

## Theft: A Love Story: An Exploration into an 'Art World'

P. Bhuvaneshwari<sup>1</sup> & Prof C.L.L.JAYAPRADA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Scholar of Andhra University, Asst. Prof. of English, T & P Cell, SRKR Engineering College (A), Bhimavaram 534204, A.P, India.

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam – 530003, A.P, India.

Received: July 22, 2018

Accepted: October 02, 2018

### ABSTRACT

*Peter Carey has established himself as one of the best contemporary writers of Australian literature. Through distinctive themes and narratives in both short and long fiction, he ardently supports his nationality. He is honoured with many prestigious awards both in and out of Australia. Theft: A Love Story shares the setting of his native country, major thematic concerns and experimental narrative techniques with his other previous works. Here, Carey admixtures lies/fakery with authenticity in such a way where his characters struggle to arrive at the horizon of reality. Carey's narrative nurtures the technique of postmodernism in exploring the themes of authenticity, fame and money, provincialism, production of art, fraudulence and human values, the illusive nature of reality and the ambivalent responses toward the art. Theft: A Love Story is about a wicked love story with an attempt of fine mockery on the art industry. It is set both in Australia and the New York art world. It introduces a satirical allegory with a straight forwarded tale of art, intrigue and uneasy love which is often dominated by the tradecraft of the artist and the art forger. It explores the contemporary art world with an open-ended perspective. Here, Carey focuses on subtle issues such as gaining reputations, collection of various extraordinary pieces of art, the greater value of paintings, the powerful right of authenticity and the art of forgery that commonly appear in the art world. In the present society where global art, trade and culture are fast escalating, it is values and relationships that are being affected to a large extent. A sense of absurdity, curiosity to be real, paradoxical facts, lies and deception reflect the contradictions in contemporary life. The misuse of the legal right of droit moral, the act of faking the masterpieces, the thought of criminality and revengeful approaches seem to be common among the art dealers, critics, curators and buyers. The present paper is an attempt to study the novel Theft: A Love Story focusing on how the business of art fraud and an insincere love influence the characters which undoubtedly replicate the existing scenario of the present globalized society. (370 words)*

**Keywords:** Peter Carey, Theft: A Love Story, fakery with authenticity, droit moral etc.

Modern art includes avant-garde ideas, models and methods. Fortunes in the field of art are neither predetermined nor remained permanent. They rise and fall with the interests of the collectors and the art dealers. When the artist leaves his artistic sketches in an unfinished stage, the identity of 'provenance' would be hard to establish, and this is what Carey ingeniously dealt with in this novel.

The striking lines of Carey "How can you know how much to pay when you have no bloody idea of what it's worth? If you pay five million dollars for a Jeff Koons what do you say when you get it home? What do you *think*?" (41) state that assessing the authenticity of the art and its worth are not easy tasks. Carey focuses on how the art can be not only faked, but also falsely validated. He says that the value of a masterpiece depends not only on its essential 'quality' but also upon what curators name it as 'provenance'. The proper identity and confirmation of the ownership establishes the authenticity to the actual artist or creator.

*Theft: A Love Story* begins in "the bleak spring" (3) of 1980 in New South Wales with an artist named Michael Butcher Boone trying to order his disordered and adverse life. He initially narrates with "an intriguing comic and subjective voice" (Stayton, 173) such as "I don't know if my story is grand enough to be a tragedy, although a lot of shitty stuff did happen" (3). The story mainly moves around three characters, Michael Butcher Boone aka Butcher Bones, a once-distinguished but now out-of-fashion painter, his mentally retarded brother Hugh who has strong independent perceptions but surprisingly has childlike emotional volatility and a beautiful woman named Marlene who is a treacherous woman advancing the set of events that take on the lives of their own. Marlene's arrival and her gorgeous appearance captivate both Butcher and Hugh, and predominantly alter their lives. Later, she is instrumental in bringing out various changes which gradually turn to both creation and destruction of the events in the story of the novel.

Carey adopts the technique of postmodernism in allocating the narration of the chapters to the characters. Butcher and Hugh narrate the story in not quite alternating ways. They include the elements of irony, reality and unreliability. Michael Butcher Boone narrates some chapters in a cynical and an

embittered voice, and his handicapped brother, Hugh narrates the other part in an incoherent and startlingly apt words.

Michael Butcher Boone and Hugh are the sons of a wild-spirited, hard-drinking butcher named Blue Bones who lives in the small town of Bacchus Marsh near Melbourne. ‘The Boones’ are later called ‘The Bones’ as the alphabet misses from their shop’s name plate. The Bones are raised by a giant, angry man, the last in the line of butchers. Their mother, the terrified woman usually drinks from a mug that read, “IN THE MORNING CONSIDER THAT YOU MAY NOT LIVE TILL EVENING,” (61-62) and embroiders samplers with such cheerful mottoes as, “The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small” (87). Though Butcher and Hugh have different views for themselves, they are united in one opinion such as “poor Mum, God bless her” (70).

