Rewriting Scapegoat Texts:

Mimetic Desire and the Dynamics of Rivalry
in Michael Ondaatje’s In the Skin of a Lion and The English Patient,
and Peter Carey’s Jack Maggs and True History of the Kelly Gang

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DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made to the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to

MY FAMILY
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a new kind of literary history developed in four postmodern historical romances: Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, and Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* and *True History of the Kelly Gang*. By foregrounding their intertexts, these novels expose acts of violence and terror directed against scapegoats, particularly those constructed as criminals, who are perceived to threaten social stability. The novels of Ondaatje and Carey transform these criminals from social transgressors to heroes, from victimizers to victims. They first reconstruct and expose the social dynamics of specific historical contexts drawn from their precursor texts, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Herodotus’s Histories*, *Great Expectations* and *Lorna Doone*, and then create a form of communal history, which for the first time voices the suppressed narratives of the disenfranchised.

The theoretical framework used in the analysis of each text and its intertextual “double” is developed through analyses of desire and imitation in space as well as time. The thesis links René Girard’s theory of rivalry and violence in mimetic desire to Julia Kristeva’s and Susan Friedman’s theories of reading at the point of intersection between a text and its precursors, newly allowing the application of Girard to the complex intertextual dynamics of the sub-genre of metahistorical romance. This approach reconfigures this sub-genre as a form of simultaneous and paratactic history. It adapts Amy Elias’s and Brian McHale’s theories of spatial tropes as literary techniques which collapse, onto one plane, or juxtapose, different historical periods, characters and events, as a means to examine the “dark areas” of history.

In this process the thesis considers each modern text and its precursor to explore the role of Girard’s rivalrous doubles within and across texts in activating or interrupting cyclical violence. The historical scapegoats, given the opportunity to
recognize and tell their histories in the modern texts, generate a new form of communal history, which challenges earlier depictions and celebrations of violence and the persecution of scapegoats. These new histories recoil from violence and reconstruct scapegoats through attention to the complex intersection of political and legal policies, cultural values and practices informing their previous historical representation. They allow Girard’s cycles of violence to be broken, reimagining the scapegoat not in terms of singular identifications as anarchist, spy, convict and outlaw, but as multi-faceted, able to be renewed in multiple identifications as heroic.
ABBREVIATIONS

SL  In the Skin of a Lion
Gilgamesh  The Epic of Gilgamesh
EP  The English Patient
HH  Herodotus: The Histories
JM  Jack Maggs
GE  Great Expectations
TH  True History
LD  Lorna Doone
JL  The Jerilderie Letter
INTRODUCTION

All historical fiction, it could be argued, engages the past by returning to previous accounts of history and remaking the grounds on which they have been established. In the four novels examined in this thesis, however, the remaking of history is also a remaking of a specific literary past. In *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient*, *Jack Maggs* and *True History of the Kelly Gang*, literature’s engagement with the past is insistently alluded to through a range of references, focused on a central intertext. For *In the Skin of a Lion* that intertext is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; for *The English Patient* it is Herodotus’s *The Histories*; for *Jack Maggs* it is *Great Expectations* and for the *True History of the Kelly Gang* it is *Lorna Doone*. This thesis examines the ways in which each explicit intertext, in combination with a host of others, bring the past into the historical present for particular political purposes. These four texts use spatial metaphors to reconfigure, rather than simply repeat, the patterns of violence represented in their intertexts, advocating new forms of communal history as a way of breaking old habits of rivalry, conflict and scapegoating.

Central to the revision of literary history examined in this thesis is the concept of mimetic desire. According to the cultural theorist, René Girard, all desire is mimetic and mimetic desire leads to rivalry and conflict. In theorizing mimetic desire, Girard argues: “Two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus, mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict” (*Violence* 146). The repeated acts of collective violence generated by that conflict create the central cultural figure of the scapegoat, whose function is to restore cultural order and stability. Girardian theory is used in this thesis to analyze the figure of the scapegoat in Ondaatje’s and Carey’s texts, where a juxtaposition of text and intertext newly
allow that scapegoat to be recognized not only as the victimizer but also as the victim. In this exchange, pre-existent power relations are exposed and reimagined revealing, as Chris Fleming argues, that those emerging as scapegoats tend to be “marginalized figures or outcasts often existing on the fringes of society” (51). Girardian analysis, focusing on the revelation that “violence belongs to all men” and “anybody can play the part of the surrogate victim” (*Violence* 257), uncovers a pattern in these four novels, which is enabled by genre: all four novels fall into Amy Elias’s category of metahistorical romance.

Elias holds that the term “metahistorical romance …encompasses both postmodernist and postcolonial fiction” (188). Both Ondaatje’s and Carey’s novels are discourses in postmodernism in that they both problematize history, are fundamentally contradictory, and political in intent. While all four novels are examples of poststructuralism, manifested in the diverse and destabilizing discourses located across the texts, Carey’s novels are also postcolonial in challenging the discourse of colonialism. Carey’s and Ondaatje’s texts articulate an alternative way of communicating the histories of marginalized people and the scapegoats who represent them.

