter written about him, he compares the experience to being tortured in New South Wales: “He had had that feeling in his gut before, that cold terror associated with the triangle. He knew his life and death were not his own” (297). Maggs’s conflating the feeling of being tortured to reading a line of text written about himself underscores his feeling out of control of his own life. Yet he slowly, unknowingly, takes back control, reversing the hierarchies. But one thing holds him back from actualizing his power: Phipps. Maggs still clings to the hope that Phipps will provide him with the stable English family denied him in childhood. And who can blame him? Cruel, greedy mothers (and fathers) shaped Maggs’s early years. Ma Britten certainly failed Maggs as a (foster) mother. She and Silas Smith, his benefactor and only father figure, raised him “for a base purpose like a hog or a hen”—using his body for their own gain (117). Taught to be a thief, Maggs

spent his childhood worming his “sooty” body down chimneys, breaking into wealthy homes to steal expensive silver and provide for his “family”. And then of course that other Ma—Mother England—equally and utterly failed him; his home country offered the unfortunate orphan no support, but used his (involuntary) criminality as an excuse to transport him to Australia, again using his body as tool for profit.

As difficult as it is to comprehend the cruelties inflicted upon Maggs, there is another character whose story, while certainly not as developed as Maggs’s, closely parallels his own: the maid of Percy Buckle’s household, Mercy Larkin. While a relatively minor character, especially in comparison to Tobias Oates, Mercy’s storyline intersects Maggs’s at this crucial juncture in his life, as she singlehandedly (pun intended) saves Maggs from a Magwitch-like death. But even before they become “matched in their deformity”, Maggs and Mercy are matched in their respective forms of colonization (355). While different in scope, both characters find themselves in sets of unequal relationships in which they are controlled, used, and manipulated by others. These others, far from unknown colonizers in far-off countries, are in fact the people closest to them: their families. And their methods for control are equally personal, as Maggs’s and Mercy’s bodies are the site for control.

From the very beginning of his life Maggs was defined by his physical appearance. Found half-buried in mud by the poor children living underneath London Bridge, Maggs was picked up by Silas Smith and brought to live with Ma Britten. But his is not a story of salvation: “Mary Britten did not even note [Silas]. She told me, often

enough, that her only observations were of me, and she did not want me. She heard the weak cry of a starving babe, the stink of cold and unwashed skin...I heard a hundred times how I was starved and thin and wrinkled like a rag” (84-5). But with Silas’s promise (and money) that they could raise this untoward “starving babe” to be profitable, Ma Britten reluctantly accepts Maggs into her home. The two see his “starved and thin and wrinkled” body as indicative of his inherent inferiority, and so inscribe upon him a base identity—that of a thief. They use his “thin” and “weak” body as a tool to break into wealthy homes, forcing his scrawny frame down through chimneys so he can unlock the front doors. Knowing little else but how to be an expert criminal, Maggs has no choice but to continue in this line of work, which, of course, makes him an unacceptable Englishman. Eventually, he is convicted and transported to Australia, his body now meant to labor for the colonial power he once called (and indeed up until the final scene still called) home.

Mercy Larkin also experiences the colonization of her body at a young age and from those who purport to be family. Both her mother and later her “savior” Percy Buckle treat her body like an object that they own and control (175). But, like Maggs, Mercy is sharp; she understands her body’s influence over Buckle and because of this is able to navigate their hierarchical relationship. Yet she, too, cannot see outside her binary—cannot envision a self that is separate from Buckle. Indeed, her highest goal is *marriage* to the man who physically and mentally abuses her. Both Mercy and Maggs are so dependent upon their respective oppressors for the promise of what they provide:

stability, support, and family, even at the cost of their own freedom. While both characters exist within these colonizer/colonized relationships, it is Mercy who ultimately realizes their colonized positions and, instead of simply reversing the hierarchies, facilitates their escape from the system all together. Mercy, then, is vital to Maggs's (or Magwitch's) happy ending, and will therefore be the focus of the chapter.

I argue that Carey self-consciously employs Mercy Larkin, another colonized subject, as a response to the limitations of deconstruction as a postcolonial strategy. Insofar as Maggs's dismantling of his hierarchical relationships proves the efficacy of deconstruction as a method for resisting colonial power, it does not offer an escape from these binary systems. Maggs resists, and even starts to reverse, the hierarchies; yet he remains stuck within them, almost dying at the hands of his "son" because he cannot imagine a "self" outside the colonial system. Mercy's interference in this final scene not only saves him from a Magwitch-like death: her swift action simultaneously frees them both from their respective oppressors. Carey introduces Mercy as a "third arm" that successfully pulls Maggs from his inferior position within the colonizer/colonized binary and then re-moves them both to Australia. Here, they both finally get the stability of a supportive family and community uninterested in constructing them into inferior positions. But while Mercy does eventually rescue them both from their colonized situations, neither of them recognizes the fact of their colonization until they recognize it in each other. Only then does Mercy act for them both, as she finally envisions a path out of their oppressive relationships, out of England, and beyond the reach of colonial

control. Through Maggs and Mercy, Carey demonstrates the impossibility of authoring one's own decolonization, suggesting the path toward freedom (and not just resistance) lies in the help of others—a family, community—outside the restrictive binaries.