To Michael Butcher Boone, the name ‘Butcher’ suits him as he is fiercely self-centered and brutal, at least where his art is concerned. He being the guardian of his mentally challenged brother pays a little attention towards Hugh and sometimes finds it as a great burden. Hugh has a tall, filthy and dangerous-looking personality. He speaks in a kind of biblically poetic style that would be relevant, if carefully studied, to the context. He introduces himself as “I was a GENTLE GIANT” (21), and further says

Our father was Blue Bones on account of he had red hair when young so they called him Blue meaning red. That is a general rule to go by if you come from OVERSEAS. In Australia everything is the opposite of what it seems to mean. E.G. I was SLOW BONES because I moved so rapid, it was my way of moving they referred to. I was Slow Bones some days, Slow Poke others, this last was SMUTTY... (21).

Until Michael Butcher Boone discovers his talent for painting, he worked for his father for many years and so he is given him the name ‘Butcher’. Once, a German art teacher introduces him to the mysteries of art world. With this influence, he abandons his mother and brother to the mercies of his father and goes to Melbourne by having the only choice of playing cards with which he has often dealt with and thus he tries to make something good from his attempts. He says that he has not read

Berenson or Nietzsche or Kierkegaard but still I argued. Forgive me, Dennis Flaherty, I had no right to knock you down. I had no right to *speak*. I knew nothing, had seen sweet fucking all, had never been to Florence or Siena or Paris, never studied art history. At lunch break at William Angliss’ wholesale butchery, I read Burckhardt. I also read Vasari and saw him patronise Uccello, the prick. Poor Paolo, Vasari wrote, he was commissioned to do a work with a chameleon. Not knowing what a chameleon was, he painted a camel instead (229).

The world famous painter, Jacques Leibovitz is one of Butcher’s earliest influences. Butcher says that “Leibovitz was one of the reasons I became an artist. I had first seen *Monsieur et Madame Tourenbois* at Bacchus Marsh High School, or at least a black-and-white reproduction in *Foundation of the Modern*” (25). Over the years, as his painting genius is recognized by him and others, he becomes an opinionated, furious yet brilliant painter. Within a few years, his passionately emotional canvasses have won him local fame and high prices.

The main story of the novel begins with Butcher Bones, a famous and divorced Australian painter who is very passionate about his painting career but unfortunately, he abruptly stops at being a *passé* painter. When his style of painting and his sketches have been considered out of fashion, Butcher reflects his thoughts as follows:

Sometimes it seemed there was not a place on Earth, no little town with flies crawling inside the baker shop window, where there was not also some graduate student in a Corbusier bow tie who was now, this instant, reading the party line in *Studio International* and *ART news* and all of them were in a great sweat to get me up to date, to free me not only from the old-fashioned brushstroke but from any reference to the world itself (39).

The reason is that the volatile interests of modernism have desiccated the popularity of Butcher’s paintings, he is now gone out of style, he says that

Oh dearie me. Gracious, what a disaster. What might I do?  
They did not know that I was born *out of style*, and was still out of style when I came down on the train from Bacchus Marsh. My trousers were too short, my socks were white and I will commit similar sins of style when I am in my coffin, ... (41)

Besides the unsuccessful state of his career, he is just released from the Long Bay Prison in 1980. His initiation of the story clearly sketches why and how he has been jailed in the attempt of stealing one of his own paintings from his ex-wife whom he calls 'the plaintiff' (65) and who has obtained the legal right on it as part of the divorce settlement. The divorce and the shifting styles of the art world cast him onto hard times. He lost not only his son, but also his prized paintings, his house and studio in Sydney. He is deprived of his career and marital life. Hugh and he are driven out by the local populace. These unpredictable changes eventually turn him into a self-destructive and also a self-obsessed person. His position reduces from an upcoming painter in the high society of Sydney to the painting in a common house. Butcher's lawyers and the former art dealers suggest that the best course of action is to send him and his brother to a remote estate in New South Wales where "although I would have almost no money to spend on myself, it was thought that I might, if I could only cut down on my drinking, afford to paint small works and care for Hugh, my damaged two-hundred-and-twenty-pound brother" (3). Butcher says that "There is always Hugh ... and you cannot take a slash or park the truck without considering him" (93).

