

Peter Carey's "*Homo Australiensis*" in *A Long Way from Home*

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Abstract

The paper examines Peter Carey's first book about Indigenous Australians, a topic which he had neglected for decades. Until *A Long Way from Home* (2017) was written, the two-time Booker Prize winner renowned for portraying Australian identity had yet to confront this crucial matter which he believed was a fundamental issue of the country. Reasons behind this seemingly contradictory and lengthy absence are highlighted along with certain methods with which the author gradually exposes Australia's shameful past in the treatment of First Nations people. Carey's approach stays true to his body of work, namely the Aboriginal subject is complemented or intertwined with his portrayal of another layer of Australia's history: the pan-European heritage of non-Indigenous Australians. But why and in what manner does he integrate European topics into a novel aiming to shed light on the maltreatment and neglect of First Nations Australians? Does this addition not dilute the original aim of paying homage to Indigenous Australia?

My paper argues that Carey successfully utilises certain European identity themes to help show the gravity of sins committed against Australian Indigenous people. The author's *modus operandi* is to piece together seemingly neglected fragments of the European legacy with First Nations Australia to reveal a unified entity. Via Willie Bachhuber, a character who most Australians can connect or identify with, Carey joins together various Australian identities which may not have been connected beforehand. With this technique Carey helps ensure the novel is about and for all Australians. I believe that *A Long Way from Home* crowns Peter Carey's career as fully depicting Australianness without including Aboriginal people has up until now meant a quite incomplete *oeuvre*. An ultimate Australian character so-far elusive to Carey, a *Homo Australiensis* has come to life via a pseudo-German-Balt-Hungarian-Australian, who is actually a First Nations Australian with a white biological father.

Keywords

Peter Carey, *A Long Way from Home*, identity, First Nations Australians, *Homo Australiensis*

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Around-Australia car race, the Redex Reliability Trial is the surface, backdrop, or as the author would say, a “door opening” (Carey 2018b) into a room where Australia’s most illustrious writer has not gone before: Indigenous History. Carey’s fourteenth novel, *A Long Way from Home* (2017) is his first full foray into exposing Australia’s shocking past in the treatment of First Nations people.

Seemingly few if any can claim to capture Australia better than Peter Carey. He has written so voluminously about the country with a “fresh and magical and reimagined” (Carey, Kanowski 2017) outlook. As Andreas Gaile sums up, practically all of Carey’s writings can be seen as reconceptualizing notions of Australianness, past and present (Gaile 2010, 287) and the two-time Booker Prize winner “returns to the country’s past obsessively” (Gaile 2010, 5). The illustrious author has also usually not shied away from the controversial, negative sides of Australian identity. Alexander Moran described it as Carey’s “career-long fascination with the dark underbelly of Australian history” (Moran 2018).

Despite diving into a new theme, the author simultaneously stays loyal to his previous body of work. Namely the main topic is complemented or intertwined with his portrayal of another layer of Australia’s history and identity that he has consistently attempted to depict: the pan-European heritage of non-Indigenous Australians with the inclusion of some previously neglected identities.

1. Questions and Aims

Questions immediately arise. First of all, there is a great contradiction in the sentences above, namely, one surely cannot represent Australianness or fully capture the country’s essence until they have written in greater detail about the oldest Australians. Why has the internationally recognised Australian author not, or only peripherally written about Indigenous Australians for many decades? What events or motives caused the shift and eventual writing of the novel? After all the sins against the First Nations population, why does European Australia receive such a crucial role in a book where Carey has committed himself to writing about Indigenous Australia? How and why does Carey incorporate seemingly peripheral European identities into a novel predominantly aiming to shed light on the brutal maltreatment and neglect of Indigenous Australians? Even if adding another theme will prove to be justified, will Carey still be able to deliver a coherent, credible message and what will the final sculpture look like?

