

## A Schopenhauer an Approach to *Oscar and Lucinda*

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### Abstract

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This paper is an attempt to scrutinize the Schopenhauer an concept of disinterestedness in Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988). The structure of Carey's novel has a close affinity with Schopenhauer's theory of witlessness. Ironically, this novel brings to the light Carey's use of inner monologue; by which the reader reaches access to the interior thoughts of its principal characters. The study displays that the novel is inhabited by a host of characters whose lives are stayed with a pathological dreariness, a sense of their own isolation from Australian society. This article aims to show how the cessation of willful activity and disinterestedness of which Schopenhauer wrote are common to the characters' narrative voices in *Oscar and Lucinda*, in particular that they are disinterested in their own interests. Ultimately, the study shows that characters' inner thoughts can be interpreted as a better understanding of their inner worlds.

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**Keywords:** disinterestedness, inner monologue, will-full humiliation, narrative, aesthetic

### 1. Introduction

Oscar and Lucinda is considered the most powerful and interesting novel ever written by Peter Carey. The extent of critical investigation it received shows this fact clearly. Carey's craftsmanship in magic realistic genre is at its best in this novel. It has been compared to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Midnight's Children*, and *The Tin Drum*.

The earlier criticisms have been focused on thematic, postcolonial, and psychological reading of the novel. To the knowledge of the researcher, no one has taken an Arthur Schopenhauer an approach not only to Oscar and Lucinda but also to the other novels of Carey. Among the existing critical investigation, is a study by Bruce Woodcock (1996). Bruce assigned a chapter in his book *Peter Carey* to the analysis of this novel. It gives a general postcolonial reading of *Oscar and Lucinda*. He remarks,

What engages most readers immediately is the self-conscious comedy of the book, coupled with its strangely magical quality – the extraordinary and fantastical elements, obsessive characters, eccentric situations, and bizarre wonders such as a church made of glass being carried across a desert. (p.72)

Bruce also drives his attention to the relationship between Carey's life and his influences. In the novel he finds lots of familiar historical figures as well as some fictional characters. He believes even there is some similarities between Carey's novel and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1986) with regard to their inclusion of history. He believes that both of the novels, "plays with history and fiction in ways which remind us that history too is a storytelling process and something we must be wary of" (p.81). Another major study of the novel is again a chapter assigned to the novel in Anthony J. Hassall's (1998) *Dancing on Hot macadam: Peter Carey's Fiction*. Hassall's study provides a chapter-by-chapter critical analysis of six novels of Carey. Hassall finds some differences between Oscar and Lucinda and earlier historical novels of Carey.

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After the futuristic short stories and *Bliss*, *Oscar and Lucinda* moves back into the nineteenth century. Its depiction of the chaste and tender love of two gentle and generous innocents is in striking contrast to the hyperactive, exploitative, and frequently violent sexual behavior that pervades much of Carey's earlier fiction, and that surrounds the central couple even in this book. (p.119) Anthony concludes that Carey has reinvented 19<sup>th</sup> century Australian history. But the point of difference between Carey and other novelist such as Patrick White is that Carey reinvented not costume but, "a narrative explaining the present" (p.141). Hermine Krassnitzer (1995) considers some postmodern aspects in the novel in his book entitled, *Aspects of Narration in Peter Carey's Novels: Deconstructing Colonialism*. Hermine's focus in his study of *Oscar and Lucinda* is on the analysis of the metaphor and its role in the construction of meaning. He concentrates on two metaphors of gambling and glass. He utters, Their images permeate the whole novel and their multiple meanings can not only be attributed to the novel's formal aspects such as character presentation and plot structure, but also to its cultural implications, which deal with such basic post-colonial issues such as the political and cultural history of white Australia. (p.68)

With regard to the characterization, extravagant characters who struggle to find and come to terms with their own self are abundant in the novel. Carey has given a postmodern and postcolonial approach to some historical facts of Australia. An interesting fact about the book is that it keeps the reader guessing about the inner life of the main characters. This is a story of misunderstanding between two lovers who are unable to establish a close relationship. Oscar wants to express his love for Lucinda by building a glass church for her but due to a misunderstanding the church will be Lucinda's gift to Dennis Hasset. Lucinda feels contrite about this presence. But the point is that she is not able to deny it. Although their misunderstanding grows, more they try to struggle with the odds in their love. The idea of making a glass church shows the fragile world of their love. It is even evident in these words of the text, "It would be a lovely thing, he said. But it is hardly practical, Mr Hopkins. It is a dangerous word ... Practical" (Carey 1988, p. 388).