However, Butcher has no primary interest in cutting down his expenses on drinking and also for working on small paintings. The impoverished circumstances drive Butcher to take up the job of an unpaid caretaker for a wealthy patron's property in Bellingen, New South Wales owned by Jean-Paul Milan who has been trying to sell it for the last eighteen months. Jean-Paul Milan is an amateur painter, the art collector and owner of a chain of nursing homes. Milan likes painting and has a studio whose riverside wall opened like a lube-bay door. Butcher follows Milan as if he were his dog and notes all his words in his notebook which is "an old leather-bound volume that was as precious to me as life itself" (5) and it is here he records every colour mix that he makes from the time of his so-called breakthrough show in 1971. To him, it is like a "treasure house, a diary, a record of decline and fall, a history" (5).

Butcher repays Milan's hospitality by craftily charging lots of supplies to his account and he acknowledges this act as the liberties of a genius. Hugh responds towards the nature of Butcher saying that it is like a "doggie dog world" (22). When Hugh dislikes Butcher's egomania, he finds comfort in the downfall of Butcher: "There is nothing sure or certain it would seem no matter how you shave your skull or boast about your position in AUSTRALIAN ART" (23). Sometimes, Hugh is envious of his brother's devotion to his art, and aggrieved of his own isolation: "Bald shiny shaven Butcher Bones said look at my works etc but nowhere did he confess Hugh Bones was his helper" (43). Hugh comments on Butcher's narcissism:

One minute you are a NATIONAL TREASURE with a house in Ryde and then you are a has-been buying Dulux with your brother's DISABILITY PENSION. You are a CONVICTED CRIMINAL a servant living on a Tick and Thistle farm" (23).

The story of the novel takes an interesting turn with the strange visit of a mysterious American woman named Marlene who steps into the place called the boondocks in a dark and stormy night. Like Butcher's brothers, Marlene is also from the tiny town of Benalla, north-east of Melbourne. She comes with a peculiar intention to verify the genuineness of the painting of Jacques Leibovitz, *Monsieur et Madame Tourenbois* which is now possessed by the neighbor of Butcher named Dozy Boylan.

Butcher is astonished at Marlene's words and says that he has first seen *Monsieur et Madame Tourenbois* at Bacchus Marsh High School, or at least a black and white reproduction in *Foundation of the Modern*. Marlene reveals that after the death of Leibovitz, the painting owned by Dozy Boylan has lately fallen under suspicion, and it is now turned into a burning issue. After the demise of Leibovitz, his son Olivier Leibovitz inherits the right of *droit moral* which gives the power to the one who gets to say if the work is real or fake. So, he has authenticated the painting of Dozy Boylan as the real masterpiece. In fact, he is unaware that its previous owner, MoMA's decision that it is merely a suspicion and sells it to Dozy Boylan.

Olivier and Marlene could not afford to buy the painting back from Boylan. If the painting is left with him, an X-ray device would certainly reveal the duplicity of fake work. So, Marlene the wife of Olivier Leibovitz arrives with a pretended purpose to authenticate the painting of Dozy Boylan, and thus safeguard the financial value of their *droit moral* which is inherited by her husband. Behind this disclosed thought of Marlene, there is another hidden idea which comes into light as the plot of the novel progresses forward. Marlene is really intended to steal the painting but not to re-authenticate it.

Further, she presents the details of the masterpieces of Jacques Leibovitz as well as the details of her family. Marlene is an art dealer and the daughter-in-law of a famous painter, Jacques Leibovitz who is one of the greatest modern French artists during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jacques Leibovitz has his par-excellence in the field of art. He is an Estonia-born Cubist contemporary to Picasso. His pieces of art being extraordinarily exceptional of their own kind are worth millions if they have been provided the authenticity.

Marlene is the wife of Oliver Leibovitz, who is the son of Dominique, the second wife of the late Jacques Leibovitz.

The paintings of Leibovitz are divided into two phases: the paintings which are completed up to the First World War are considered the first phase of works and they are invaluable; and the paintings drawn after the First World War belong to the second phase of works and these are less valuable when compared to the works of first phase. So, if any painting has the authentication of the earlier period, it amounts to a great property. The paintings of the later period which are partially doctored, re-dated and re-made are subjected to authentication.

Authentication is the powerful right of the possessor of the *droit moral*—“the one”, according to Carey, “who gets to say if the work is real or false”. As per the French Law, the right of authentication forms an entity. It bestows a powerful authority to the heir of the painter in authenticating the unauthenticated works. The right of the *droit moral* can be inherited by the members of his family like ‘a share of stock or a Limoges tureen’ (98).

When Jacques Leibovitz unexpectedly dies at the age of eighty one through a sudden collapse at the dinner table, facing down into a Picasso cheese plate which broke into two, his son Oliver is five years old. After his sudden demise, the authenticity of his valuable paintings becomes difficult to establish and it, in turn, creates a spectrum of confusion in the due course of time. The family of Leibovitz is given the power to authenticate the paintings. The possessor of the *droit moral* has the right to authenticate the genuineness of the work of art and this right can be inherited by the successors.