For Elias the metahistorical romance “incorporates an understanding of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in terms of the historical sublime” (188). She defines the historical sublime as a traumatic history, a history that hurts, such as the violent subordination of colonized subjects, which is obscured by the ideology of imperialism. In Ondaatje’s novels the historical sublime is expressed in the oppressive working conditions of Toronto’s workers and the physical and emotional damage to war victims while Carey’s novel addresses the cruel consequences of transportation, and the victimization of the Irish working class in
colonial Australia. Elias’s emphasis on the historical sublime underpins the focus of my argument on violence to historical scapegoats. At the same time, I acknowledge and use the insights of two prominent experts in the field of metahistorical fiction, Brian McHale and Linda Hutcheon. For Elias, the form of metahistorical romance is characterized by its narratological terracing of historical events and people and its active relationship to the multiple, layered texts representing the past in order to “expose a new angle of historical vision” (104). Its excavations allow silent or repressed histories to be reconfigured. In these novels, it is the figure of the scapegoat that emerges as key to rewriting narratives of the past, as the medium through which the fissures and contradictions of grand narratives might be revealed. While Girard’s theorization of desire is based on the notion of imitation, which he refers to by invoking the Greek term “mimesis”, the rewritings undertaken by Ondaatje and Carey borrow from a long tradition of imitation as literary practice. The rhetorical term of *imitatio* involves a competitive ambivalence towards the object of emulation, and its recent analyses highlight the elements of rivalry and violence that characterize the relationship between text and precursor. These range from Thomas Greene’s understanding of imitation as a fraught practice of creative anachronism (37), to Richard Peterson’s more benign view of imitation as “the dynamic process of gathering in and transforming” (21). For G.W. Pigman, imitation is always both transformative and contradictory. He uses a model of eristic imitation to highlight the images of struggle, strife and competition through which a text may simultaneously criticize and emulate its precursor, where “admiration for a model [is] joined with envy and contentiousness” (4). Ondaatje’s and Carey’s novels, which depend on central intertexts, retain some of these elements of ambivalence, rivalry and violence which characterize imitation, but are closest to allegory, in its poststructuralist sense,
through their radical transformations of the historical texts upon which they rely. As Craig Owens argues, “allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another”; its two fundamental impulses are “a conviction of the remoteness of the past and a desire to redeem it for the present” (68).

Stephen Slemon’s poststructuralist understanding of allegorical writing reinterprets history as a concept in order to articulate “new codes of recognition”: where those acts of resistance that “history” has rendered silent or invisible can be newly recognized as a shaping force in a culture’s tradition. Primarily known as a postcolonial theorist, Slemon questions the common assumptions about allegorical models of reading and writing as either concerned with redeeming and recuperating the past or, conversely, as a “willful act of annihilating the past” (158). In contrast, for Slemon, allegorical writing dislocates the past in the sense that traditional discourses are challenged:

[. . .] in one area—the relation between allegory and history—post-colonial allegorical writing not only constitutes a challenge to prevailing theoretical assumptions about what kind of grounding is required for allegorical communication to take place, but also, [that] it is helping to change our received ideas of history. (158)

His writing differs from the work of Michel Foucault and Hayden White, in which history is represented as “a mode of discourse that is culturally motivated and ideologically conditioned.” Instead he argues for the articulation of “a code of recognition” (159) that brings history as language and discourse into focus. In this theory, traditional discourse intersects with invented discourse to create different modes of perception. Slemon recognizes that the reader’s vision is binary in interpreting an allegorical impulse against what Fredric Jameson calls a “mastercode.”
It can work in two ways, by legitimizing imperial history, or by transforming received concepts of history or tradition. In this sense history is a discourse open to review, to exploration and to reinterpretation, and is a means of subverting colonial myths.

Slemon argues that in the process of destabilizing and transforming our fixed ideas of history, it is fiction that determines the way we read history, history that is contingent upon fiction, not the other way around; that we read allegory with binary vision viewing the inherited concept of history and the interpretive fiction at the same time. According to Slemon, postcolonial narratives are concerned with neither redeeming nor annihilating history, but rather they inscribe it as a concept that is open to revision. Further, poststructuralist allegory also changes ideas of the concept of allegory itself, reading this new revised “mode of representation in all of its diversity, its plurality, its cultural and political difference” (166).

Poststructuralist allegory provides a context for reading Ondaatje’s and Carey’s engagement with the past that keeps in play a form of Slemon’s “double vision”. They neither redeem nor annihilate history but juxtapose contradictory possibilities of interpretation in productive tension. Rather than closing down interpretive avenues for assessing the past, they open up multiple new pathways. This is not to say that these texts are politically neutral. The central figures of these novels are disenfranchised—the “immigrants”, “the spy”, “the convict” and the Irish”—and negative associations with their histories are reimagined. These figures, selected by cultural markers of difference, are scapegoats who, rather than be seen as victims, as Fleming argues, “are invariably seen as victimizers” (51). By deploying allegorical doubling, these metahistorical romances question the identification of scapegoats in traditional discourse as such victimizers by exposing the point of view of the community from which the scapegoat is drawn.
To reveal these alternative histories, the thesis develops Julia Kristeva’s and Susan Friedman’s theory of spatialization together with René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire, to examine the construction of the historical scapegoat in these four novels. The reading of Ondaatje’s and Carey’s novels is based on Susan Friedman’s analysis of intertextuality, which in turn draws upon Julia Kristeva’s theory of spatialization. For Kristeva, spatialization constitutes the text as a place in which space and time functions as co-ordinates for textual activity at the level of word, sentence and story. The implication of this textual activity or intertextuality for historical fiction is that it provides a means to read the text “within (the text of) society and history” (37). If, as Simon Edwards claims, the element of violence is implicit in the genre of historical fiction as it “plays itself out in different national and cultural traditions, patterns of political and social development” (295), this thesis locates an alternative model of history at work in spatialized texts. The spatialized texts examined here use communal histories, the histories of people represented in alternative narratives, to demonstrate the potential to avert the violence generated in the subtexts by asserting ethical action. In the process of decoding previous ideologies embedded in myths, beliefs and “grand narratives”, communal history challenges the understanding of historical violence and revises literary and historical canons.