Besides aiming to answer these questions I will attempt to highlight that apart from the dominating Indigenous thread, various European identity themes are also crucially, positively and legitimately prevalent in the book in order to strengthen the original aim. Australian Indigenous history cannot of course be understood without examining the devastating and lingering effect of the European invasion and its repercussions. Carey successfully covers this topic previously not elaborated on, yet he also concurrently exposes the fact that discrimination existed against various white Europeans entering the country. By dissecting and eventually amalgamating these focal points the writer presents a plot and a character who can symbolically unite all Australians. Carey's *modus operandi* with which he attempts to portray an integrating character in *A Long Way from Home* is to collate fragments of the European legacy, then piece them together with Indigenous Australia to reveal a potential unifying entity. Willie Bachhuber is the "integrator within the poles" (Carey 2018a). Through the central hero the author connects several dots of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia which may not have been joined together beforehand.

2. Carey's Route to Aboriginal Australia and *A Long Way from Home*

The contradiction of being an internationally renowned author whose main skill was perceived to be displaying Australian national identity and this same writer also neglecting to fully focus on the very Australians who had originally inhabited the country demands scrutiny. *Ad fontes* style we should go to the source of the problem: Peter Carey himself. A huge discrepancy of this kind was not lost on the writer. "I'm an Australian writer and I haven't written about this? Well, that just seems pathetic to me" (Convery 2017) and "I was wrong. Really, really wrong" (Carey 2018b) were self-verdicts voiced in separate interviews. In a *London Review of Books* interview with Nicholas Spice Carey reveals the causes in greater detail. Here he acknowledged the fact that sins of colonialism committed against Indigenous Australians were a "fundamental issue" (Carey 2018a) of the country. "It's always been there, if you can't be an Australian and not think about this, whose country it is...I think it is essential it be addressed and it was normally addressed in my work." (Carey 2018a) The word address was fine-tuned in another interview, where Carey said he "didn't address it directly" (Carey 2018b).

The most crucial element of his reasoning which appeared in several interviews (Carey 2017b; Carey 2018a; Carey 2018b), was the citation of a playwright's conference in Canberra in 1985, where Aboriginal activist Gary Foley forthrightly informed the

mostly white participants that non-Aboriginals writing about Indigenous people was causing more harm than good and there was enough "misinformation" and "false imaginings" (Carey 2018a). Carey accepted that this may not have been the correct decision, but he rightly or wrongly made it "deliberately" (Carey 2017b) primarily based on the views of an important Aboriginal figure. "I really had no problem with what he was saying, it made a lot of sense to me. Now whether I was right to listen to him or not right to listen to him I certainly listened to him." (Carey 2018a) In an interview with Sarah Krasnostein, Carey also noted that before putting pen to paper with this work he was "terrified" to be representing Indigenous people. "In that book the things that I was sort of terrified of was sort of representing Indigenous people in a way that Indigenous people would read and find to be true and real and not offensive and so that was a scary thing." (Carey 2021) It seems Carey fully accepted Gary Foley's thesis, or in his words he showed "no resistance" (Carey 2018b) to the request, feared potential negative consequences and decided to more or less avoid the topic for decades. He was certainly not alone with his stance, yet this was the decision he made at the time.

It was far from a complete evasion of the theme, because *Illywhacker* (1985) and *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) were published in the same year or shortly after the conference. *Illywhacker* seemingly takes a firm stance: "The whole nation is based on a lie which is that it was not already occupied when the British came here." (Carey 1985, 307) The German Carey expert Andreas Gaile in 2010 believed that the Australian author's work addressed "the unfairness of Aboriginal dispossession" (Gaile 2010, 6) and "the feeling of guilt over Aboriginal dispossession and victimization and, related to this, the attempts at reassessing the doctrine of terra nullius" (Gaile 2010, 6). Yet, for a novel where "a sprawling 600-page-invention featuring ghosts, dragons, disappearing tricks, a mysterious hybrid kept in a bottle of shining liquid" and one "clearly concerned with the wider canvas of Australian history" (Gaile 2010, 75) the terse or rather virtually non-existent circumscribing of Aboriginal Australia remained a glaring hole. Thus, it can be stated that *Illywhacker* only scratched the surface of the topic, yet *Oscar and Lucinda* was referred to by Carey as a novel alluding to the white takeover of Aboriginal land. (Carey 2018b) The opening phase of the book displays a vivid confrontation of the Aboriginal theme:

I learned long ago to distrust local history. Darkwood, for instance, they will tell you at the Historical Society, is called Darkwood because of the darkness of the foliage, but it was not so long ago you could hear people call it Darkies' Point, and not so long before that when Horace Clark's grandfather went up there

with his mates – all the old families should record this when they are arguing about who controls the shire – and pushed an entire tribe of aboriginal men and women and children off the edge. (Carey 1988, 2)

An emphatic start, but one which was only partially followed up in the subsequent pages. Overall, the crucial topic was significantly averted, albeit Carey refers to Indigenous Australia in the concluding part of the 1980s when he followed Foley's advice: conquest of First Nations land was acknowledged, but not elaborated on.