Both principal characters are not optimistic about their future. This sensation overshadows their love affair to such extent that Oscar even thinks to lose the gamble that makes with Lucinda thus, "It was a knife of an idea, a cruel instrument of sacrifice, but also one of great beauty, silvery, curved, dancing with light. The odds were surely stacked against him, and had it been a horse rather than a woman's heart he would never have bet on it, not even for a place. (Carey, p. 387) It shows a characteristic of Carey's writing. He lets the reader to be informed about the characters' thoughts. Carey's creativity is at its best in this point of the novel when we know that Lucinda is only in love with Oscar not Dennis Hasset but Oscar himself does not know this. Even in a more complicated way, we know that these clues in the text are misleading. As Anthony Hassall avers, The lie of Lucinda's feelings for Dennis Hasset, which has allowed Oscar and Lucinda to stay together long enough to fall in love, will never be exposed to Oscar; and the lie of Miriam Chadwick's "marriage" to Oscar will never be exposed to Lucinda. (p. 118) Later on we see Oscar is fooled by Miriam. He won the bet but lost everything for Lucinda. The story is saturated by extensive melancholy. Scrutinizing Oscar and Lucinda's oddness and unconventionality is a matter of importance in this paper. These people are mostly nonconformists. They gamble because it solaces them from their questionable personalities. The manner in which characters interact with the world around themselves has some resemblance with Arthur Schopenhauer's notion of will-less apprehension.

## 2. Methodology

For theoretical understanding of the function and nature of love between Oscar and Lucinda, the paper relays on Arthur Schopenhauer's notion of 'will' and the 'self.' Schopenhauer in his *The World as Will and Representation* explains about the way we perceive the world. All the phenomena perceived by us are referred as Representation. The way we interact with these phenomena is represented by the Will. The world's objects which we, as knowing individuals experience, depend for their order and existence on the 'knowing self'. The same world that has been apprehended as representation must also be viewed under the aspect of what Schopenhauer refers to as the 'will'. He writes, "The world is entirely representation, and as such requires the knowing subject as the supporter of its existence" (1969, p. 30). When we act our body moves and our awareness of its movement is unlike our awareness of events that we apprehend. It accords with what Christopher Janaway (1994) remarks, "I am 'outside' other objects, or they are 'outside me-but my body is mine in an intimate way. This can be expressed by saying that other events are expressions of my will" (p. 250).

As such, the will is the moving force in agency; it determines and underlies what individual action is and how it is carried out. The act of willing, then, includes bodily manifestations, and the whole body is nothing more than the objectified will. Janaway states, "Every true, genuine immediate act of the will is also and directly a manifestation of the body" (p.110). The will interacts and engages with the world and the representation drawn from those interactions. Interestingly, this agency of the will cannot be truly considered 'free' in the sense of an exercising of 'free will', as it is constrained by an external and changeable experiential world. We say that a person acts on his or her 'free will' when he or she is not hindered or restrained by something external to his or her will. This idea of will-less apprehension, specific to creativity, is the cornerstone of what will be referred to as a 'disinterested' aesthetic activity. If we stretch the notions of 'genius' and 'imagination', as interplayed in Schopenhauer's metaphysics, we can arrive at a concept of creativity that can be applied to a reading of Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, and in so doing, draw interesting parallels between the two systems, one metaphysical the other fictional.

## Discussion

In *The World as Will and Representation* (1969), Schopenhauer outlines a notion of metaphysics that is non-relational, non-conceptual, and concerned with an account of the body and the intellect apprehended as a whole. Among the major concepts, which Schopenhauer paid attention to is his notion of sex that is central to his concept of the will and will-lessness. His concept of sexual drive gives us insight into Carey's novel, allowing us a picture of the sexual dissatisfaction of the principal characters. In each, we find a dysfunctional relation between sexual longing and wholeness, drawing us into a world of failure. Sexuality was important for Schopenhauer: he developed metaphysics of the body based on the focal point of will in sexuality. Rudiger Safranski (1991) avers, As a rule, he taught, we do not stand a chance against our sexuality. As the most garish manifestation of 'will', it is the 'thing in itself' in action, humiliating the poor ego and sweeping it along before it. In his unsatisfactory relationships with woman, Arthur Schopenhauer very personally experienced sexuality as the humiliation of his supreme autonomy. (p.137)