In Kristeva’s analysis, intertextuality can be visualized as a grid in which the writer/reader (horizontal axis) intersects with the text/context (vertical axis). These tropes of spatialization enable a reader to visualize the operation of a text. The horizontal axis of a text represents the transaction between the writer (writing subject) with the addressee (either a character or the reader) whereas the vertical axis connects the text with exterior, precursor texts (66). Kristeva uses the term “ideologeme” to refer to the intersection of a text with its precursors. Augmenting Kristeva’s theory,
Friedman suggests that the spatialization of intertextual narratives fosters an interactive process of reading in which the reader reconstructs intersections of the vertical and horizontal axes of a text. Deriving her argument from Kristeva’s concept of the “subject-in-process”, Friedman writes that “the vertical axis involves the space and time the writer and reader occupy as they inscribe and interpret […] the ‘subject-in-process’ constituted through the ‘signifying practice’ of the text and its dialogues with literary, social and historical intertexts” (Friedman 219). In narrative, Friedman posits, these and other spatial tropes identify plural subject positions for the reader to construct a story, so that within a narrative, “juxtapositions, oppositions, conflations, convergences, or mirroring of narrative coordinates […] form a fluid ‘story’ of a dynamic text […] ‘narrated’ by the reader” (218).

In Friedman’s analysis, the horizontal narrative is the sequence of events that contains generic conventions familiar to a reader, such as setting, character, action, problem, progression, and closure: “Every horizontal narrative has an embedded vertical dimension […] that must be traced by the reader because it has no narrator of its own” (221). A reader must interpret the intertextuality of the vertical narrative; “both the literary and historical aspects of the vertical narrative,” Friedman explains, “involve reading the horizontal narrative’s dialogues with other texts” (221). These dialogues, “whether consciously or unconsciously produced by the writer […] exist as ‘the mosaic of quotations’ that traverse the text” (221). Intertextual resonances, when consciously intended by the writer, “establish an indirect communication between the writer and reader, with the characters and events of the horizontal narrative as points of mediation” (221). Friedman refers to the vertical axis of narrative as a palimpsest, that is, “a tablet that has been written on many times, with prior layers imperfectly erased” (221).
Friedman proposes that the text’s vertical narrative can be read, “as a linguistic entity structured like a psyche, with a conscious and an unconscious that interact psychodynamically” (223). She analyzes three distinct interwoven strands of the vertical narrative: the literary, the historical, and the psychic. The literary strand of the vertical narrative includes the writer and reader’s awareness of genre conventions that exist “as a chronotope, a space-time, within which the specific text is read—for its invocations and revocations, its uses and rescriptions, its repetitions and play” (Friedman 221). All literary texts exist within one or more literary traditions or cultures; as I discuss subsequently, there are multiple texts and traditions with which the novels of Ondaatje and Carey intersect. Yet each novel emphasizes its relationship to a particular precursor. Hence, the horizontal narrative of these novels indirectly entwines a vertical aspect that engages readers with what has been written before.

The horizontal aspect of the vertical narrative can also refer to a specific historical event that the text reconstructs, such as Ned Kelly’s death in *True History of the Kelly Gang* and the transportation of convicts to Australia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in *Jack Maggs*. Similarly, in *In the Skin of a Lion* Ondaatje rewrites the history of Toronto’s modernization using records from the Riversdale Library, while *The English Patient* rewrites events in the life of desert explorer Count Almásy, who was recorded as a spy in British Intelligence documents. The horizontal aspect of the vertical narrative may also “reproduce, subvert, and otherwise engage with the dominant and marginalized cultural scripts of the social order” (Friedman 222), such as narratives about class, gender, ethnicity, religion and race. *The English Patient*, for example, includes Western cultural scripts about nationalism, the Asian “other” and gendered alterity. As Friedman explains, these aspects of the vertical narrative allow a reader, as Kristeva recommends, to analyze
“the text in dialogue with ‘its historical and social coordinates’” (Friedman 223 qtd. Kristeva 36).

Friedman believes that conceptualizing narrative in spatial terms “emphasizes the psychodynamic, interactive, and situational nature of narrative processes; it also provides a fluid, relational approach that connects text and context, writer and reader” (225). Within Friedman’s analysis of spatialized narrative, Kristeva’s grid of the writer/reader (horizontal axis) and text/context (vertical axis) reconnects the text with its writer and the world and “potentially produces interpretations of the textual and political unconscious of a given text or series of texts” (226). The notion of the vertical axes embedded in the horizontal historical and literary intertextualities constitutes more than resonances attached to the text associatively. They initiate “dialogic narratives ‘told’ by the reader in collusion with a writer who inscribes them in the text consciously or unconsciously” (225). This concept of interactive horizontal and vertical narratives “allows for a relational reading of the two that produces a “story” not present in either axis by itself” (225). This is the model of narration used in the analyses of these novels. Reading the psychic aspect of the vertical narrative allows us as readers to construct stories of trauma in the untold history of the protagonists in these novels. Friedman concludes: “The richest insights produced by a spatialized reading strategy may well reside in the way it potentially produces interpretations of the textual unconscious of a given text or a series of texts” (226).

Friedman’s framework allows the construction of painful history that may be usefully studied through René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire to explore how these modern novels intersect with their precursors to articulate concepts about history and historical scapegoats. The mimetic desires of the characters in these narratives frame discourses that create rivalry, construct deviancy and identify scapegoats. Integrating
Girard’s theorization of how imitation can lead not only to a loss of differentiation but also to transformation provides a means to trace the dynamic relationship of a text and its precursors, exposing the changing identification of criminality. But where Girard’s theory of mimetic desire studies the representation of imitation among characters, my analysis traces the interconnectedness of triangular relationships among characters and across texts.

The “doubling” of text and precursor in Ondaatje’s and Carey’s novels foregrounds the role of culture in determining how and why a scapegoat is constructed. Reading the ideology of the text against the subtext exposes different cultural attitudes linked to the moment of each text’s cultural production and circulation. Friedman’s analysis of intertextuality provides a means, in the words of H. Porter Abbott, “to interpret […] the complex embeddedness of a narrative’s meaning in the culture from which it comes” (94). Integrating Friedman’s theory of spatialization as a strategy for reading narrative with Girard’s theory allows texts from different historical times to be used to analyze the role of desire in the construction of ideology, criminality and scapegoating.