Seeing that the theme was not completely omitted from his works, Carey may have decided to deliberately execute a form of indirect addressing rather than just purely ignoring the topic. In her study on Carey's 2012 novel, *The Chemistry of Tears* Barbara Klonowska dissects how the author utilised the concept of ellipsis as "a powerful tool to both conceal the undesired or censored notions and simultaneously to reveal, via exposing the gap between what is said and what is left unsaid, the issues which are difficult – for various reasons – to express" (Klonowska 25). Incidentally, Klonowska also categorised *A Long Way from Home* and *The True History of the Kelly Gang* as "difficult history" (Klonowska 26). Carey acknowledged the challenging nature of the task in the Author's Note in an advanced copy cited in an interview with Sarah Kanowski. Here Carey stated that "this is a novel I spent my whole life not knowing how to write...I didn't know how to do it, so I didn't do it" (Carey 2017b). Combining the author's words about the degree of difficulty being too high and Klonowska's interpretation of his use of ellipsis, this time in a different novel, we may suppose that for Carey the First Nations theme was simply too difficult to write or for various reasons, too complex to express in full, hence, he utilised a technique of ellipsis to partially cover this base. A few indirect allusions in his pre-2017 works may have been conscious attempts at adhering to Gary Foley's advice yet simultaneously not completely ignoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.

A lot of water had passed under the bridge since 1985 and with time it slowly washed away Carey's previous angsts. The Mabo decision, the Native Title Act, the Native Title Amendment Act and Kevin Rudd's apology had all eventuated. Australian society and the mindset regarding Indigenous rights had also significantly evolved over the years. But even after passing 70 years of age Carey was still penning novels which did not incorporate Aboriginal Australia. *Amnesia* (2014), which "gives a panoply of Australia over the last several decades" (Birns 2015, 206) fell short of covering the gaping hole in the *oeuvre*. It was at about this phase of his life where the two-time Commonwealth Writer's Prize winner realised that as a novelist renowned for portraying Australia and its history, he could not exclude the First Nations theme

from his work any further and simply had to enter waters previously uncharted in his *oeuvre*. Although in the Spice interview he specifically denied it was a matter of urgency (Carey 2018a), in the Wolinsky podcast Carey singled out age as the main factor (Convery 2017; Carey 2018b) in deciding to finally grasp the keyboard and fully address the theme. Age brought with it more experience. In a discussion with Sarah Krasnostein Carey only briefly talks about *A Long Way from Home*. Still, there is a statement which underpins the notion that although it took a long time for him to shrug off the previous state of being scared to write this novel, he finally had the confidence to do so. "But I think if one is patient and humble enough and is prepared to show one's work to other people those things can be overcome." (Carey 2021) This quote is also vital for another reason. Carey stuck true to his belief that First Nations people should guide him when he writes about them. It is clear that by "other people" the writer was referring to Indigenous voices. It seems he believed it was the right time to seek the advice of First Nations people other than Foley and he was now comfortable in integrating their advice into his watershed book. The anthropologist Catherina Wohlan from The Australian National University and Steve Kinnane were engaged from the Aboriginal community during the writing process (Convery 2017). We can conclude that ultimately his age, his experience and First Nations guidance convinced Carey to do what he, by his own admission, had always wanted to, yet did not possess the knowledge of how to carry it out until the fear of time devouring the opportunity convinced him to take the plunge. A great contradiction in Australian literature was about to be dissolved.

3. Willie Bachhuber's European Australian Identities

Carey's main character treads a complex path, one fitting of the Redex Reliability Trial's topsy-turvy route. Willie Bachhuber's identity is an equation the author only wishes us to solve after continuous ambiguity. It is revealed glacially, as it "bubbles to the surface" (Carey 2018b) and the process of enlightenment is most probably a longer one for non-Australian readers. "I spent my entire life in Australia with the conviction that it was a mistake, that my correct place was elsewhere." (Carey 2017a, 9) Not exactly a lead-off sentence or motto befitting a potentially unifying Australian character.