According to Schopenhauer, the act of coitus takes us further down into an ego-less nature and makes of us the object of its action. In this way, we become passive, and are thereafter 'driven' by our actions. As in Freud, we can see the sexual drive as an instinctual need to relieve tensions and move beyond the repressive nature of the unconscious. Schopenhauer declares, the sexual impulse is proved to the decided and strongest affirmation of life by the fact that for man in the natural state, as for the animal, it is his life's final end and highest goal. Self-preservation and maintenance are his first aim, and soon as he has provided for that, he aims only at the propagation of the race; as a merely natural being, he cannot aspire to anything more. (1969, p. 329)

In *Oscar and Lucinda*, repressive sexuality is depicted in both Oscar and Lucinda. The act of procreation is just that, an act, it carries no further significance or expression. We are driven by these sexual desires, and in turn are subject to them. After getting familiar with each other, they are unable to experience a successful coital relationship; Oscar fulfills his sexual needs with Miriam Chadwick. In Lucinda's closing monologue, for example, she muses about sexuality and is driven, so to speak, to strive after those very things she desires. In this manner, Lucinda's sexuality is a driven or desire-based need to satisfy specific sexual ends. In Schopenhauer's 'disinterested' world, these strivings and desires are manifestations of a will-full humiliation; and as such, deprive us of autonomy. Schopenhauer depicts sex as an interest, in that it draws us away from ourselves. If sex is a driven activity, then it has to be or have an object of desire or drive, which requires an act of will. In this manner there could be no disinterested sex; it is driven by an object or desire outside of us. In Carey's novel, sex would be a way out, a reprieve from disinterestedness. But as sexual needs or desires are seldom fulfilled, characters such as Oscar and even Lucinda, are never given that reprieve. Sexual fulfillment, then, would be a way out, albeit fleetingly, from the cold dispassion of disinterestedness, the aloneness and solipsism of the Careyan characters. It is important to note that Schopenhauer's conception of the aesthetic, which includes creativity, is best understood as a culmination of his philosophy of the 'will' and its application to the metaphysics of thought itself. He searches for a better notion of what it is to be creative, and finds it in that application of the will-less activity of aesthetic apprehension towards painting, poetry, literature and music. On the notion of an inner nature, Schopenhauer writes, He who seeks to know mankind according to its inner nature which is identical in all its phenomena and developments, and thus according to its Ideas, will find that the works of the great, immortal poets present him with a much truer and clearer picture than the historians can ever give. (1969, p. 246).

This 'inner nature' can be seen in Carey's narrative and Schopenhauer's aesthetics, in that both work from an inner source of aesthetic apprehension. Schopenhauer's notion of a suspension of 'will' may allow us a better understanding of the creative process of Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*. The notion of will-lessens may pave the way to an unconventional understanding of how Carey's manipulated language, allowing us a look inside a work that exhibits a process of creativity that while engaged in the world, also pulls away from it in an attempt to reach a disinterested aesthetic detachment.

Carey's fiction evokes strong feelings in many readers. Many readers respond to his novels genuinely, personally and uneasily. For instance, it is not easy at once to articulate why *Oscar and Lucinda* moves us as deeply and yet, there is something so captivating about the story. It is difficult to locate the origin and the exact nature of the emotions that this novel stirs up. Yet, it kindles in us a certain sense of vagueness, indeterminacy and a kind of weakness. Oscar Hopkins's loneliness in his relationship with his surroundings especially with Lucinda Leplastrier and feelings of disconnection from Australian society, and Lucinda's shame and guilt over her inability to establish any enduring relation with her friends especially those she is in love with, depict the pathetic aloneness of the two principal characters in the novel. The novel portrays lives of a cast of Australian people and their thoughts on life, love, sex, gambling, politics, religion, philosophy and so on. The two principal characters, Oscar and Lucinda, ruminate on their failures and hopes, and their detachment from and indifference to themselves and the world. This disinterestedness is central to Carey's use of mono logical narrative in *Oscar and Lucinda*.