Dominique, wife of Jacques Leibovitz gets hold of all the paintings. After the death of Leibovitz in 1954, the Leibovitz *droit moral* which passed to his wife Dominique, has been used by her and her lover to authenticate many works of the dubious or fraudulent provenance. Dominique as well as her lover, Honore Le Noel who is a crooked art dealer plot together and abscond with about 50 of his works in progress, which they have re-dated, doctored or finished in order to fetch higher prices.

In reality, the act of authenticating the paintings is not an easy task as family politics, greed and all sorts of selfish business, back-dating and touching up enter into the family relations. Dominique and Honore Le Noel spend an incredible amount of money in manipulating the authentication and the sale of paintings.

Later, when Dominique finds Honore Le Noel in bed with the English poet Roger Martin, they (Dominique and Honore Le Noel) soon have many disagreeable terms between them. Their strained relationship gradually moves them towards separation through divorce. As per the decree of court, Dominique wins most of their remaining loot as part of the divorce settlement. She gets ownership on several pieces of the magnum opuses of Leibovitz, but in 1969 she has been unfortunately strangled in the Nice hotel.

After the death of Dominique, even if her ex-husband fights for the rewarding *droit moral*, the legal right to authenticate Leibovitz’s paintings has been given to his son, Oliver Leibovitz who has been a seventeen-year-old student at St. Paul’s in London. However, Olivier Leibovitz is quite unaware, uninterested and unenthusiastic about the art and the act of authentication. And, the surprising fact is that Olivier Leibovitz does not have any appreciation for art and is quite unaware of the greatness and the financial value of the paintings of his father. He keeps himself away from the paintings of his father to the point that he does not have any hope or wish even to touch them. His unwillingness and hatred for the art becomes evident when Marlene, his wife confides to Butcher “These great works of art make him ill, really, physically ill” (31). After reading the monograph on Leibovitz written by Milton Hesse who nears sixty of age and who says about Leibovitz as “in the process of becoming that creature we all fear the most – a bitter old painter whose friends are famous, whose own walls are now stacked with twenty-foot-long canvases no-one wants to buy” (136), Marlene is encouraged to acquire the skills of authentication. The artist Milton Hesse teaches Marlene that

...the only secret in art is that there is no secret. Nor should she imagine that there is a hidden strategy. Forget about it. Real artists don’t have strategy ...Good art cannot explain itself. Cézanne could not explain himself, nor could Picasso. Kandinsky could explain everything Q.E.D” (138).

With the support and assistance of Milton Hesse, Marlene tries hard to make herself an expert in authenticating the paintings and exercising the power of the *droit moral*. She intends to verify the real Leibovitzes among the fakes that have been in circulation. After the mysterious death of her husband Olivier Leibovitz, Marlene comes to New South Wales with a purpose of authenticating the painting done by the legendary Cubist painter, Jacques Leibovitz, and which now has been the property of Butcher’s neighbour, Dozy Boylan. Her visit adds new dimensions to the novel as a fake sometimes might not be a fake, and an

authenticated painting might be a fake with its interwoven elements of the art business and the business of love.

The painting owned by Dozy Boylan is a canvas completed during the 1940s. After the authentication of this painting, it has been stolen within a short time. Since this famous invaluable painting is stolen from Dozy Boylan's house, the police accuse Michael Butcher of the crime. Two detectives arrive from Sydney to confiscate the new paintings of Butcher thinking that the stolen Leibovitz might have been kept amidst the new paintings of Butcher.

However, Butcher seems to be entirely dismissive of the detective's profession: "The Art Police are cops, that's all, and they will come and call on you as unexpectedly as Jehovah's Witnesses and for reasons just as stupid" (54). Michael Butcher is very much suspected by the Inspector Amberstreet who has the ability to recognize the work of genius. Some of the works of Butcher are carelessly ruined by the police during the search of the missed painting of Leibovitz. In this adverse situation, Butcher again enters into the art world.

Marlene devises a nefarious plot to rehabilitate the career of Michael Butcher Boone by indirectly intervening into the lives of Butcher and Hugh by making them come out of their home in the remote New South Wales. She lures them by giving a promise that she assists them in reviving the career of Butcher. She encourages them to flee to Manhattan, Tokyo and Sydney, where Hugh and he again encounter Marlene. She identifies the quality of the works of Butcher.