A deeper analysis of the main character's complexity will help lead us to the solution. Willie's identity *sans* nationality is worth a story alone. He yearns to be loved, "the only thing I ever wanted" (Carey 2017a, 110) yet due to a tragic

misunderstanding, he left the love of his life and their child right after birth. Pseudo-rich to the outside world due to cheques he cannot cash on a quiz-show he dominates, in reality, he is a poor schoolteacher who soon finds himself without work. A bookworm whose residence is untidy to the point of being a fire-hazard due to the voluminous amount of books resembling a library. Willie's intelligence and wide-ranging, deep knowledge may possibly symbolise the fact that it is the oldest Australians who possess the greater wisdom despite being dispossessed by White Australians presenting them with fake cheques.

Regarding national identity, Willie is first presented as fair-haired, with "strange German eyes" (Carey 2017, 37). He is not attempting to conceal his background despite the negative connotations of this heritage, with the recently concluded World Wars. At the same time, he recollects remarks regarding his German nationality on several occasions. "My name was obviously German but I was not, as far as anyone could see, a sissy." (Carey 2017a, 27) After being denigratingly called a "kraut" (Carey 2017a, 27) he insists on being called Bachhuber instead. Willie goes on to say "I smiled and was as misunderstood as I had wished to be. Soon I got a hamstring injury. That seemed the only safe response." (Carey 2017a, 27) The incident is repeated later in the book (Carey 2017a, 368). This plethora of remarks regarding his background make it obvious that racial vilification played a role in the main character's early years and this theme is not purely by chance or just an incidental peek into 1950s Australia. In an interview Peter Carey stated that Willie knows "people will hate him for being German" (Carey 2017b). The author's specific intent was to create a character who was vilified for his European identity. In White Australia a white identity from the Old Continent could also be racially discriminated against.

Vilification regarding his heritage continues with a different European nationality in the next critical stanza of his life. As a schoolteacher he handles a class none of his colleagues wanted to teach, the "untouchables" (Carey 2017a, 29) to the praise of his peers, but gets into trouble for hanging a student, Bennett Ash out the window by his ankles. Of critical importance is the fact that the pupil questioned the legitimacy of the tutor being in Australia. "What about you, sir? Why did they let you in?" (Carey 2017a, 29) This malicious brace of questions was preceded by a class discussion on the so-called "Balts", a key theme in the 1950s.

I asked him what he thought a Balt was.

He thought it was a reffo, sir. He meant a refugee, a person displaced by war.

I could have escorted him to the map of the world, that is the pink British Empire and the other bits. I could have shown him that Balt was short for Baltic, or a person from the Baltic states. But could he even recognise the Baltic Sea?

How could I possibly 'teach' him that the Australian government had deliberately misnamed the displaced persons Balts? That was the path by which the word had entered his vocabulary. How many weeks might it take to have him understand that the Australian government were selecting light-skinned 'Nordic types' as future citizens and that they had, for the sake of obfuscation, named them Balts? (Carey 2017a, 28)

Although the pupil is potentially discriminating against all those entering Australia at the time, through the incident Carey highlights discrimination against a certain European group. The "Beautiful Balts" constituted a unique episode in Australian immigration. The first contingent of these newcomers was a hand-picked selection of displaced World War II refugees, predominantly with blonde hair and blue eyes. A manipulative media campaign highlighted their external features. Calculated political motives aside recruiting post-war refugees was an ultimately successful move by Arthur Calwell, the Labor Minister for Immigration, who otherwise was an exponent of the racist White Australia policy. Amongst other reasons, success came because the Australian public eventually accepted and integrated not only the "Beautiful Balts" but the "Balts" sans beautiful and also the other European groups arriving with or following them (Brett 2013, 124–125).