Unfortunately, the story of Mercy Larkin's interesting life only occasionally punctuates the larger storylines of Maggs and Oates. From the brief glimpses we get of her past and present circumstances emerge a lifetime of abuse, specifically bodily abuse, that has shaped her into a curiously bold yet understandably anxious young woman. We learn that Mercy's father died when she was thirteen, forcing her and her mother to move to "a damp and crumbling slum at the back of Fetter Lane" (74). With few options available to her, Marjorie Larkin begins selling baked goods—an occupation that quickly progresses into selling herself. While out at night, Mercy's mother locks her away in their apartment where, half-starving, she "fear[s] her mother dead, and that she herself would die before anyone would find her" (75). After an entire summer of this torture, Mercy's mother realizes her young daughter was of much more use to her out in the Haymarket than imprisoned in that "dreary room" (75). She dresses Mercy in an eye-catching, if not slightly unfashionable dress, takes her into the crowded streets, and immediately sends the unsuspecting girl off with the first man that approaches them. "What happened then happened, and like a broken plate was soon all pieces, most of them missing in the dark" (77). The shame-faced man hurriedly paid the confused and frightened girl and when she reunited with her mother, was welcomed back with a slap across the face. Thus we have yet another failed mother.

This episode marks the beginning of Mercy's colonization, in which her body becomes a site for control. By putting her in the garish dress, Marjorie Larkin seeks to shift men's perception of her young daughter. The dress marks her as a prostitute, open and available to the desires of all paying customers; as with Song's deceptive clothing, it allows the depraved men to delude themselves, to look past the fact that she is still a child, dressed up to perform the role of a whore. In this position Mercy loses all agency; she can no longer control how her body is perceived and used by others. While it is a role she is forced to perform, it is not one that she simply steps out of once free from her mother's grasp. Even after she moves out of Fetter Lane, leaving behind her life of prostitution, Mercy still navigates her new position in Percy Buckle's household as if she lacked ownership over her body and with the expectation that to survive, she must satisfy the desires of men. The "role" understandably leaves lasting effects on Mercy's identity; and it is this perception of herself, combined with her so-called savior's treatment of her, that sustains Mercy's colonization.

After Mercy winds her way back through the Haymarket and finds her mother, Percy Buckle approaches the distraught pair. Although he seems to look past the dress, seeing only his vulnerable neighbor with her mad mother, Marjorie Larkin reproaches the earnest little man, mistaking him for another client. To finally get her attention, he puts money in her hand, repeating his simple plea: "I am your neighbor" (78). Only then does she listen to him; they follow Buckle back to their apartment where he cooks the first of many fried fish meals. Thus begins Buckle's and Mercy's long friendship, one filled with

home-cooked meals and bedtime stories. Certainly Buckle deserves the designation that Mercy gives him as “the kindest, most decent man in all the world” (79). And why not, when he pulls her from this life of forced prostitution.

Return to the present: Percy Buckle, after having laboriously worked himself up from fried-fish seller to grocer, unexpectedly inherits a gentleman’s residence, complete with servants. Despite his sudden transformation from mere grocer to master of a household, Buckle does not completely leave behind his former life: he takes Mercy with him, pulling her out of Fetter Lane and away from her mother, giving her a position as maid in the house. Grateful and relieved, Mercy finally feels she has escaped from her miserable life.

While Mercy’s circumstances have certainly changed, it becomes apparent that she has only exchanged one evil for another. Not simply just another of Buckle’s servants, Mercy explains to Maggs that “[t]hey call me a maid, but that is not my true position in the household. I have known Mr Buckle since I was a child. He has read to me for ever so long a time” (121). In Mercy’s eyes, Percy Buckle is her savior. His kind treatment of her must have stood in stark contrast to that of her mad mother who abused her body. And yet, somewhere along the line, her “savior” became yet another client; Buckle’s nightly bedtime stories now conclude in sex with his “Good Companion” (124). However, in the single, brief scene we get of their nights together, Mercy is not physically coerced into having sex with her “master”; indeed, she appears a willing partner, and is even playfully open and honest with her longtime friend. This openness

even carries over into their daytime interactions, as she and the other staff members have grown accustomed to a casual and comfortable atmosphere in Master Buckle's household. And yet, despite Mercy's apparent ease around Buckle, there is a lot at stake for her in this relationship. She lives in constant fear of dismissal, which would force her to return to her previous life. And while this fear heightens after Jack Maggs arrives, his presence posing a threat to Buckle's singular authority over Mercy, there is evidence that Buckle has always demanded Mercy attend to his desires lest she provoke her petulant master into dismissing her. One night shortly after Maggs's arrival, while he and Mercy are talking in Henry Phipps's abandoned house, Buckle comes home early. Maggs shrugs it off, as he was hoping for Phipps's return; but Mercy is sent into a panic: "'Oh Lor.' Mercy leaped to her feet. 'Dear Jesus—home so early.' 'He cannot need you now, at this hour.' 'No, no, I have to go. Oh dear God save me.' And she turned and ran off up the stairs" (81). Clearly, these nightly meetings mean more to Buckle than perhaps is explicitly stated; and Mercy feels the pressure to perform in her role as his "Good Companion." She is no longer under her mother's control, nor is she selling her body to different men every night. But Mercy Larkin is not free. Her body and her life are not yet her own.