Marlene's recognition of the expertise of Butcher gradually makes Butcher and Hugh travel through Tokyo and New York. Marlene moves very closely with Hugh and Butcher who also reciprocate the same. Michael Butcher marvels at Marlene's ability to bewitch the buyers with mock catalogues, saying that "To judge a work, you don't read a fucking catalogue. You *look* as if your life depended on it" (152). Yet, even Michael Butcher who belongs to working-class owes most of his art knowledge to reproductions and reputations.

In Manhattan, Butcher becomes an accomplice to Marlene both in crime and passion. Marlene is very much intended to resurrect the lost masterpieces of Leibovitz. He uses his talent to create the fake paintings just as the paintings of Leibovitz. Storyline gets more complex when Marlene, Butcher and Hugh concoct a scheme to resurrect the lost masterpieces of Leibovitz. Soon they are left in the centre of the art world, New York where forgery, theft and several other kinds of skulduggery are practiced in the art world. With the inspiration of Marlene, Butcher completes a series of paintings, crowned by a "beautiful seven-foot-high monster" (145) painted in "greens so fucking dark, satanic, black holes that could suck your heart out of your chest (38)".

Eventually the story shifts to Tokyo, where Marlene has arranged a show for Butcher's new paintings, all of which are bought by a billionaire collector. Here, Carey's paramount insight comes to focus as Butcher feels ravished. For the painter, a mass purchase makes it seem that his entire burst of creation has been made to disappear. Later Butcher, Hugh and Marlene move to the centre of the art world, New York where Butcher thinks that he is insulted by the galleries. Because of the selfish involvement of Marlene, German gallery acquires two paintings of Michael Butcher Bones. Butcher visits the gallery and sees his paintings, and a new acquisition representing Jacques Leibovitz which is a fake that he painted in Manhattan.

Things get even more complicated when her husband, Olivier, shows up with Hugh in tow. Consequently, Marlene becomes central to the success and destruction of the lives of Butcher and Hugh. Butcher hardly understands his role in Marlene's plan until he witnesses an exchange of complicity between Marlene and a wealthy Japanese collector. Marlene develops Dominique's methods and connects herself with the art dealers all over the globe. Butcher loyally supports Marlene particularly because he is obsessed with her presence. And also because he sees in her, as in himself, the outsider pitted against an art establishment governed by money rather than artistic judgment.

Marlene gradually discloses her dubious involvement in all her previous acts. But by the moment Butcher realizes the amoral and vivacious personality of Marlene, he is left with a question which he asks Marlene "What happened?", he in turn receives only a glowing smile from her. The novel ends with the questions of Butcher: "Is she taunting me or missing me? How will I ever know? How do you know how much to pay if you don't know what it's worth?" (269). Like Butcher, the readers slowly but surely understand that a scam is being carried out by Marlene for her own selfish purposes. Both of their wishes and the desire of these two Australians for each other determine the plot and story of the novel. Finally, Butcher and Hugh return to Sydney. As the works of Butcher are left in the hands of the Japanese collector, the brothers set up a lawn-mowing business. At the end of the novel, all is made well.

The strength of the novel lies in its narrative voice, subject and characterization. Carey infuses a warmth and sensitive feel to his characters which in turn lets them live in the minds of the readers. Thus, Carey sets a fantastic and a tangled love story through a number of chapters. When the story shifts to Japan and then New York, Carey challenges the perceptions of the readers as Butcher says at one point “If you’re a painter, you’re already ahead of the story, “but if you’re not, you’ll be limping along behind (198)”.

Carey emphasizes on the genres of folk tales, fairy tales and childrens’ literature. When Marlene first meets Butcher and Hugh, Hugh enjoys the fact that Marlene has read his favourite Australian classic of children’s literature *The Magic Pudding* (1918) by Norman Lindsay. Hugh understands people by identifying and estimating their knowledge, likeness and appreciation of the characters of *The Magic Pudding*.

Marlene’s sympathy for the pudding thieves foreshadows her dubious involvement. It also suggests that Hugh and his brother Michael Butcher Bones are like the two characters of *The Magic Pudding*, namely, Barnacle Bill and Sam Sawnoff, the two punchers of snouts. The clever people around them are likely to outwit them, and it is their state and stubbornness which propels the Bones forward through all the complications, the crimes and the occasional bout of misery.

Carey subtitles his novel as ‘*A Love Story*’ because Marlene draws the attention of Michael Butcher Bones and Hugh Bones into her plot by attracting Butcher sexually and Hugh emotionally. Like the pudding thieves, her resources are endless, and her intelligence and dedication to the task is irrefutable.