It must be clearly and unequivocally stated that reception of these new immigrants was far better than the treatment First Nations Australians received at the time; still, full equality for the European arrivals was another matter. Without detailing other atrocities, Indigenous children were ripped from their families as 1950s Australia was very much still a Stolen Generations² age, a main theme of the novel. Although there can be no comparison between the two types of injustice, the new white European arrivals were still subject to discrimination. Even the otherwise racially sensitive positive character Irene Bobs, who is quite obviously close to Carey (in the Wolinsky interview there is a reference to her potentially representing the writer's real mother: Carey 2018b), drops a denigrating comment in the novel about characters originating from Eastern Europe. Sebastian Laski, who is from Poland

² Adding to the long list of atrocities committed against First Nations Australians, predominantly but not exclusively mixed race or using the contemporary derogatory term, "half-caste" children were forcibly removed from their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Originating from the "protection," in reality segregation and assimilation policies of the 19th century with the notion that Indigenous people of Australia are doomed for extinction anyway, the official aim of Federal and State governments was to assimilate these children into European Australian families and institutions, that is the "higher civilisation" (Haebich, A., Kinnane, S. 2013, 335). Commissioned by Prime Minister Paul Keating (1991–1997), The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (HREOC 1997) detailed the "systematic removal of Indigenous children from their families by successive Australian governments" (Walter 2013, 182). The shocking policies spanning from 1910 all the way to the 1970s irrevocably affected all First Nations generations. With ensuing debates regarding an official apology, initially denied by Prime Minister John Howard (1996–2007) then delivered by Kevin Rudd (2007–2010, 2013) in 2008, along with the arguments regarding the Indigenous Voice in Parliament in full swing at the time of writing this article, the Stolen Generations theme is still at the forefront of Australian politics (Goot 2013, 207; Haebich, A., Kinnane, S. 2013, 333; 356; Mackinnon, A., Proctor, H. 2013, 435).

and his wife, Dorotea are very close to Willie. “And what a wild and woolly lot the burglars were, a pair of Balts quite obviously.” (Carey 2017a, 347) Carey utilised this line to highlight how even generally good, kind people could easily fall into the trap of stereotypes and prejudices. This comment is most probably inserted to show how widespread this negative phenomenon must have been in 1950s Australia.

The novel represents that for those individuals discriminated against, these episodes were potentially life-changing moments. This classroom conversation about the “Balts” is a watershed moment for Bachhuber, who loses his composure. “I am a calm man, have been so all my life. I grabbed the heel of the boy’s hobnailed boot, and yanked him off balance and pushed his body out the window and held him there while he bawled and shouted.” (Carey 2017a, 29) No physical damage is done but the provocative remark from the student would ultimately cost Willie his job. To rub salt into the wound, attacks regarding his identity continue. The father of the boy tries to avenge the act, “‘Barkhumper,’ he said clearly delighted to see me jump. ‘You don’t know who I am, do you?’ ‘I don’t think I’ve had the pleasure.’ ‘No pleasure,’ he said, and I recognised, in those familiar angry eyes, the father of Bennett Ash.” (Carey 2017a, 43) Apart from being an offensive sexual reference “Barkhumper” is a general racially vilifying remark as it plays on the victim’s name. Mr. Ash also presumes the teacher is a “Balt”: “I’ll hang you out the window you f.ing Balt” (Carey 2017a, 43) is a much more specific “reference” to a group of migrants. No-one is physically harmed in the incident as Willie escapes. There is no direct continuation of the thread apart from Bachhuber not being angry with his attacker, supposing he too would be upset if the same thing had happened to his son (Carey 2017a, 44). Still, this almost physical, verbal attack symbolises the psychological effects of such malice. Willie has suffered another form of racial vilification because of his supposed European origins.

Carey not only covers an episode of Australian history containing racial discrimination, but he has also widened the scope of Bachhuber’s national identity. By classifying him as a “Balt”, he could potentially originate from a number of European countries. Specifically, from the Baltic areas of Europe such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania but due to the “Beautiful Balt” episode and the generalisation that came with it, basically any white, non-Anglo Saxon European country. Consequently, Carey incorporates a greater ethnic share of the Old Continent. Willie has now been a victim of “Balt” jokes after the ordeal of receiving remarks regarding his German identity. The author has skilfully created a character who is a representative of several more nations on top of being German.