René Girard posits that people not only imitate the actions but also the desires of other people. He believes that “a rigorous conception of desire [is] imbricated in the textual interlacings of the great works” (To Double 39). In his analyses of texts ranging from Shakespeare’s Hamlet to Proust’s Recherche Le Temps Perdu, characters who imitate each other’s actions and desires become “doubles” who reveal the “reciprocity of mimetic relationships.” A triune or triangular structure conjoins “doubles”, that is, a desiring subject and a desired object, with a “model” or “mediator” whose own desires direct the subject towards the object. Imitation of another’s desires generates, according to Girard, “the dynamics of mimetic rivalry
[. . .] rooted in a disputed object” when “two hands will reach for the same object simultaneously: conflict cannot fail to result” (To Double 201). As rivalry intensifies, the attention of the desiring subject becomes fixed on the mediator rather than on the object of desire, whose importance to the relationship fades. The violence with which the mediator resists the subject paradoxically encourages imitation that initiates struggle and conflict between them. The subject desires the very being of the mediator. As this is impossible to gratify, the subject is forced into a position of inferiority or “emptiness” in contrast to the mediator’s perceived “fullness”. The apparent lack of desire or need in the mediator powerfully attracts the subject.

What Girard calls the “double-bind” of the mimetic triangle is the double injunction affecting the relationship of the subject and the mediator: “taken as a model, imitate me; and as a rival, do not imitate me” (Things Hidden 291). Imitation causes the rivals, that is, the subject and the mediator, to resemble each other, becoming enemy “brothers” as it were. Mimesis and reciprocity structure the relationship of the rivals whose personalities eventually become indistinguishable. They may engage in a process of counter-imitation to prove themselves different. Counter-imitation produces a binary or symmetrical structure, which is a sign of the internal mediation of their imitative desire. Nevertheless, the relationship of rivals, in Girard’s terminology, “is non-differentiated. In fact, at every instant, mimesis engenders new reciprocities by a constant redoubling of the same ruses, the same strategies, and the same mirror effects” (To Double 91). Imitative desire is the antithesis and complement of identity. There is nothing on one side of the rivalry that will not, sooner or later, turn up on the other side. Characters dissolve and personalities disintegrate, for the process is one of growing reciprocity and uniformity until the rivals become “indistinguishable”.
The “scapegoat” effect, according to Girard, occurs when one of the rivals, or indistinguishable enemies, is differentiated and becomes a scapegoat, a focus of violence. Fleming explains the process which leads up to scapegoating: “As antagonism generates doubling, this doubling itself gives rise to renewed threats of violence, violence which is able to draw in people putatively external to a dispute” (46). To mitigate against this contagious aspect of violence, Girard argues that the reintroduction of order at the social and cultural level involves a sacrificial crisis that “only an act of collective expulsion can bring this oscillation to a halt and cast violence outside the community” (*Violence* 151). For Girard “the operation of scapegoating is crystallized when “the community satisfies its rage against an arbitrary victim” (*Things Hidden* 27). According to Girard, the scapegoat as a victim unifies “the community in its opposition. The sacrifice is simply another act of violence, one that is added to a succession of others, but it is the final act of violence, its last word” (*Things Hidden* 24).

By tracing the complex intersection of characters’ relationships between a text and its precursors, my analysis considers how the modern novel differs from its precursor in representations of the scapegoat. Central to this representation is the approach to history in the novels considered in this thesis. Carey’s and Ondaatje’s texts are “metahistorical romances”, articulating their imitation and differentiation from their precursors in a manner that reconfigures their representation of the concept of history. Elias describes metahistorical romances that integrate historical and fictional people and events from different periods of time within one narrative as multidimensional and “narrotologically terraced” (117), by drawing upon the theory of Ihab Hassan, an early analyst of the postmodern, who specifically linked parataxis to postmodernist and poststructural modes of thought. Hassan differentiates
postmodernism from modernism on the ground that “modernism appears hieratic, hypotactical, and formalist, while postmodernism strikes us by contrast as playful, paratactical and reconstructionist” (91). By anachronistically integrating precursor texts, characters and historical persons from different historical periods, metahistorical fiction self-reflexively represents the complexity of historical narrative. Metahistorical romances portray an alternative representation of the scapegoat by engaging with the dominant and cultural scripts of the social order, by gesturing towards the recovery of untold history and by replacing one linear time line with multiple existing time lines.

In a discussion of postmodern strategies for “spatializing” time, Elias uses spatial tropes to explicate the complex narrative form of postmodern historical fiction. Following Michel Bakhtin’s analysis of spatial tropes in the novel in Dialogic Imagination, metahistorical romances, Elias argues, represent history spatially and thereby reveal “definitions of time and space” to be “culturally specific” (103). The spatialized narrative form of postmodern metahistorical romances critically evaluates the linear model of time characteristic of epistemological assumptions of Enlightenment historiography. In his critique of Elias’s work, “History Itself? Or, The Romance of Postmodernism”, Brian McHale argues that the “spatial turn” of postmodernism Elias proposes includes “paratactic history”. Simultaneous history, McHale theorizes, differs from paratactic history. In postmodern fiction, according to McHale, paratactic historical narratives force “temporal planes into textual proximity with each other without producing any synthesis among them, while simultaneous history [. . . ] precipitates different historical planes onto a single plane of reality” (155). By replacing one linear time line with multiple, coexisting time lines a postmodern metahistorical romance “creates a new fictional universe in which historical epochs, characters or events appear together, thus challenging the entire
notion of historical reconstruction” (Elias 139). Such “creative anachronism”, according to McHale, “draws upon a number of strategies for constructing/deconstructing space, among them juxtaposition, interpolation, superimposition, and misattribution” (Postmodernist Fiction 45). He describes the result as “a kind of double vision or split-screen effect, the present and the past simultaneously in focus” (93).