Marlene, a faulty and manipulative woman mightily lures Butcher to the deeper extent where everything he stands on is threatened, his integrity, his art, finally even his affection to Hugh. The passionate confession of Butcher reveals his likeness towards Marlene that he feels as though he were in “a foreign country” (167), and he further says that “I found the city beautiful, a three-dimensional representation of my neon leaping heart” (159). He openly states that he does not spare “a moment to wonder about the consequences of drifting into the poisonous orbit, “I was in love” (89). At the end of the novel, Butcher’s romantic attraction proves no easier to authenticate the paintings than to rediscover a masterpiece.

Though Butcher realizes the negative aspect of Marlene’s personality, he feels hard to resist her charms. He considerably believes in Marlene as he rhapsodizes: “She was my thief, my lover, my mystery, a lovely series of revelations which I prayed would never end” (195). Both the brothers, one is skewed by desire, the other by a brain disorder resemble the present intricate living ways of the people. Carey succeeds in weaving a complex, brilliant and appreciative story with the involvement of Butcher, Hugh and Marlene.

Butcher is self-centered and often seems to be brutal. When Hugh’s puppy drowns during the rainstorm, Butcher is absorbed in his art. As Hugh is sleeping at that time, he is completely unaware of this tragic occurrence. Butcher indifferently describes what has happened:

I was very nearly, almost, for sixty seconds, at peace, but then two things happened at once and I have often thought that the first of them was a kind of omen that I might well have paid attention to. It only took a moment: it was the puppy speeding past borne on the yellow tide (9).

And then, he goes on to ask himself what he felt at this moment –

I don’t know what I felt, nothing as simple as pity. Incredulity, of course. Relief - no dog to care for. Anger - that I would have to deal with Hugh’s ill-proportioned grief (9).

The actions of Michael Butcher Bones seem to be vicious and strenuous as he says to Marlene that: “I sucked love like phthalo green sucks light,” at this Hugh reports as, “Butcher bought a plastic wading pool and then constructed a metal crossbar and once this was bolted to the floor we would drag the canvas like a reluctant beast through a cattle dip of paint (132)”. Carey attributes much importance to paint as it is considered like blood and life’s essentials:

Green would not be my only colour, but rather my theorem, my argument, my family tree and soon I had all ten bloody power drills committed in one way or another, mixing my demon dark, with gesso, with safflower oil, kerosene, with cadmium yellow, with red madder; the names are pretty but beside the point—there is no name for either God or light... (38).

In other context, Butcher proves himself as a self-destructive as well as a self-obsessed person. He selfishly responds to his caring art collector by trashing the house and deceitfully shifting lots of supplies to his personal account. He indulges himself in the acts of selfishness, alcoholism and rages. Cheating, self-destruction and even killing to obtain power and love have been the dominant desires of the people. Honesty, truth and integrity are often shadowed and are less sought after. Butcher referring to the alleged

attempt of Hugh in drowning their father, he says that "If you relied on Hugh for family history you would never hear this incident," (94) and further asserts that Hugh seems to be unreliable in his actions.

*Theft: A Love Story* shares the narrative technique, complex plot and characters with the novel *The Recognitions* (1955) written by an American author William Gaddis. Michael Butcher Bones reminds the character Wyatt Gwyon from *The Recognitions*. Wyatt Gwyon is the son of a Calvinist minister. He initially plans to enter into ministry which is his father's profession. But, being inspired by the painting of Bosch, he wishes to become a painter. In the process of his career, he meets Recktall Brown, a collector and dealer of art. Wyatt creates paintings following the style of Flemish and Dutch masters namely Hieronymous Bosch, Hugo van der Goes, and Hans Memling. Wyatt forges their signature and Recktall Brown sells them as newly discovered antique originals. After some time, Wyatt becomes unhappy with his work and at the end of the novel he involves himself in the search of authenticity for paintings.

Carey innovatively experiments with the traditional forms of the genre by offering a fragmented narrative and dual perspective. While Butcher introduces the main theme of the novel, the mechanics of the art world, and the rise and fall of the career in the field of art, Hugh also intervenes with the first person narrative. Even though the main plot revolves around the narration of Butcher, it is the narration of Hugh who weaves the narrative threads in an irregular way but subsequently provides an altogether different perspective to the story:

I have been informed that there is no-one else on Earth who could part those threads for nine feet *without* an error. But then again I do not care, all is vanity, and many times I think I am nothing but a big swishing gurgling pumping clock, walking backwards and forwards along the road to Bellinghen each day, spring, summer, flies, moths, dragonflies, all fluttering fluttering tiny clocks, a mist of clocks, each moment closer to oblivion. Impediments to art. Who will remove us with the tweezers? (46).