The derogatory word “reppo” which was used by Bennett Ash also needs to be explored. Utilised by the pupil as a demeaning word like “Balt”, a differentiation in interpretation can be made. The term could refer to a bigger, predominantly

slightly later wave of arrivals to Australia after the original post-World War II refugees of 1947–52. With a “loosening” of the White Australia policy in the 1950s a greater number of Greeks, Italians and from 1956 Hungarians were allowed to enter Australia, who were referred to by this derogatory term. “Reffos” from these countries were frequently portrayed in a positive, light-hearted manner³ after the 1950’s before times and “utilisation” of these stereotypes changed from approximately the 2000s onwards, yet we must not forget that Carey’s book is about Australia in the 1950s. Current or retrospective reception of communities now fully integrated into Australian society cannot change the fact that amongst other hardships of entering a new distant country, being racially vilified with such a term would have had a deleterious effect on the new European arrivals. Once again, direct comparisons can in no way be made with how the oldest Australians were discriminated against at the time. Still, Carey rightly brings up discrimination of this type aimed at new European Australians. In a *Long Way from Home*, the Bacchus Marsh schoolteacher symbolically stands up for all Australian refugee communities as a whole, whether they are “Balts” or “reffos” and irrespective of whether they arrived before or after the Redex Reliability Trial referred to in the novel.

Bachhuber’s national identity is made even more complex, what is more, a Central-European thread emerges during the presentation of Willie’s devotion to maps.

In self defence I summoned an urgent interest in my grandmother's coloured atlas of the Holy Roman Empire. I laid it before her and she admired it and listened to my unshakable belief that I did not belong where my mother had delivered me. I had no reason to be in the hot streets of wartime Adelaide, not when my true home must be in the atlas of the Hapsburg⁴ Empire and the lands of Hungary. There was no map of Adelaide that could produce the longing aroused by the dense fibrous universe of that atlas, which, being hand-painted in a slightly unconventional if not eccentric manner, had the mellow colours of a closely woven Persian rug, in which our red Hungary had turned a greyish brown, Salzburg was the colour of dried straw, Croatia was pale pink. Bohemia like the other states was now foxed and speckled brown. The crumbling coast of Dalmatia in the south was what I believe is known as Spectrum Violet. (Carey 2017a, 97)

In typical Careyesque style Bachhuber’s relationship with Glenda Cloverdale is integrated into this virtual historical round-trip.

There was her gorgeous silk skinned leg, folded beneath her dark private hair glistening with dew and here were all these lands with their diverse peoples,

³ For example, *Acropolis Now* which ran from 1989–1992 on the Seven Network and *Ladies in Black*, which was released by Sony Pictures for the big screen in 2018.

⁴ Hapsburg or Habsburg are both accepted in the English language. Carey used the p in this quote and elsewhere, whilst I have used spelling with a b.

Germans, Magyars, Spanish Jews, Romanies and Mohammedans, which had been a source of wonder to my childish imagination. My grandmother told me that an ancestor of ours, a Venetian nobleman, had been called to advise an Imperial Council in Vienna. What he had done there or what became of him we could never know but he was the reason that I had curiously splayed ‘Italian toes’ and although blonde haired as my father the pastor, would turn ‘brown as a Mediterranean berry’ in the Australian sun. (Carey 2017a, 97–98)

Lengthy quotations are utilised as conclusive evidence to prove that Bachhuber cannot exclusively be called German, a “Balt” or a “reffo” especially when he supposes his origins to be in “our Hungary”, that is the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Empire. A plethora of other nationalities are also specifically mentioned, some of which cannot be linked to the three identities above and all of which are present in today’s Australia. Along with the reference to the sun, Carey has now linked several more European identities with Australia. Cartography had played a central role in Carey’s 1975 short story “Do You Love Me”, a “suggestive exploration of Australian identity and history, especially perhaps for non-Indigenous people” (Corbett 2015, 45), but here Europe is specifically extrapolated. In order to execute his point, the author has listed all these European identities in detail to summon a great variety of ethnicities in a few short passages.

Historically and geographically speaking, the Hungarian Kingdom of the Habsburg Empire fits the above descriptions. Because of the words “our Hungary” and references to multi-ethnic Empires we can clearly state that Carey has deliberately created a character with multi-thronged Central European “origins”. Not only Hungary, but Bohemia (today’s Czech Republic), Croatia and several other nations within the Vienna-centred state are mentioned in the passage.