Schopenhauer's conception of the will and the notion of a disinterested narrator might help us to better understand Carey's use of inner-monologue and stream-of-consciousness as they pertain to the creativity found in *Oscar and Lucinda*. Carey carefully and painstakingly plotted the narrative in the novel as a way into the inner thought processes of the principal characters. Even though the Careyan character struggles relentlessly through the everydayness of life, he or she seems intransigently bound to the inner musings and confabulations of a monological reality. These lines from the text show that Elizabeth Leplastrier a character in the novel is detached from her surroundings: But it was true, she had no reason to be in New South Wales. She did not care for farming. Farming was her husband's concern. He was a soil scientist but secretly romantic. It was he who had such dreams of country life and she who was careful not to pry into the wells from which these desires sprang lest she find something so foolish she would cease to love him altogether. (p. 83)

It is this detachment from the moment, the goings on in everyday life that best exemplifies the detachment from the outside that is common in this novel. Carey's characters live in a one-dimensional world drawn solely from their own ongoing machinations and psychological experiences; and from within this narrative, each character narrates the inner process of his/ her thoughts. Oscar, Lucinda, and Theophilus, for example, have inner narratives embedded in the ongoing theatrics in the outside world, which represent their inner thoughts as events particular to their psychological mirrors. In saying this, we may understand Oscar, Lucinda and other character's inner monologues as reactions to external social and interpersonal relations. This disinterestedness, or pulling away from the outside world, reveals an inner process of disinterested disinterestedness. In the novel Carey conceived of a fictional world where the inner thoughts of its characters were given full reign and inner monologue is used to narrate a difficult and often exasperating story. In the novel, we are challenged by Carey to 'decode' the material in the narrative and come to an understanding of the way in which the material is presented to the reader. In the narrative-the inner monologue-Carey uses this 'disinterested' voice in a manner that isolates each character in a psychological inner world; he magnifies the thought process and in doing so creates a fictional world that thrives on stream-of-consciousness narrative.

The novel is a book of free-floating association; it is characterized by a narrative style that suggests a 'disinterested' and solipsistic world in which each character is cloistered and detached from meaningful relationships with others, dispensing with all possibility of change and fulfillment. As in the failed relationship between Oscar and Lucinda and their inability to find a source of comfort and reconnection with each other after reaching to Australia and living together for some time, Carey's characters inhabit a lonely and disaffected world that was presaged by Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism. Carey's characterization of detachment and disconnection in the novel suggests that the Australia he left with such haste and disfavor years earlier found its way into his fiction through the inner narratives of his main characters.

Carey's novel can be read as a comedic tragedy in which its main characters experience the monotonous pains of ordinary living and through these tragedies try to discover some form of redemption in light of their suffering. This striving towards disinterestedness is a constant theme in Schopenhauer. The main protagonist in the novel, Oscar, in his travel to Australia finds himself caught up in an endless stream-of-consciousness thought that revolves around the failures of his past and the dissatisfaction of the present.

As previously suggested, this novel represents an inner or unconscious process that is drawn from the narratives of its primary characters. Carey created a fictional world that was representative of the unconscious process and the notion of a will-less or disinterested apprehension of each character. From within this unconscious aesthetic, apprehension is possible from an 'inside' or 'disinterested' perspective; or as the case may be a disinterested interest.

What then does this suffering and tragedy have to do with creativity? In Carey the constant striving for satisfaction is a theme that repeats itself through the novel. Oscar is constantly at odds with feelings for Lucinda and his need for sexual and existential fulfillment. The need for a way out of this dissatisfaction impels each character to search for a way out of unhappiness and tragedy. In Carey, this satisfaction eludes its primary characters; they continue to exist in a world of unhappiness and tragedy. Oscar is less concerned with his mother's death, than with his inability to free himself from the guilt and shame he feels for not being a normal person. Carey's characters inhabit an 'inner world' of cold 'disinterest' where their thoughts are alone and uncommunicative to anyone except themselves. In the end Carey's characters remain trapped, captive to their own inner pessimism. This encourages disinterestedness from disinterest, twice removed from the disinterested. In this way Oscar is looking at himself, twice-removed from the object of disinterest. Even a cold dispassionate disinterest would be too much to bear.

There is a scene in chapter 82 of *Oscar and Lucinda*, on which the entire story has been converging, one in which the central relationship crystallizes, and in which the emblem of that relationship is conceived. The two central characters make a wager that is to shape their destinies over a dinner of consommé and flounder at the Oriental Hotel in Sydney. It has been a struggle against the odds for Oscar and Lucinda to reach this point, which seems at last to presage a happier future for them. Oscar's audacious suggestion that they build a glass church perfectly expresses the impractical, fragile beauty of their love. "It would be a lovely thing." (p. 389)