Hugh has a strong independent behaviour. He reminds the character named Benjy in the novel *The Sound and the Fury* written by William Faulkner. The story-like chapters of Butcher and Hugh provide the readers with a view of the world, and also function as a channel of information about others especially Marlene's husband and Jean-Paul. Through Biblical allusions, childlike observations and accidental insights, Hugh brings out many insightful thoughts such as

It is hard work to slaughter a beast but when it is done it is done. If you are MAKING ART the labour never ends, no peace, no Sabbath, just eternal churning and cursing and worrying and fretting and there is nothing else to think of but the idiots who buy it or the insects destroying TWO DIMENSIONAL SPACE. . . . everything we stand on will be washed away (23-24).

Butcher and Hugh use biblical allusions and pithy colloquialisms. They generate a kindred prose as well as pithy colloquialisms like "skip" (trash container), "ute" (utility vehicle), "skint" (broke), "dunny" (toilet), and "batty" (bottom) etc.,

Carey involves Hugh in a linguistic playfulness as he says "Look at that Poke, he is poking her. But I could take a JOKE and get a POKE fast slow anyway you like you might be surprised" (21). The language of Hugh asserts that he has much knowledge about the words and syntax. His narration is open, funny and guileless. The narration of Hugh adds insights and makes the story very effective. The curious mixture of different registers adds a passionate interpretation to the novel. Hugh lives in his own world. In his narration he liberally uses capitals, and his voice seems to be uncontrollable and mentally deranged. This aspect is evident as he says when he has visited the park filled with "TREES FROM THE COUNTRIES OF OUR FORMER ENEMIES" (234).

Comedy is an additional remarkable element of Carey's narrative. He uses this device very unobtrusively as it what does in real life. It runs through the complete sketch of the novel, and often surfaces intentionally and accidentally. Amidst these, the first person narrator beholds the goings-on around him in a detached, ironic and amused way. He then takes the stand to report his version of what has been actually happened in a less structural artifice which displays a sort of controlling over the narration and the story. From the remembrances of the first person narrative, the past comes into reality and it, in turn, insists on its credibility.

Carey presents the aspect of proper names losing their integrity over the course of time. Michael Butcher's father's shop which is formerly named as 'Boones Butchers', turns into 'Bones Butchers' (20), and thereon the members of the family are called the 'Bones' instead of Boones (Blue Bones (father of Michael

Butcher Bones and Hugh), Butcher Bones (Michael), Slow Bones (Hugh)). At some places, Hugh calls his brother 'Mr Bones'. The German art teacher is mentioned as 'German Bachelor', the Bauhaus where Butcher previously worked has been changed into 'the Bower House', Butcher refers to the German Bachelor as 'dear little queeny Bruno Bauhaus', Clement Greenberg becomes 'Clement Dickberg'.

Despite the fact that this novel is an exposé of the international art world with an Australian attitude, the details of the story appear to be partly autobiographical. Both Carey and Butcher were born in 1943 in a small-town Bacchus Marsh, Victoria. Carey is the son of a car dealer and Michael Butcher Bones is the son of a butcher. Both have lived in Sydney and Bellingen in northern New South Wales. Both of them travel to Tokyo and take their considerable talents to New York, where they've had to prove themselves all over again. Both have experienced a bitter divorce in their marital life, and at the same time both have glamorous new lovers. Butcher becomes a deluded romantic after the disappointment in his marital life and career of art. Even though Michael Butcher Bones instantly does things to avoid painting with his dejected state of mind, his creativity wins out as he attempts to produce a new masterpiece. And it is noticeably clear that Carey's visit to Japan, his book *Wrong About Japan* and his long living in New York hint at the inclusive of Japanese and New York art world. Like Carey, Butcher too proves his mastery in all his literary works.

The characters Michael Butcher Bones and Hugh remind the twin brothers in *The Solid Mandala* by Patrick White, the Nobel-Laureate Australian Novelist. Both the novels not only bring out the differences between the two artists, but also present Australia over the course of time. *The Solid Mandala* is the story of Arthur, a would-be artist (a writer) and Waldo, a mentally damaged person. They live out their lives bound together by Arthur's social retardation, in what Patrick White calls, that it is more of a harness than a relationship. Like Hugh in the novel, Arthur too sees much more than Waldo ever expects and regards himself as the protector of his smarter brother.

At the end of Patrick White's novel, one brother kills the other and leaves his corpse whose genitals are eaten by dogs. On the contrary, Carey's novel ends with the brothers still side by side, still grouchy optimistic, still laughing at how easily the rest of the world is duped. The words of Butcher who describes himself as "running parallel with my huge demented brother, linked and mirrored like a double bloody helix (89?)", the words of Hugh such as "If I lost my brother I was lost myself (178)", the reflections of Butcher such as "He had my brawny sloping shoulders, my lower lip, my hairy back, my peasant calves (147)" bring out the state of fraternity in Australian society. Like Patrick White who expresses his anger at his countrymen's sycophancy to colonialism and at the snobbery of pre- and post-war Australians towards colonial interests, Carey expresses the same anger of White but he shows his considerable sympathies with his compatriots. Patrick White hardly hesitates to punish his characters whereas Carey is sensitive towards his characters. Carey commits himself in presenting the Australian form of high culture.