The Habsburg Empire was a unique conglomerate in history which Carey could unearth to find his distinctive Australian meaning. The state which collapsed after World War I in 1918 was utilised by the writer as a country to use in matters of national identity. Australia could possibly relate to this multi-ethnic land where a person could belong to more than one nation, have more than one identity yet still be part of a united country. Although only via the aid of a virtual map, our central character was now capable of representing several more European nations. Along with the previous European themes it seems Carey’s aim was to portray a pan-European origin mirroring the various European and other nations that are present in today’s Australia. The technique of not creating Bachhuber as a German born and bred in that land, but forming him to be a German supposedly rooted in a country with multi-ethnic communities makes the hero in question especially in line with the image of modern multicultural Australia.

The multi-lingual European country on the map could also quite possibly be a reference to the fact that Indigenous Australia possessed several hundred languages, in contrast to "my monolingual land" (Carey 2017a, 25) which Bachhuber refers to when talking about Australia. The monolingual, "We know nothing. It is *l'État australien*" (Carey 2017a, 98) Australia here is to be understood as 1950s White Australia of course, which seemed to know nothing or disregarded the new European languages let alone its several hundred Indigenous languages which had been present on the continent for tens of thousands of years.

Willie Bachhuber: First Nations Australian and European Australian

Later in the novel, Willie Bachhuber is revealed to be of Indigenous descent. Willie's mother is Aboriginal, whilst his white father previously murdered her true First Nations love. Thus, using the terminology of the age Willie is genetically a "half-caste", that is half Indigenous, half European. He is forcefully ripped from his family by Welfare (Carey 2017a, 282), by which the authorities ruined Willie's mother to the extent she eventually dies in prison. The tragic sequence of events causes irreparable damage to the same community, who now tearfully welcome Willie or "Uncle Redex" (Carey 2017a, 275) back decades later. Apart from the previous identity twists and turns Willie Bachhuber now also represents First Nations Australians and even more specifically, the Stolen Generations.

Due to the revelation of Bachhuber's real roots, one might ask whether the character's supposed "German" and other European origins and longing for the Old Continent have become irrelevant or rather less important. The starting point of this issue is when Willie himself claims that when he believed he was German, he suffered from a "phantom homesickness" (Carey 2017a, 295). "But now I was in my real birthplace and finally knew my father's name." (Carey 2017a, 295) He adds that "The pastor had known, of course, that my ancestral home could never have been, a Schloss in Germany." (Carey 2017a, 297) Self-doubts about his identity linger within Willie before and after him finding out all the details of his "pre-German" life. "I was a white man, a kartiya, who saw only death." (Carey 2017a, 268) "I wondered if I was the stupid whitefella or if I was the blackfella inheriting the story." (Carey 2017a, 298–99) Other instances and characters also solidify this uncertainty, from both the Indigenous and European Australian perspective. When Alice, the First Nations girl checks Willie's skin, it is different to hers. "Alice rested her Bible in her lap and touched my cheek and pinched my arm and watched to see how the blood fled the skin and then came rushing back. Her own black skin did no act like this, she showed me." (Carey 2017a, 276) Barry Carter, the brutal white

pastoralist landlord who ends up getting beaten by Willie calls him white. “You’re a white man, mate, no matter what you think.” (Carey 2017a, 320) It is clear that whether he is black or white or neither continually causes doubts in Willie’s mind. It is a phenomenon with which Carey exposes some of the psychological scars people from the Stolen Generations had to and have to endure: they can easily mistakenly believe that they do not fully belong to any Australian community.

Despite his doubts, the question still remains: how relevant are Willie’s European origins? By the end of the story Willie is first and foremost portrayed as an Aboriginal and Carey’s main aim is to pay homage to Indigenous Australia. Having said that, it is crucial that Bachhuber’s biological father was white and he was brought up in a Lutheran community, perceiving himself to be German. What is more, throughout his life he felt his origins were in Central Europe, not in today’s Germany (geographically speaking) but in the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire, so it is fair to say that these origins form an indelible part of his identity. If we compartmentalise certain sides of his character, there is definitely a “German-Habsburg-European part” of Willie Bachhuber.