Unfortunately, Mercy does not recognize her relationship with Buckle as a continuation of her colonization. While she certainly lives and works in better conditions and has more agency to navigate their complicated relationship, Mercy is still dependent on Buckle alone. Indeed, the highest expectation she has for her life is marriage to her

childhood savior and now benefactor. She derives great pleasure in imagining the day she becomes Mrs Buckle: while attending on Buckle, she'll lose herself in hopeful reveries, holding her hands behind her and "making a firm circle where her wedding ring might one day be" (137). What Mercy doesn't understand is that marriage to Buckle would only solidify his control over her. Her body, her identity, her life: Buckle would own her completely. Mercy cannot conceive of an alternate path for her life, for a reality in which she controls her body and constructs her own identity. Her experience has been limited to an abusive mother who attempted to turn her daughter's body into a revolving door for depraved men. It comes as no surprise, then, that Mercy desires the stability that marriage to Buckle offers.

After such a tumultuous beginning to her life, Mercy naturally seeks safety and stability; to attain them she will do anything: "She was a proud young woman, and extremely particular about who she waited upon and why. Yet when it came to retaining her benefactor's good opinion, she was prepared to jettison self-respect completely" (136-37). When Buckle is angry with Mercy, she is willing to degrade herself to get back in his good graces: "She would lick his boots, and like the taste of it. She would make herself a worm and crawl into his ear. She would slide along his very veins and curl up inside the red wash of his angry little heart" (136-37). Mercy's fear of abandonment runs so deep that she would, "as she later told Jack Maggs...cut off her own arm as lose his kind opinion" (79). (This seemingly flippant remark about maiming herself of course takes on a new meaning by the end of the novel, a point examined below.) What is most

striking about her willingness to degrade herself is that she feels no need or desire to protect her body from Buckle. Instead, she immediately offers her body at the first sign of his displeasure. Mercy has learned, through her years of interactions with Buckle, that it is her body that he desires above all else; he cares almost nothing for her wellbeing. If Buckle were her true savior, selfless and understanding of the trauma she endured, he would help her without demanding anything in return and Mercy would not be made to feel the threat of his abandonment so acutely.

Although Buckle selfishly takes advantage of Mercy's dependence on him, coercing her into having sex, he is, in fact, an often kind and sympathetic person. It must be remembered that Buckle, too, came from a disadvantaged position. Although not forced to sell his body, he did live in the slums of Fetter Lane, making a meager living as a beggar selling fried fish. He took care of Mercy when she was young; while their current relationship has developed into something questionable, at the core he is still her protector. When he helped her escape from her mother, he (perhaps unconsciously) gave her more agency than she previously possessed. And his kindnesses don't stop at Mercy: when Maggs enters their lives and Oates uncovers his secret—that he is a “bolter from New South Wales”—Buckle does not turn him out (96). Oates warns Buckle that the convict threatens his and his servants' safety, but Buckle refuses to send him back to Australia, and even defends Maggs's right to stay. In response to Oates's declaration, “I will visit him in prison”, Buckle insists:

“We do ourselves no credit in judging him.”

Oates snorted. "Did you not see his *back*, man? He is a scoundrel.

"Well, we saw a page of his history," said the little grocer stubbornly.

"Whatever his offence, anyone with half a heart can see that he has paid the bill. I could not send him back for more." (96-7)

Buckle reveals the source of his ready and profound sympathy for the convict: "As for me, I had an older sister who suffered transportation to that same cursed place...Excuse me crying, Sir. My sister was not an angel either. Lord knows what became of her" (98). Buckle has first-hand experience with the injustice that "Mother England would do such a thing to one of her own" (98). Because of this, he goes to great lengths to ensure Maggs's safety.

Of course, Buckle does eventually run out of patience for the convict once he begins to feel threatened by Maggs's presence. In this way, Buckle mirrors Pip's sudden shift in attitude after his expectations change. When faced with his convict benefactor, the (unacceptable) constructed nature of Pip's identity as a gentleman is suddenly and unwantedly exposed. Once revealed, Pip recognizes his gentleman status as illegitimate and rejects Magwitch as his benefactor. Similarly, Maggs threatens to rob Buckle of his own (constructed) imperial privilege—his inherited gentleman's residence and his "ownership" of Mercy Larkin. Indeed, Maggs not only exercises control over Buckle's household by initiating a fake quarantine of the premises (acted out by the "doctor" Oates), boarding up the doors and windows to keep the servants, who know he is a "bolter," from turning him in. He also locks Mercy up in his private room because, in her

keen ability to see beyond disguises, she recognizes Oates's act. In his selfishness, Buckle misinterpreted Maggs's self-preservation as a direct threat to his own identity. Unable to thwart Maggs's swift takeover of all that was once exclusively his, the previously empathetic Buckle starts to turn on the convict.

Buckle's initial defense of Maggs demonstrates his ability to empathize with the convict. And yet, Buckle fails to see the irony in his earnest speech, as he is not just harboring one colonized subject under his roof. While the scars across Maggs's back are merely "a page of his history" that "anyone with half a heart can see," Buckle is blind to Mercy's internal scars. As such a close and intimate friend, Buckle had to know that Mercy's mother forced her into prostitution. Yet Buckle demands the same from Mercy, keeping her in her colonized position. Every time he threatens to dismiss her, he threatens to send *her* "back for more." What's more, Mercy's "offence" was having a madwoman for a mother, a crime she had no control over. Buckle recognizes that to send Maggs back to his former life would be inhumane, that he is a victim of colonization and has "paid the bill" and deserves compassion. His inability to see the parallels between Maggs and Mercy, to see that she needs his compassion as much if not more than Maggs, keeps her fixed in an inferior position.