Schopenhauer suggests that the 'creative urge' is fundamental to all individuals; it is by way of inner thought, or disinterestedness, that man finds the creative clues to his existence. These 'creative urges' cannot be equated with biological or psychological strivings, but rather with aesthetics apprehension as understood in Schopenhauer's philosophical system. In Carey's novel this quest for inner solitude – the apprehension of ideas – culminates in Oscar Hopkins's soliloquy at the top of Glass church and at the end of the novel. Oscar extends himself beyond the rhetoric of the mundane, and into the creative language of existence itself. She occupies a domain of inner reality that is accomplished only through the inner strivings of a seamless inner thought, and in this manner discovers the true nature of him. He occupies a domain of inner reality that is accomplished only through the inner strivings of a seamless inner thought, and in this manner discovers the true nature of him. He achieves this by allowing his thoughts free-flow, and in doing so he is drawn away from the outside world and into his innermost thoughts. Oscar soliloquizes at the end of novel in this way:

All my life, he thought, I have sought the devil's murmuring in my ear, have let him persuade me that it is holy that I bet, that I abandon my father, that I draw poor Stratton into the morass, and all the while I am armored by conceit. I play the saint. When Miss Leplastrier and I were most passionately engaged, I imagined it was I who restrained us from sin, I who ensured our chastity until that happy day, (today, today I might have written to her in triumph) when she might have seen what I am and accepted my proposal that we stand as bride and bridegroom in God's sight. But it was not I. And the proof is here: that the moment a ministering hand is placed on that part of my anatomy, the minute, the instant it is touched, the first time in all its time – why, then, I fail the test. And find my Christianity to be but a spider web, so easily is it brushed aside. And I am a dog in the street prepared to be crushed by a wagon's wheel in order to let its beastly nature have its head. I cannot even justify my act by calling out 'love, love, I did it for love.' (p. 508) In Oscar's ending monologue the reader is drawn into the interior of his thoughts, and given access to his innermost secrets. By doing so Carey allows the reader to live vicariously through Oscar's inner-thoughts and feelings.

We can see here the rich, textured language Carey is renowned for and the creative energy that he expended on the simplest description. It is Oscar's narrative voice that extends the ground of creativity, and upon it builds an inner world of thought that entreats us to gaze through an open window at the private reflections of a sad and solipsistic mind.

We are not audience to sense data or concepts here, but rather to emotions and feelings stripped naked of their material and conceptual conceits. Here Oscar is talking to himself about Lucinda, whom he sees in the distance. Carey's use of inner monologue gives us a better understanding of the nature of each character's private thoughts, and the creative disinterestedness that lies at its foundations. It is in his stream-of-consciousness narrative that we find disinterestedness, a pulling away from the outside, the interested, and a closing in on the inner or disinterested.

The novel as a whole concentrates on those exquisite moments when, as Anthony Hassall says: "the gaps between people almost close, when they just fail to touch one another, when the grievous sense of wasted possibility, of what almost succeeded, is at its most intense" (1988, p. 126).

### Conclusion

As has already been suggested, the Schopenhauerian concept of 'disinterestedness' helps define the characters in the novel. In Carey, this is undertaken with the utmost literary skill in the character of Oscar Hopkins. The overall creativity of *Oscar and Lucinda* can be understood as an exercise in writing that maintains a close relationship with 'inner' processes and breaks the silence of thought that exists in each character's narrative. Following Schopenhauer's aesthetic, we might discover that Carey's use of stream-of-consciousness and inner monologue are examples of a disinterested aesthetic that allows us access to the inner workings of each character's thoughts. Carey's characters inhabit an inner monological narrative that is disinterestedly interested, allowing them to create a narrative of their own making, a disinterested interest. In doing so, this opens up the notion of aesthetics as a will-less apprehension of ideas common to both Schopenhauer and Carey. Schopenhauer, in relating will-lessness to the aesthetic, engineered a narrative philosophical voice of his own. As suggested, in the novel we are confronted with a picture of reality, or nature that is created from the inner musings of each primary character; in Schopenhauer we find a conception of aesthetics that exists independent of the will itself; a disinterested narrative understanding of self.

In the novel, inner thoughts, or monological narratives, give rise to a sense of the unknown, a sense of the goings-on in each character's mind; and perhaps also to a better understanding of our own inner worlds. Carey used the idea of 'inner' monologue to add disinterestedness to narrative; and in doing so created a work of such dense perspicuity that even today, twenty eight years after its publication, it continues to be an ambitious work. It is this preoccupation with 'disinterestedness' that extends the notion of 'inner thought' and creates the tragic aloneness that is to be found in Carey's novel.

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