Whichever of the European and/or First Nations identities readers assume for Willie Bachhuber, he still has to deal with discrimination. It is a common denominator, a glue among his various identities. He is the character who gets upset at people who make fun of his European origins, and is the same man who is infuriated by negative references to the “reffos” along with leaping into defence of Indigenous interests, before and after finding out he is actually an Aboriginal. Willie Bachhuber is therefore a credible and legitimate representative of the European communities even after the revelation that he actually originates from a First Nations community.

Carey has created a character possessing what we can call an “anti-discrimination coalition” identity. Referring to Carey, Andreas Gaile wrote about the “magic mirror of his [Carey’s] fictions” (Gaile 2010, 293). Utilising this Gaile term we could say the writer is weaving his magic pen, this time integrating Indigenous Australia into one of his characters. Since there were “complicated threads of racism” (Carey 2018b) in 1950’s Australia, the author had to create a complex character accordingly. As a *Kirkus* book reviewer opines, “racial identity may not be as simple as black and white” (Kirkus) and Bachhuber displays this complexity. If Carey had simply wanted Willie to be an Aboriginal with a white biological father, one who solely represents Indigenous Australia and the Stolen Generations, all the “Balt”, Habsburg Empire and “our Hungary” material etc. would have been superfluous for his craft. It is precisely by incorporating all these other European, non-Aboriginal identities that Carey has masterfully concocted a character who can represent such a huge slice of Australians. Willie Bachhuber is neither purely a European Australian nor a First Nations Australian, but simply a *bona fide* or locally put: a fair dinkum Australian.

Conclusion

Carey has taken the reader on a journey of Australian history where the sins of White Australia are rightly on display, yet the outcome is not exclusively one of guilt, instead a possible compass for a responsible future is presented through the medium of a mixed-identity character. Since a majority of Australians including not least German-Australians, Lithuanian-Australians, Hungarian-Australians etc. can in some way identify or connect with Willie Bachhuber, he is the character who, by means of Carey's magic and unique methodology, embodies as much as literally possible of what the positive spirit of European Australia could be. Because of his Indigenous roots, he can also manifest the oldest Australians. In an ABC podcast the author poses and answers the question himself: are the Indigenous people in *A Long Way from Home* representative of the whole Aboriginal population? "Of course they're not." (Carey 2017b) A similar question can be validly asked and answered here too: is the protagonist representative of all Australians? Of course not. It is impossible to create a literary character who represents every community in Australia. Yet, Bachhuber is a symbolic pool collecting voluminous drops of today's Australia and thus helping people of the country not only identify and face their past but also to provide a possible route of conciliation in the future via his homecoming. Willie Bachhuber has found his home, whether this is the extremely symbolic Ark, or the classroom where he teaches his First Nations students. Thus, he potentially represents a possible symbolic homecoming for all Australians.

After *A Long Way from Home* one would seldom trust anyone else other than Peter Carey to create a literary character who best represents Australia. Andreas Gaile penned in 2010:

Women, Aborigines, and migrants from a non-European background can relate to this fictional biography as much as can Anglo-Celtic males who traditionally eclipsed all others in representations of history and identity. Seen in their entirety, Carey's fictions can reassure Australians of their collective identity, of what they share in all their ethnic and cultural diversity. (Gaile 2010, 297)

It seems to me that at the time the German expert was not yet completely correct with the analysis above and this quote can probably only fully stand seven years later, after the publication of *A Long Way From Home* in 2017. Gaile believes the concept of mythistory (Gaile 2010, 31–43) is the most appropriate term for Carey's works (Gaile 2010, 43) where the Antipodean writer searches for a unique Australian national identity. My argument is that until Carey finally extrapolated the

Indigenous Australian topic, the task of painting a complete picture of Australian identity, a true Australian mythistory could not be accomplished. Until the author brought Willie Bachhuber to life, generating a character who could claim to depict so many Australians was not possible. Yet in Willie Bachhuber, Carey has finally found the character that he has been searching for. A figure who, I argue, quite possibly crowns his literary career. In *A Long Way from Home*, through a pseudo-German-Balt-Hungarian-Australian, who is actually a First Nations individual with a white biological father, Peter Carey has found the ultimate Australian, a “*Homo Australiensis*,” embodying as many Australians in a novel as possible.

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