Insofar as Mercy is a colonized subject, Buckle, in his role, is the colonizer figure. And yet the two clearly do not fit in this overly-simplified binary. Buckle is uncertain of his power and authority while Mercy does possess—albeit minimally—agency to at least navigate their complex relationship. They obviously care for each other; and yet he

exploits her dependence on him. Mercy fears Buckle's petulant behavior could cause him to send her back to Fetter Lane, but she is still bold-tongued and honest with him. Their relationship is far from simple. Indeed, it exemplifies Bhabha's theory of ambivalence, which more accurately characterizes the colonizer/colonized relationship. Ambivalence describes a complex relationship, one constantly fluctuating between attraction and repulsion, complicity and resistance. Ambivalence disrupts the clear-cut authority of the colonizer because it disturbs the simple binary. And more than this, it demonstrates the impossibility of stability and the inevitable deconstruction of the binary.

While the inevitable dismantling of their relationship was always already in motion, it is Jack Maggs who precipitates the process. As perhaps the first man since her father's death to show no interest in taking advantage of her body, Maggs stands in stark contrast to Mercy's "savior." Maggs's seeming disinterest in her confuses Mercy, who had been taught to use her body as a means of getting what she (and her mother) needed. She had always operated under the assumption that all men perceived her as disposable and that therefore her survival was contingent upon her upholding this perception. Therefore, if she wanted safety and stability, she had to use her body to satisfy the *one* man who offered her protection. And marriage, for Mercy, guaranteed this protection, as it meant she would never return to Fetter Lane and her unstable mother.

It is Maggs's seeming disinterest in Mercy that first opens her eyes to the possibility that there exists an alternate perception of herself. All of her previous experiences with men have taught her that they are only interested in possessing her

body, in using it to fulfil their desires. And so Mercy approaches Maggs in much the same way as she does Buckle, with the expectation that her actions will prompt similar results. After Maggs's paranoia and distrust causes him to lock Mercy up in his room with him—a decision that makes Mercy think, understandably, he'll eventually have his way with her—she begins the necessary preparations for such an encounter:

Mercy Larkin applied her 'nurse-maid's rouge,' pinching her cheeks, tweaking them spitefully, all the time contorting her face and letting out small cries...This cosmetic recipe she had learned from her mother, who had applied it enthusiastically before launching her daughter out into the Haymarket. (165)

The “swollen, slightly bruised features that always produced so amorous a response in Mr Buckle” have no effect on Maggs, as he appears not to notice them, let alone act upon their intended invitation (165).

This slight but nevertheless violent manipulation of her appearance highlights her ability to construct her own body to affect men's perceptions. But this time, Mercy's trick doesn't work. Indeed, she constantly misreads Maggs, and her expectations of his desires often differ from his actions. After telling Maggs that Oates and Buckle know he is a convict, she grabs his hand when he reaches for her, mistaking his anger for distress. Her lips twitch as he ushers her through the door to his room, a mistaken “omen...that they would soon be kissed” (165). And while Maggs does eventually kiss her after she coyly admits, “I don't mind you lock me,” it is a kiss “[u]pon the forehead, like a bishop or an

uncle” (174). In this moment, Maggs finally begins to piece together her history and to understand the forces that shaped her into such a conflicted young woman:

There was an odd agitation showing in his eyes...

“How did little Buckle nab you? It don’t make sense, the pair of you.”

“It makes sense.”

“Did you lose your papa?”

“What?”

“Did you lose your papa?”

His eyes were soft and brown, all their hardness gone...She looked at him, trying to understand what it was he felt, and then he lifted his poor misshapen hand and stroked her hair.

“Lost your da?” he said roughly. “The poor thing lost the da.”

Then she wept against his musky shirt and she felt how he pitied her. He did not embrace her, but he continued gently to stroke her hair... (174)

Maggs finally understands why Mercy, as such a bold, quick, and persistent woman, flinches at the first sign of her master’s displeasure: the fear of abandonment. And indeed, Maggs can relate to this feeling because he has experienced it himself—the “odd agitation showing in his eyes” his dawning realization that he recognizes himself in Mercy. And he reacts not as Buckle did (by trying to fill the hole left behind by her father, giving him a false sense of ownership over her) but with compassion, with pity—with exactly what he needed when his “family” and his country abandoned him.

It is Maggs's pure empathy for Mercy—without any expectation of a sexual reward—that first shifts Mercy's perception of her "savior." And by shifting her perception of Buckle, she shifts her perception of herself. Their compassionate embrace is disrupted by Constable, come to collect Maggs's letter for Phipps, and Buckle, come to inspect the condition of his valuable object, Mercy. Buckle's obvious relief at Maggs's declaration that he will soon "be gone from [his] life" rankles her: "Mercy saw him as she had never seen him before. She wished it were not so, but her saviour had begun to cut a pathetic figure in her eyes" (175). By force of contrast, Maggs exposes the flaws in Buckle, which causes Mercy to see the flaws in his singular perception of her identity. Maggs can see her as something more than just a prostitute, and her body as more than just a site for profit and control. He opens Mercy's eyes to the possibility of a relationship—indeed of a *self*—that can exist outside of the hierarchical relationships in which she's been bound.

Maggs gives her much more than just a different perspective of herself: he shows her a glimpse of a space in which she can reconstruct herself—a process that he has unknowingly already begun for himself. But it takes Mercy's boldness and persistence to make him see this other self. Over the course of the narrative, Mercy slowly pieces together Maggs's own history: she learns he is a bolter from New South Wales; that he has a sea of scars across his back from the torture and abuse he suffered while there; and, most importantly, she discovers that he carries with him two locks of children's hair:

‘Go home to your babies...You have babies in the place where you have come from.’