These postmodern historical romances raise larger questions about how narrative structures represent history. In his signature work, Metahistory, Hayden White looks to “the reconstitution of history as a form of intellectual activity which is at once poetic, scientific and philosophical in its concerns” (Preface, xii). He argues in “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” that historians use narrative to understand and interpret phenomena, using complex structures in which “a world of experience is imagined to exist under at least two modes, one of which is encoded as ‘real’, the other of which is ‘revealed’ to have been illusionary in the course of the narrative” (208). Extending the idea of real and illusory modes of narration, McHale writes that classic historical fiction camouflages the seam between the fictional world and historical reality by introducing “pure fiction” to obscure “dark areas” and by matching the inner structures of the fictional world with that of the real world. In contrast, postmodern metahistorical fiction foregrounds the seam, by making the transition as disturbing as possible. This is done “by violating the constraints on ‘classic’ historical fiction: by contradicting the public record of ‘official’ history; by flaunting anachronisms, and by integrating history and the fantastic” (Postmodernist 90). In the search for a new approach to Western history, Elias claims that metahistorical romances “reenergize the historical romance genre by inverting its dominant, melding
fantasy, anachronism, metafictionality, and other fabulatory techniques with the facts of history” (Introduction xv).

In “History Itself” McHale notes that Fredric Jameson’s “spatial turn” of postmodernism is crucial to Elias’s poetics of the metahistorical romance. As Jameson asserts in *The Political Unconscious*: “there is nothing that is not social and historical—indeed, that everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political” (20). Jameson proposes that the historical process of thinking and writing involves the return to “master narratives” and argues for the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts, and against historical amnesia. For Jameson, “the object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which to confront and appropriate it. Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular master code” (9-10). Jameson, working out of a Marxist context, sees postmodernism as a “cultural dominant”, characterized by the developments of mass culture, in which discourses are constituted by modes of ideology. For the poststructuralist theorists, Hassan, McHale, Hutcheon and Elias, postmodernism problematizes history, for, as Hutcheon asserts, “postmodernism uses and abuses the conventions of discourse” (*Poetics* xii), demanding a concept of history that is concerned equally with dominant and oppositional strategies, for it incarnates the contradictions of their interaction” (*Poetics* 179). Jameson theorises that allegorical images create “new modes of perception” where “different moments in historical or existential time are simply filled in different places; the attempt to combine them even locally does not slide up and down on a temporal scale [. . .] but jumps back and forth across a gameboard that we conceptualize in terms of distance” (*Postmodernism* 167-8). This view illustrates why McHale theorizes in “History Itself” that Jameson’s “spatial turn” melds with Elias’s
assertion that the strategies of parataxis and simultaneity merge “to release images from the repressed (the culturally repressed as well as the libidinal and mythic unconscious) into the world, to walk among real people, creating a mythical world where different kinds of reality and time interact with one another or exist simultaneously on the same plane, the same historical moment” (147-48).

Importantly, anachronism resulting from simultaneous and paratactic history, according to Elias, implies that history is “weird, uncanny, and dimensionally complex” (141). Spatializing history is then potentially a basis for the formation of a positive if problematized subjectivity. The problematized subjectivity of the protagonists in the novels discussed in this thesis is illustrated in the extent to which each character understands his historical position in order to “read” or “tell” history by occupying subject-positions of reader and writer.

The stories the protagonists in these novels write or tell represent their longing for identity and history. Their stories imply that historical writing is not different in kind from other kinds of narration, whether it is fiction, myth or official records. In Ondaatje’s novels, Patrick Lewis, the protagonist of In the Skin of a Lion, “reads” his narrative by gathering “all of these fragments of a human order” (145) drawn from his memory and the lives of the immigrant working community. Patrick uses these fragments to form a personally and culturally meaningful sense of the past. Once he understands his relation to both history and society, he has access to language to “tell” his story in a literary form Linda Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction” referring to popular novels which are both “intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Poetics 5). Patrick’s story points to the doubleness “represented in the narration and towards the act of narration itself” (Politics 76). Yet the reader is still required to fill in the blanks in the
fragmentary and chaotic structure of a text that produces a multiple array of metatexts just as the historian is forced to do, ensuring that as Berger’s epigraph notes, “no single story” can emerge to deny all others. Similarly, the English patient “reads” his story as a guilt-ridden participant in a narrative of war. His story is only completed at the villa when the exiles at the villa are constructed in multidimensional history, which the English patient calls “communal history, communal books.” In this communal history, the narratives of the victims of an imperial war are reconfigured, unbounded by the constraints of class, gender, race or time. The English patient can “tell” his story when he includes the human element in historical narration in his interaction with his companions by teaching them that their lives have stories. These stories, communally, construct a new kind of history.

In Carey’s texts, Jack Maggs suffers from a repressed lost memory and keeps on suffering as Tobias Oates steals his story in mesmeric sessions. He occupies the subject position of a reader once he starts writing to his “son”, Phipps, about the story of his childhood and the loss of his “wife” and aborted child. Written in invisible ink and mirror writing, it is an alternative way of writing history in representing the story that Empire does not reveal in its official records. This story is juxtaposed with Tobias Oates’s narrative of the courtroom, where, according to Douglas Hay, criminal law is manifested as “an ideological system” wherein aspects of “majesty, justice and mercy”, are demonstrated to the “mass of unpropertied Englishmen” (26). Maggs was sentenced to transportation. It is only when Mercy breaks him out of this unspoken grief that he can understand his own story. In True History of the Kelly Gang, Ned Kelly’s record of events in his fictional autobiography mirrors Kelly’s historical The Jerilderie Letter. His story is juxtaposed with the “parcels” of documents and Thomas Curnow’s rewriting of Kelly’s narrative. Kelly “reads” a story of unfair and unjust
government policies and corrupt police behaviour oppressing Irish settlers and writes portraying himself as the heroic leader of the proletariat. Official narratives construct Kelly as an outlaw and the leader of a rebellion and identify him as a scapegoat to quell the social unrest. In Carey’s version of Kelly’s autobiography he positions himself as a romantic hero who stood for social justice.