The plot elements of *Theft: A Love Story* share with Michael Frayn's novel *Headlong* (1999). This novel is about the discovery of a long-lost painting from Pieter Bruegel's series *The Months*. Here, Frayn's protagonist is an art historian. Once the main character, Martin identifies the lost painting which supposedly belongs to Brueghel. Thereon, he attempts to get hold of the painting without allowing its owner to be aware of its supposed great value. This leads him into a web of lies, deceit and crime. After acquiring the painting of Bruegel, he tries to secure this fortune but he crashes the old Landrover and the picture goes up in smoke. The novelist does not give a happy ending for Frayn's protagonist in the game of cards at the ending of the novel.

*Headlong* is about the art history and is concerned with the interconnections of archives and memory of art. Frayn's readers are provided with extensive lectures on the history of Flemish art, and are offered art as an object, something that one can look at from a distance and something that can be contextualized. The art history mentioned in the novel is not imaginary and it includes knowledge. Retreats from that knowledge and the inventions are meant to create a contrast to the archived bits.

In contrast to that, Peter Carey's approach is different. He invents everything, the artists and the relevant sections of art history. His protagonist Butcher Bones is not an art historian, he is a famous artist. He narrates the story with foreshadowing and flashback techniques. Carey deals with the economic and historical relationship of an artist with his work and the authenticity of authorship, ownership and originality.

The sentence "how can you know how much to pay when you have no bloody idea of what it's worth?" (41) signifies the theme of the novel. In one context, Butcher mainly asks this question about the work of art. In another context, this sentence refers to the love story between Butcher and Marlene. But Carey does not give a happy ending to the love between Butcher and Marlene, he presents a good relationship between the two Boone brothers. Thus, Carey vividly sketches the ruin and final redemption of

Butcher Bones by making the readers travel along with him from the New South Wales to Sydney, Tokyo and finally New York.

The words of Flaubert in an *Intimate Notebook*, "Am I to be a king, or just a pig?" which appear in the epigraph of Peter Carey's *Theft: A Love Story* suggest egotism, misanthropy and self-doubt that constantly reflect through the characters in the novel. Butcher is caught between arrogance, egotism and self-pity. The reference of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* which Carey has used in his previous novel *My Life as a Fake* through the character of McCorkle resonates in the title of the missing Leibovitz, which "Stein referred to as *Le Golem Electrique, Picasso as Le Monstre* (29)".

Carey with his keen insights creates indelible and fascinating characters, the global art trade, the value of genuineness and the relationships in society. He explores Australian history and culture through his ingenious narrative techniques.

## References

1. Carey, Peter. *Theft: A Love Story*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. (the Subsequent references from this text are made in parenthetical documentation).
2. Birnbaum, Robert. "Birnbaum v. Peter Carey." *Morning News* 16 December 2003 (online view) [www.themorningnews.org/archives/personalities/birnbaum\\_v\\_Peter\\_Car-ey.php](http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/personalities/birnbaum_v_Peter_Car-ey.php)
3. Boldtype. "Interview with Peter Carey." *An Online Literary Magazine* 2.12 (1999), 8 September 2003. (online View) <<http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0399/carey/interview.html>>
4. Jones, Radhika. "Peter Carey: The Art of Fiction No. 188." *The Paris Review*. <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5641/the-art-of-fiction-no-188-peter-carey>> (accessed on 02/02/2015).
5. Meyer, Lisa : "An Interview with Peter Carey." *Chicago Review*. Vol.43. No.2 (Spring, 1997): 76-89. Print.
6. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.
7. Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner. *The Postmodern Adventure: Science, Technology, and Cultural Studies at the Third Millennium*. London: The Guilford Press, 1991. Print.
8. Bhatnagar, M. K. and M. Rajeshwar. *Post-Modernism and English Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001. Print.
9. Gaile, Andreas. *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. Print.
10. Hassall, Anthony J. *Dancing on Hot Macadam: Peter Carey's Fiction*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994. Print.
11. Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988. Print.
12. Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
13. Malpas, Simon. *The Postmodern*. London and New York: Routledge. 2007. Print.
14. Shahram R. Sistani. *Peter Carey's Fiction: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2011. Print.
15. Woodcock, Bruce. *Peter Carey: Contemporary World Writers*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1996. Print.
16. Woods, Tim. *Beginning Postmodernism*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007. Print.