His mouth tightened in denial. ‘My son is an Englishman.’

‘I meant your real children.

‘I am not of that race...The Australian race.’

‘But what of your babes...You are their da, Jack. They walk along the street, they think they see your face in the clouds.’

‘I made my promise to Henry before they were born.’

‘He looks at no clouds for you...He don’t see your face.’ (340)

Just as Mercy was ignorant of her own colonized position before Maggs entered her life, he cannot acknowledge that it was England and Englishmen—not Australia—that colonized him. His “family” turned him into a thief and used him for profit; his country transported him to a penal colony; and his “son” learned to send him fake letters of gratitude for all that he gave him. Yet Maggs cannot let go of the vision of the thoughtful young boy who once shared his food with him—a vision he literally carries with him in the form of a locket with what he believes is a portrait of Phipps, but is instead a miniature of George IV. While being tortured in New South Wales, Maggs would construct, “piece by piece the place wherein his eyes had first opened, the home to which he would one day return” (350). He built for himself an ideal version of London, one that he later understood “was meant by *authors* when they wrote of England, and of Englishmen”: that is, a fictional construction (350, my emphasis). The portrait is a lie; the

England he built up in his head is a lie. But these were necessary fictions, delusions he maintained—like Mercy with Buckle—for his survival. It takes Mercy's deep empathy for him and his children to show Maggs what he always knew: "his life and death were not his own"; but, perhaps with Mercy's help, he could have an opportunity at another life (297).

Despite Mercy's persistent plea to Maggs that he should go back to his children, he holds fast to his delusion that Phipps is ready to accept him as a father. It takes a near-death experience at the hands of this so-called son for Maggs to finally realize his grave mistake. The now highly unstable Percy Buckle convinces Phipps that Maggs has come back from Australia to take back his house, telling him: "In a short while...a criminal will break into your house...You will shoot him through the heart" (323). And Buckle's murderous plan would have been completed if not for Mercy Larkin, whose first truly agential act saves Maggs from a Magwitch-like end. While the crazed Buckle urges Phipps to "Fire, for God's sake, fire", Mercy slips from the shadows and raises her left hand toward the barrel of the gun while in her right hand is clutched the "two precious locks of hair" (352). The gun goes off, Mercy's "wedding finger was blown away" and "when Jack Maggs came to her side, the pair were finally matched in their deformity" (355). While maimed in the process of saving Maggs's life, Mercy has really saved them both. Through this single, agential act of bodily harm, Maggs is able to return to his life in Australia—a life he could not recognize as his own until Mercy's selfless decision allows him this opportunity. And she also escapes her colonized position, solidifying her

freedom from her mother, from Buckle, and—with the loss of her wedding ring finger—from that other oppressive binary: marriage.

Mercy returns to Australia with Maggs where she raises his two children, “but then very quickly gave birth to five further members of ‘That Race’” (356). And what, exactly, is “that race”? No longer of England and yet not quite Australian, Maggs and Mercy exist in a liminal space that is entirely their own. It is here in this in-between that they are finally free to construct, for themselves, their own identities. But they would not have returned to this space if not for each other: Maggs showed Mercy the possibility of an alternate self and she showed him that he had already found a way out of his colonized position; he just needed to find his way back. And once they return, they create for themselves, and for their children, the stable family and supportive community denied them their entire lives.

Coda: Power in Multiplicity: Authorship and the Creation of Multiple Truths

The deconstructive play that *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly* engage in does not end within the worlds of the narratives, but is embedded in Carey's and Hwang's methodology for "writing back" to their canonical sources. The existence of a counter-discursive text creates yet another hierarchical relationship, in which the "original" establishes authority over the counter-discourse, as the latter is understood as derivative and therefore inferior, unoriginal. But Carey and Hwang directly challenge the canonical claim to authority by not simply rewriting *Great Expectations* and *Madama Butterfly* through a postcolonial lens—although they do this, too. Their projects engage these "original" texts in complex intertextual and metafictional interactions that compel dialogues about originality, truth, authorship, and the power of storytelling. Through the use of these postmodern devices, *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly* move the originals "onto a world of shifting sands" (Thieme 2). By destabilizing their canonical predecessors, the postcolonial texts leave an indelible mark on the originals; they can never be read the same again. While the counter-discourses force an alternate reading, they do so not with the intention of subverting and replacing the canonical texts; indeed, *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly* would never have been written without them. Instead, the deconstructive moves that take place through the metafictional, dialogic interactions work to show a relationship of codependence between "original" and "derivative". As such, *Jack Maggs* and *M. Butterfly* are both testaments to the greatness and enduring legacy of *Great Expectations* and *Madama Butterfly*. But they also possess their own greatness and power

insofar as simultaneously rewrite and complicate their originals while challenging the supposedly implicit boundaries between texts bound in this unique, dialogic relationship.