The potential of the protagonists to “read” and “tell” history provides a counter discourse to the traditional framework for historical representation. In metahistorical fiction, the intertextuality of spatialized narratives exposes the fault-lines and anachronism of paratactic and simultaneous history. To demystify conventional literary representations of the past as one linear timeline, McHale argues in *Postmodernist Fiction* that the text operates in the “dark areas” of history and thereby “revises the content of the historical record, reinterpreting the historical record, often demystifying or debunking the orthodox version of the past.” The alternative history either “supplements the historical record, claiming to restore what has been lost or suppressed; or it displaces official history altogether” (90). Elias concentrates on the events of history, referring to the ‘lost’, ‘repressed’ or ‘hidden history’ as the ‘historical sublime’, as that which can only be gestured towards. Following Hayden White’s assertion in *The Content of the Form* that the discipline of history “consisted in subordinating written history to the categories of the ‘beautiful’ and suppressing those of the ‘sublime’” (67), Elias argues, “the assertion of spatiality allows the metahistorical romance to recover the historical sublime often repressed in history’s linear model” (104). Spatiality is an attempt to gesture towards the historical sublime, that is, the silent and unknowable past. Because the sublime is “that which stands outside of proof, empirical reason, the rule of truth” (28), Elias contends it remains absent in historical novels, romances and myths. For Elias, narrative
structures in metahistorical fiction produce provocative reimaginings of the past. Historical romance and myth depend on a historical perspective that effectively obscures the “dark areas.” In contrast, Elias contends, the spatialized narratives of postmodern metahistorical romances reveal “a compulsion to make sense of a traumatic history, a history that hurts” (87).

In order to “make sense of a traumatic history”, metahistorical fiction engages in a process of repetition and deferral. In Elias’s analysis of postcolonial metahistorical romances, the repetition compulsion is the way metahistory constructs history as a process of deferral that requires a constantly defined border, which in turn offers a constantly defined location of the Other. Inherent in the repetition compulsion is the loss of self and a journey from the center to the margins, which is repeated endlessly because “the borders of knowable history it seeks are themselves constantly receding” (202). In Elias’s analysis, “This endlessly repeated movement towards the historical sublime/History repeatedly voices and inverts the relationship between subject and object, center and border, Self and Other: the Self searching for History finds nothing and loses itself, and is instead set on a never-ending spiralling quest towards the meaning of the social, the self and the other” (202).

In contrast to the novels that lead Elias to this conclusion, the metahistorical novels examined in this thesis provide opportunities for protagonists to recognize and narrate their understandings of history. Rather than finding nothing and losing the self, the subjects here locate a precarious form of subjectivity through their participation in communal history. In the novels of Ondaatje and Carey that I discuss, male protagonists’ journeys lead them towards occupying the subject-positions not only of readers, but also of a writers or storytellers who “tell the histories”. Women are instrumental in mediating the men’s access to the subject-position of writer or
storyteller, often occupying key roles as storytellers with privileged access to oral cultures. In triangular relationships, Alice, Hana, Mercy and Mary Hearn are stabilizing forces, ultimately anchored in sacrifice, that produce a braking effect on the cyclical violence generated by the rivals. Through their mediation these women create a communal history by facilitating the subjects to understand and tell their stories.

All four novels, as discourses of postmodernism, problematize history as “fundamentally contradictory” in which “the presence of the past” becomes “a critical reworking, never a nostalgic return” (Poetics 4). They are texts that engage the reader in constructing communal history from spatialized narrative, providing an alternative means of constructing identity. Ondaatje’s novels rewrite documented history to critique the ruthless appropriation of people in times of upheaval, such as during the modernization of a city or in times of war. The imperial ideology of the ancient narrative Gilgamesh, as an intertext of In the Skin of a Lion is analyzed not only to reveal the modern text’s “social and historical coordinates” (Kristeva 36), but also to describe the interactions of rivals in a recognition scene when they understand each other’s role in modernizing the city of Toronto. The English Patient differs structurally from In the Skin of a Lion in that the novel comprises two interwoven narratives, one of which is the fragmented account of the English patient whose narrative intersects with The Histories. The other describes the interactions of four war victims whose memories intersect with literary, biblical and art history intertexts. The juxtaposition of these two narratives is explored in relation to the construction of imperial history and communal history to examine the ideologies that generate particular versions of history and their effects on the marginalized.
Carey’s novels rework narratives of Empire to problematize formations of national identity and demonized figures in cultural history. An analysis of Jack Maggs examines the interpenetration of the cultural ideology of its precursor text, Great Expectations, into the modern text and the role of Victorian social policy in constructing criminality by linking policy, property and poverty to Jack Maggs’s identification as a social deviant. A similar connection of ideology and criminality is examined in True History of the Kelly Gang. An analysis of the paratactical implications of juxtaposing three chronological narratives, Ned Kelly’s autobiography, the autobiography in the sub-text, Lorna Doone, and Ned Kelly’s The Jerilderie Letter, explores the influence of the government power structure in colonial Australia on the social struggle of Irish settlers and the social banditry of Ned Kelly.