Carey challenges this hierarchical relationship between his novel and Dickens's through a proliferation of texts that offer an alternative to the unitary storyline. But this intertextuality also validates *Great Expectations* as a novel worthy of such a complex response and acknowledges its openness and potential for such an interaction. Magwitch is represented as a stereotypically dangerous convict whose return to England signals a threat to the society that sought to purge itself of its criminals. Ultimately reduced to a mere function of the primary storyline (Pip's), Magwitch's hopes of reclaiming his country and "son" are denied him, as he dies without the acceptance of either one. And yet, Magwitch's role in Pip's life—and therefore the entire novel—is a powerful one. Despite his exile from England, and consequently from the action of the novel, Magwitch ostensibly controls the entire story of Pip's life from the moment they met in the graveyard. Fueled by his deep appreciation and sense of duty for the young boy's brief but lasting act of kindness, Magwitch determines to become Pip's benefactor. From his exiled position, Magwitch singlehandedly shapes Pip's entire identity as an (constructed) English gentleman. So while he lacks the narrative space in which to tell a more complete story of his undoubtedly fascinating life, Magwitch nevertheless occupies the powerful position of *author* of Pip's story.

As both a figure of a colonized subject and constructor of Pip's identity, Magwitch's character is certainly more complex and warrants deeper exploration than

what Dickens offers. Yet what Dickens *does* offer is a character with great potential, one that is open to dialogic interactions. And, of course, Carey engages with this unexplored character; but this is not the only intertext that Carey brings into conversation: Dickens's own life becomes a text in the novel, re-worked through the author-character, Tobias Oates. And texts abound within *Jack Maggs*: Oates is constantly writing his next novel using material from the memories involuntarily produced and stolen through his mesmeric sessions. Maggs becomes the latest victim of Oates's burglary, and the author works tirelessly to extract the whole of Maggs's tantalizing story so he can fully appropriate it as his own. But Maggs is simultaneously creating his own text, one that tells a different version of his life story—different from both Oates's story and Dickens's. Even Mercy Larkin participates in this textual play: she ardently collects all versions of Oates's novel, *The Death of Maggs*, and imposes her own minor, yet powerful rewrite through her act of excision.

Clearly, metafiction lies at the heart of Carey's novel. As such, these metafictional interactions generate this multiplicity of texts and authors. This multiplicity directly challenges the monolithic author figure as creator of a single truth while at the same time it demonstrates the power of authors and their stories to shape, affect, and construct identities. The awareness of this power—that anyone can tell stories, their own or someone else's—forces an awareness of the possibility for infinite truths. The author consequently becomes a fractured figure; the stories produced through this fracturing are

no less powerful, but perpetually open to reinterpretation, retelling, and reconstruction from other authors.

Tobias Oates attempts to represent this romantic ideal of the all-powerful author figure who creates entire worlds from his own brilliant mind. While Oates is undeniably powerful, his narrative creations are anything but original. His novels derive from the minds of the unsuspecting eccentrics that he pays to tell him their stories. “He cannot help himself,” the cook says of Oates, speaking to Maggs: “he is an author...and he must know your whole life story or he will die of it” (48). Once he extracts the “whole life story”, Oates repurposes it, transforming it from real-life to fictional narrative. These narratives end up in his novels, and thus he profits from the stories of others.

But he doesn't just repurpose these stories to write novels—he also uses them to *re-write himself*. Oates's identity is in a constant state of flux. He stores away all of his collected narrative fragments, literally—he has “systems of shelves and pigeon holes” in his study where he keeps these bits of stories he steals from others (49). This system allows him to pull out pieces of any one of the various identities and use them at will. At a dinner party of distinguished surgeons at the “Hippocratic Institute” Oates presents several of these narrative fragments, moving deftly among stories of Percy Buckle and chance run-ins with Thackeray, ending in an imitation of the Regency Surgeon (148). Directly after this dinner, Buckle calls upon Oates to pacify his agitated footman, as Maggs has learned that his secret (that he is a “bolter”) has spread throughout the Buckle household (152). So Oates once again repurposes his Regency Surgeon impersonation; he

enters under the guise of a doctor, declares “there is Contagion in the house” and issues a quarantine (158). In this act of fiction Maggs comes to understand the extent of Oates’s power: “This doctor, with his twisted red mouth and wild bright eyes, was incredible, ridiculous, and yet he *existed*, given life by some violent magic in his creator’s heart” (160, emphasis in original). While this story got a laugh at the dinner, there is no humor this time around. The morning after the Contagion “spreads” throughout the household, several servants fall ill. Eventually, the butler dies of Oates’s fictional illness. He is accused of using mesmerism to “bewitch” the butler; although this accusation goes unconfirmed, Oates’s storytelling nevertheless affected, to an unimaginable degree, those who he wrote into his narrative. This particular rewriting of his identity hyperbolically demonstrates this “violent magic” authors use to change material reality.

Oates’s perpetual fragmentation and constant rewriting of his identity suggests a desire, or need, to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction. By putting on these various masks and performing these various roles, Oates effectively obscures his own reality—from others and from himself. Oates hides a great secret, one that threatens to destroy his life if it were to be found out: “he was in love with his wife’s sister” (42). Their affair began with a “mutual concern for his wife” which brought them close together, physically and emotionally. “This had never been his intention,” he claims. And perhaps this is true. However, his adulterous actions stem from a much deeper truth that he himself never fully understood: “He did not know the curse or gift his ma and pa had given him: he would not be loved enough, not ever” (43). This is why he performs for the

distinguished surgeons, why he writes novels. He craves the fame, the acceptance, the brief feeling of love that overcomes him in their praise, their applause. He seeks out these fleeting bursts of admiration, obtained through constant reconstruction, because they allow him to escape, momentarily, from himself.

There is of course another character who also attempts to blur the boundary between reality and fiction so as to hide his own truth. Like Oates, Maggs harbors a great secret that threatens to destroy all he has built up in his mind: he is a “bolter” who returns, illegally, to his home country, in order to reclaim his self-constructed identity as an Englishman and father. Maggs proves equal to Oates in his ability to rewrite himself at will. When he first returns to London, he keeps his fellow coach passengers guessing at who he is: “One privately imagined him a book-maker, another a gentleman farmer and a third, seeing the excellent quality of his waistcoat, imagined him an upper servant wearing his master’s cast-off clothing. His face did not deny the possibility of any of these occupations; indeed he would have been a singular example of any one of them” (3-4). And so when Mercy spies him lurking outside Phipps’ house, he quickly and easily becomes “a singular example” of the footman she believes him to be—all to protect his actual identity.

Maggs shares this same “curse or gift” that Oates’s parents left him, as he continuously seeks the support, stability, and love denied him in childhood. But, unlike Oates, Maggs recognizes the deeper desires that motivate his actions. After his single, brief meeting with the young Henry Phipps before his transportation to the Australian

penal colony, Maggs decides, then and there, to dedicate his entire life to providing for his every need, to “spin him a cocoon of gold and jewels...weave him a nest so strong that no one would ever hurt his goodness” (287). In this way, Maggs resembles his canonical predecessor, as Magwitch commits to the same, seemingly unreasonable level of care for Pip. But while Magwitch’s plan comes across as crazy, as the only thing motivating his excessive generosity is Pip’s single gesture of kindness, Maggs recognizes the underlying emotions that spurred his own decision. Or, to bring it to the meta-level, Carey writes Maggs a more complete backstory that gives the reader the necessary context surrounding this pivotal moment. Maggs relates to Oates, in brief, the story he has been chronicling in his encoded letters: his adoptive brother’s betrayal; his “childhood sweetheart’s” imminent death by hanging; his own imminent transportation to Australia. “I was in an emotional condition,” he says. “Then I see this little boy just starting out on the journey of his life, a very kind boy, with all his God-given goodness still undamaged. And I thought, so must you have been, Jack, before you were trained to be a varmint” (287). Because of this emotional connection, Maggs hopes to preserve Phipps’s “God-given goodness,” as his was so cruelly taken from him by Ma Britten and Silas Smith.

While he exhibits profound self-awareness in this candid moment, he fails to recognize his “self” as constructed, as fictional. In his mind, he is more than just a benefactor to Phipps—he is his father, and Phipps his son. He does not realize until it is almost too late that this relationship is built upon lies—lies perpetuated through the

fictional letters and miniature portrait that “kept [him] alive these last twenty-four years” (287-88). It is only because of Mercy’s quick action that he survives his near-death experience at the hands of his “son.” But Mercy had also been the only one to see through the fictional relationship that Maggs maintained in his mind. She in fact possesses the keen ability to pierce through both his and Oates’s masks: she knew immediately that Maggs wasn’t a footman; she saw right through Oates’s doctor disguise while the rest of the servants caught the “contagion” he conjured up. Despite their desperate attempts to hide themselves within the blurred boundary between reality and fiction, Mercy effortlessly cuts through the confusion—and her sharp intelligence ultimately saves Maggs from himself.

Mercy does not participate in this reconstructive game until she and Maggs return to Australia where they reinvent themselves and establish the supportive family and community they’ve always lacked. However, she does reengage the metafictional play that Carey conducts throughout the novel. After Oates finally publishes *The Death of Maggs*, she collects “no fewer than seven copies of the last edition, and each of these is now (together with Jack Maggs’s letters to Henry Phipps) in the collection of the Mitchell Library in Sydney” (357). But each of the volumes contain the “v. rough excision” of the dedication page to Percy Buckle. Along with Maggs’s letters, Mercy’s small act of revision makes her copies yet another rewriting of Oates’s fiction. Yet her excisions of the dedication page are a response; they do not erase this piece of the story, but add to the multiplicity of stories that emerge from such intertextual interactions. Carey underscores

this by making the excised dedication the final words in his novel. In the same way that Mercy and Maggs add their own truths to Oates's story, so too does Carey create an alternative truth to *Great Expectations*. By doing so, he demonstrates the power of authorship to create new truths while deconstructing the notion of the singular author figure. The metafictional play and intertextual dialogue creates the unique, lasting relationship between *Jack Maggs* and *Great Expectations*.

M. Butterfly challenges the canonical status of Puccini's opera, *Madama Butterfly*, by introducing a highly self-conscious, gender-bending "Butterfly" into the long line of literary predecessors. Hwang's play responds directly, and intertextually, to the opera, to the older adaptations, and to the real-life story of Mr. Bouriscot and his lover, Mr. Shi. While there are multiple texts—both "real" and "fictional"—in the Butterfly tradition, the same assumption underlies them all: that there exists, within the Orient, "[w]omen willing to sacrifice themselves for the love of a man" (Hwang 92). Puccini's opera aids in establishing and perpetuating this racist belief by remaining one of the most popular operas—one that is still regularly performed throughout the world over a century after its premier. However, unlike *Great Expectations*, *Madama Butterfly* does not present a complex character or plotline that leaves itself open to dialogic exchanges. And yet, Hwang chooses to take on this firmly established cross-cultural text because he recognizes its power to affect the lives of *actual* people. He finds evidence of this pervasive stereotypical relationship in the brief description he reads of Mr. Bouriscot's and Mr. Shi's decades-long love affair, during which time the Frenchman believed Mr.