In the four novels, violent identifications of the protagonists in the subtexts are constructed in triangular relationships that are representative of the cultural ideology in which the narratives, or “persecution texts”, are conceived. The difference is that in the modern texts the linear history of the subtext is crosscut with spatialized multilayered history wherein one of the participants offers an alternative to violent confrontation, which breaks the cycle of revenge. This is marked by a point of agreement when an individual understands his role in relation to both history and society. The merging of identities of Patrick and Harris in In the Skin of a Lion informs their understanding of how a city functions socially and economically. The English patient’s journey closes on the way he can define his own life and that of others in terms of communal books. In Jack Maggs, Mercy’s understanding of how both she and Jack Maggs are identified as deviants in Victorian society informs a decision to continue their lives in Australia. True History is the exception because Ned Kelly positions himself as a romantic hero rather than as a hunted outlaw. He
refuses Mary Hearn’s conciliatory suggestion to leave his violent entrapment in Victoria and builds “monitors” in order to rescue his mother from Beechworth Prison. Unlike the other protagonists he does not understand his own historical position and is condemned to die as an outlaw.

In contrast to violent identifications in official history, the communal model of history offers a different perspective on the protagonists. In *In the Skin of a Lion*, through Alice’s mediation, Patrick is remembered as the historian of Toronto’s immigrant working class rather than as the representative of the city’s anarchists. Triangular relationships in the spatialized narrative of *The English Patient* construct the patient as a guardian of communal history transmitting discursive maps from the past to the present to guide humanity in times of need. In this construction he is an alternative to Benjamin’s “Angel of History,” which depicts ruin and destruction and is emblematic of a narrative of war in which the English patient is identified as a spy by British Intelligence. Jack Maggs, guided by Mercy, is removed from a cultural ideology where he would be destroyed as a criminal outcast and is remembered instead in communal history as the civic-minded and picturesque patriarch of the Maggs family in Australia. Ned Kelly, encouraged by Mary Hearn to write *The Jerilderie Letter*, is displaced from documented history as a murderer and outlaw and recreated as the hero of the proletariat in communal history. The letter, imitated and expanded in Ned Kelly’s autobiography, not only represents a communal account of events, but also constructs him as a romantic rebel who fought for justice.

In contrast to the subtext, where Girard’s mimetic desire produces rivalry, violence and deviant identifications, communal constructions of identity in the new texts show that violence is averted and communal history displaces imperial history when one of the participants rejects violence and produces an alternative solution.
Alice advocates social change through the use of language, leading Patrick to narrate the history of the workers. Mercy rejects England’s brutal penal code and criminalization of the poor, and withdraws Jack Maggs to Australia and his Australian sons. Jack Maggs’s agency in writing his account of the cause of his criminality demystifies the imperial identification of convicts and constructs an alternative history. Mary Hearn also recognizes narration in *The Jerilderie Letter* as an alternative means of fighting for justice. *The English Patient* is different in structure because in each triangular configuration in which the patient is a participant, rivalry is present but is always deflected. Characters are situated in spatialized narratives and as such are multifaceted. For example, Hana is reconstructed as Kim, who guides the lama to his sacred river. As such, Hana reshapes Almásy’s violent identification as a jackal and a spy in a guilt-ridden past to construct him as the English patient, a holy man. In the villa, the English patient epitomizes the idea that the stories of mankind unite the past with the present and serve as codes to guide humanity in the future.

Contrasting the imperial history embedded in the subtexts with spatialized narratives in the modern texts demonstrates that communal history draws on past and present narratives to break the cycle of violence and revenge that underpins “grand narratives”. Violent identifications of social transgressors in imperial narratives as spy, anarchist, convict and outlaw are reassessed in each of the chapters of the thesis to reveal heroes who have been the scapegoats of cultural ideologies. Each chapter examines the bounded interpretation of the subject in documented history contrasted to multiple subject positions in communal history, and traces the subject’s role as the storyteller of the communal history. Patrick, cast as an outlawed rebel and anarchist, is recognized by Harris as a prototype of Diogenes and Enkidu, scapegoats, who speak for people who have been oppressed. The English patient, known as a spy,
constructed in multiple personas as a guardian of Western narratives and art history. Jack Maggs, stigmatized as a convict, is able to relate the communal history of the poor classes by drawing on his own multifaceted experiences. Ned Kelly, famous as an outlawed bushranger, is reimagined in narratives and legends as the champion of the oppressed Irish farmers. In their recreations in the modern texts the subjects-in-process are empowered to tell the stories of the people, past and present.

Chapter One discusses how the intersection of Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* with its ancient subtext, *Gilgamesh*, draws attention to the plural, often contradictory, subject positions. Through their identification with each other, the rivals, Patrick and Harris, gain knowledge of their related roles in social change. Their altered understanding of the social and economic suggests a communal model to rewrite history. In the analysis of “simultaneous history” in which the past and present coexist within the novel in historical layers, I explore the intersection of Patrick Lewis with Enkidu, and Rowland Harris with Gilgamesh, in relation to the role of natural man in rivalrous conflict with a figure representing political power and authority. The role of language and narration in merging those identities explains how the cycle of revenge and violence embedded in historical accounts can be disrupted when boundaries are dissolved.

A critique of the social history of Toronto as represented in the interaction of the historical figures of Rowland Harris, engineer, and Ambrose Small, capitalist, placed in conflict with Patrick’s fictive companions, Alice Gull, Cato and Hana, examines the human narrativization of history, working class conditions and the construction of scapegoats. The stories of Alice and Cato illustrate a history of failed social activism against working class oppression redeemed to some extent by the figure of Alice’s daughter, Hana and the access she provides to communal histories.
Communal history, here figured through the Macedonian community, dissolves boundaries, supplements experience and invests linear histories of oppression and suffering with historical significance. Patrick is then able to piece together the communal history of Toronto missing from the city’s historical records. The novel puts forward a case for change through narration rather than through violent confrontation.

In Chapter Two, *The English Patient* is analyzed as a text conceived as an expression of the English patient’s thoughts, ideas, and views; more compellingly, it is the product of a multitude of historically prior events, specifically the earlier text of *The Histories*, and contemporaneous events, particularly those centering on the Second World War, and the refuge in Tuscany. The juxtaposition of narratives is explored in relation to the construction of imperial history and communal history to explain the different ideologies that each history generates and their effect on the marginalized. An analysis of historical figures in imperial history in the context of the Greek War (480-479 BC) and the Second World War examines how rivalrous conflict in mimetic relationships creates conditions for constructing scapegoats. The role of simultaneous history is explored in relation to parallel relationships across texts, where Gyges, Candaules and the Queen merge with Almásy, Geoffrey Clifton and Katherine Clifton, to decode the ideology that animates their actions. The effects of this ideology in promoting violent outcomes are contrasted with the multiple points of view of communal history.

Communal history compared with documented history challenges the construction of a deviant identity determined by a dominant ideology. In models of communal history multiple identities, immersed in a spectrum of ideologies, question this interpretation by encouraging, through relational readings, unbounded
interpretations of the four so-called historical villains, the anarchist, spy, convict and outlaw. In this narrative two characters from *In the Skin of a Lion*, Hana and Caravaggio, are joined by two other companions, Kip, a Sikh sapper with the British Eighth army who condemns the “English” and their values with the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, and the “English patient”, a badly burned amnesiac. The problematized subjectivity of the English patient is explored in the context of both narratives in which he is a participant. In the context of war he is constructed, and constructs himself, as a spy, a demon lover and a social transgressor, while in the villa, he is constructed by others as a teacher, a prophet and a holy man. These identifications suggest that in imperial history there is, to use Simon Edwards terminology, “an untranslatable language of violence” (300) that is articulated in naming and criminalizing a transgressor, while a spatial account of the same character constructs a guardian of communal history.

In Chapter Three, I analyze how Carey’s text *Jack Maggs* also illustrates that the historical space or historical layer in which the subject in process exists is constructed by a source of power, an ideology. The role of cultural ideology in constructing a scapegoat is exposed in reading *Jack Maggs* against its precursor, *Great Expectations*: Tobias Oates is identified in simultaneous history as Charles Dickens, Jack Maggs as Abel Magwitch, and Phipps as Pip’s alter ego. Drawing attention to the plural subject positions illustrates how views on criminality change from one historical era to another. The violence inherent in a subtext grounded in imperial ideology pervades the new text.

The influence of imperial history in creating and punishing deviancy is exposed in Jack Maggs’s relationship with Tobias Oates and Henry Phipps and in his relationship with Ma Britten and Tom Britten. Both configurations reveal the role of
cultural attitudes in criminalizing the poor and generating violence. Repetition of class and gender violence in Jack Maggs's relationship with Mercy and Percy Buckle is broken only in the final configuration when Mercy rebels against the social order. Cyclical violence is deflected when Phipps, symbolizing Empire, and Mercy, representing those identified as deviant, confront each other and Mercy asserts her agency. A critique of mesmerism as “a scientific discourse” is compared to a parodic simulation in a court of justice to reveal its role in cultural ideology, in cultural discourses, and in the creation of Oates’s novel of Empire, *The Death of Jack Maggs*. The role of stories written by Oates and Maggs are analyzed in relation to their representations of history and their exposure of political judgments and values to explain how different ideologies understand historical violence. Oates’s novel supports imperial culture in sanctioning violence against the socially marginalized and in identifying the “criminal mind” of Jack Maggs. Maggs’s writing is a communal record, which draws the reader’s attention to the plural positions inscribed in the subject position of Jack Maggs, a reading that identifies his life as heroic.

As well as reconstructing the Australian convict, Carey reconstructs an Australian icon, Ned Kelly, to rethink, he reveals in the Interview with Andres Gaile, the “denial and false consciousness” of Australian history (7). Carey states, “the so-called violent outlaw” is “certainly a hero” and “an important person in the Australian context.” He is “a decent person” who “behaved rather well”(6) in attempting to help those doomed to poverty. Ned Kelly’s fictional autobiography, in imitation of Kelly’s *The Jerilderie Letter* and enclosed in Carey’s novel, identifies Ned Kelly as a hero who fought for justice. The spatialized narrative, read against the ideology of the subtext, *Lorna Doone*, critiques the role romance plays in mystifying Kelly’s understanding of his historical position in colonial Australia. An analysis of
literary intertexts embedded in Ned Kelly’s autobiography examines the role fabulation plays in linking him to Irish legends, to heroic historical figures and to John Ridd, the protagonist of *Lorna Doone*. By constructing himself as a hero and the hero of the proletariat Kelly becomes the scapegoat of the colonial administration.

The autobiographies of John Ridd and Ned Kelly illustrate triangular relationships underpinned by ideology; these link the desire for wealth and recognition to justice issues, class struggle and the construction of a scapegoat. With a focus on violence, these destructive configurations are compared to the relationship of Ned Kelly with Ellen Kelly and Mary Hearn to establish the part each plays in mediating for violent confrontation or for a peaceful solution. Their responses link the repetition or breaking of cyclical violence to imperial and communal histories. Reading the spatialized narratives of the new texts against their subtexts exposes important differences that radically separate their politics. The new texts confront rather than suppress the violence of the intertexts in the search for history’s meaning. They present a critique of history and historical representation, which encourages, in Friedman’s terminology, “a notion of the text as a multiplicitous and dynamic site of repression and return” (226). Cross-referencing the lives of historical criminals—anarchist, spy, convict and outlaw—with those of other historical characters breaks up the linear models that define them and narratologically and politically construct them. The spatial metaphors used in drawing upon historical characters in subtexts as imitative prototypes suggest, in Elias’s view, confluence between space, discourse, history and power. The metahistorical novels in this thesis challenge and revise literary history to reconstruct the lives of those deemed to be deviant by exposing the ideologies, which operate as a mechanism of scapegoating.