Shi, a male Chinese opera singer, to be a woman. Hwang rationalizes Mr. Bouriscot's apparent ignorance by suggesting that he "probably thought he had found Madame Butterfly" (95). The stereotypical assumptions of the modest and submissive Oriental woman are shown to endure across time and cultures—and to pervade fiction and reality. So while the texts that make up the Butterfly tradition are not self-consciously open nor particularly complex, Hwang nevertheless forces intertextual and metafictional interactions among his play and the various texts because of their dangerous interference on material reality.

Hwang's is a highly reflexive drama. The literary predecessors that claim a level of truth to their narratives get transformed into texts within *M. Butterfly*. His play engages these texts in metafictional, intertextual dialogues to question the nature of their "truths". Whereas Carey's characters have minimal interaction with the text from which they emerge (as it is in the process of being written within the narrative), *Madama Butterfly* features prominently in *M. Butterfly*. Not only is it a text within the play, Song and Gallimard actively interact with the story from which *they* emerge, and are aware of how it informs their identities. Gallimard, as both narrator and character, explains to the audience: "In order for you to understand what I did and why, I must introduce you to my favorite opera: *Madame Butterfly*" (4). Not only is Gallimard aware of the opera, he points to this real-world fiction as the catalyst for his relationship with Song. He internalizes the opera's central message that the "Perfect Woman" exists within the

Orient, and that she is available to any Western man. So when Song comes along and offers him this fiction, he blindly accepts what is “rightfully” his.

By introducing the audience to Puccini’s opera, Gallimard acknowledges its complicity in maintaining his and Song’s fictional relationship. But his metafictional awareness of the text also allows him to become a rewriter of *Madama Butterfly*. After taking us through the basics of the plot, performing in the role of Pinkerton to highlight this character’s arrogance, he readdresses the audience: “We now return to my version of *Madame Butterfly* and the events leading to my recent conviction for treason” (9). In this moment, Gallimard blends together the canonical text with the real-life story of Mr. Bouriscot, creating his “version”—which is, of course, Hwang’s play. As it does in *Jack Maggs*, the metafiction enables a multiplicity of authors who have the power to rewrite the opera using the various “real” and “fictional” texts to recreate a new “version.” But Gallimard’s metafictional awareness of the audience signals the addition of even more authors. By acknowledging the audience, he is acknowledging his own fictionality; as a fiction, Gallimard, his “version,” and the play itself are all open to perpetual reinterpretation by the audience.

Gallimard’s metaleptical movements frequently bring him in communication with the audience, as narrator of his own “version” of *Madama Butterfly*. From his prison cell in what is understood as the present, Gallimard keeps the play moving forward at the same time as he keeps us informed of the progression of his feelings during their relationship. But, as the play inches closer to its inevitable end, Gallimard’s narrations

become increasingly digressive. It's as if he is trying to postpone the inevitable. After Gallimard's transfer back to Paris, he and Song end their relationship; shortly thereafter, Song publically reveals his scandalous decades-long acting role. But he returns to Gallimard years later, again dressed as Butterfly. And in what becomes for him a moment of metalepsis, he takes over as narrator because Gallimard wants to play out the scene of their reunion, and stall the play:

Song: But where's your wife?

Gallimard: She's by my side. She's by my side at last.

Gallimard reaches to embrace Song. Song sidesteps, dodging him.

Gallimard: Why?!

Song: *(To us)*: So I did return to Rene in Paris. Where I found—

Gallimard: Why do you run away? Can't we show them how we embraced that evening?

Song: Please. I'm talking.

Gallimard: You have to do what I say! I'm conjuring you up in my mind!

Song: I've never done what you've said. Why should it be any different in your mind? Now split—the story moves on, and I must change.

Song's intrusion forces the realization that, despite telling his own "version" of the story, Gallimard remains a construction within Song's own retelling. But his declaration that "the story moves on, and I must change" reminds the audience that we are, in fact, still watching a play. Song underscores this point by shooing Gallimard off the stage and

turning back to us: “The change I’m going to make requires about five minutes. So I thought you might want to take this opportunity to stretch your legs, enjoy a drink, or listen to the musicians” (78-9). Song’s lead-in to the intermission again signals an awareness of their own fictionality. As such, Gallimard is not just a construction within Song’s fiction, but Hwang’s as well.

Despite his desperate attempts to halt the play’s progression, Gallimard reaches the inevitable end in which Song Liling forces the “truth” upon him. While Gallimard continues to deny, in public, that Song is a man, he admits that during his imprisonment he had “long since faced the truth” (92). But Gallimard’s decision to reject this truth and live within the fantasy brings him to his final, agential act in which he chooses “[d]eath with honor” (92). Before this moment, Gallimard addresses the audience one last time:

I’ve played out the events of my life night after night, always searching for a new ending to my story, one where I leave this cell and return forever to my Butterfly’s arms. Tonight I realize my search is over. That I’ve looked all along in the wrong place. And now, to you, I will prove that my love was not in vain—by returning to the world of fantasy where I first met her.
(91)

Again, Gallimard’s words hold double meaning: as a character within the story, he has, sitting in his cell, “played out the events” of his life “night after night”, looking for a “new ending”. But this is, of course, a play written by Hwang; the “events” will be “played out” the same way each and every performance. There will never be a “new

ending” because this is how Hwang wrote his play. But within Gallimard’s final address to the audience, there is a subtle reminder, and a plea, of our own power as authors—as rewriters of Hwang’s story. Just as he removes himself back to the “world of fantasy”, so too can we imagine, and even write down, a “new ending” for Gallimard and Song.

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