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Picking up Threads: Intertextuality in the Postcolonial World of Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip*

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ENGK01, Literary Seminar
Spring 2012
English Studies
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Introduction

‘At night the blimmin’ dogs and roosters chase after dreams and break them in two. The one good thing about a broken dream is that you can pick up the threads of it again. By the way, fish go to heaven. Don’t believe any other shit you hear’. (52)

Simple as it is, the quotation above illustrates a central theme within Lloyd Jones’s novel *Mister Pip* (2006) – the theme of picking up threads. *Mister Pip* is to a great extent about threads of dreams and of stories, picked up and woven into each other in order to create something new. This essay aims to follow some of these threads of stories and dreams trying to see how they are produced and reproduced. The process of stories being woven together could be better understood through the concept of intertextuality.

Intertextuality refers to any kind of interaction or communication between different texts. In this essay I will use the concept of intertextuality to describe and show how all texts are visible in other texts, and that a text never stands all by itself but is instead influenced by other earlier texts and will influence future texts. ‘Text’ will be used in a broad sense, that is, text is not only referring to a literary piece of work but could also be spoken language or conversations as well as religious or political texts. This interpretation of intertextuality and text is based on Julia Kristeva’s definition of the concept.

In *Mister Pip* we meet many different texts that are woven together in a complex process of intertextuality. The novel is set in Bougainville during the civil war in the 1990s. We meet thirteen-year-old Matilda, her mother Dolores and the self-appointed teacher Mr Watts. Because of the civil war all teachers have left the island and instead Mr Watts begins to teach the children using *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Matilda and the other children are fascinated with the exotic story of Pip’s expectations set in Victorian England and reading in class becomes a way of escaping the horrors of the war through imagination. Besides reading Dickens, Mr Watts invites the parents and relatives of his students to class to share their knowledge of the world with the children. With the broader conception of ‘text’ these stories and this knowledge could be understood as texts in themselves. This is important to recognize in order to understand the different layers of the intertextual process within *Mister Pip*. Intertextuality is at work both between different literary works and in daily conversation and therefore we need a

broad conception of text that allows us to recognize this whole process.

As the story goes on, the situation on the island becomes increasingly complicated. When the Rambo rebels (a guerrilla movement of boys and young men from the villages) arrive in the village, Mr Watts is threatened. In order to save himself and calm the rebels down, he introduces himself as “Pip” and begins to tell his story. This story contains extracts from his own life and from *Great Expectations*, as well as from the villagers’ stories and the local folklore. From an intertextual point of view, this part of the novel is interesting since so many different texts are visible in Mr Watts’s story.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the intertextual theme within *Mister Pip* focusing on Mr Watts’s storytelling. I will argue and show that different levels of intertextuality is a central theme within the text of *Mister Pip* and especially in Mr Watts’s storytelling. Mr Watts’s story is special since the intertextual process is transparent and visible to a much greater extent than in most other texts and thus the story is interesting to study closer from this perspective.

Mister Pip is a rich story and it contains many different themes and ideas. The postcolonial aspects of the novel linked to intertextuality and rewriting, is present throughout the text. Bougainville is an island with a colonial past (see for example Ewins) and *Great Expectations* is a novel produced in Victorian England. The Victorian era was the time of high imperialism and the expansion of the British Empire included colonies and a British influence over other peoples and cultures. These are facts that affect how the characters relate to and identify with each other and also with the different texts and stories within *Mister Pip*. A postcolonial reading of a text relies on the presumption that the unequal power structures which were established during the colonial era still affect the world in a significant way. A central concept within postcolonial theory is ‘the Other’ which was introduced foremost by the psychiatrist Franz Fanon and the literary theorist Edward Said in the 1950s and 1970s. The central issue in their works is in what way the Western eye has looked upon the ‘black’ or ‘the Orient’, in other words: the colonizer’s gaze upon the colonized. In this process it is the difference that matters (see for example Hall). The gaze creates difference, that is, ‘identity’ is constructed in opposition to ‘the Other’. This perspective is useful when studying the storytelling in *Mister Pip* since it allows us to recognize how difference and identification is significant in Matilda’s reading of *Great Expectations*.

Intertextuality

In the 1960s Julia Kristeva published her studies on Mikhail Bakhtin's work and introduced the concept of intertextuality to the academic world (Allen 11; 15). The concept of intertextuality describes how different texts communicate with one another, that is, a text can never be a completely independent creation but is always a reproduction of earlier texts (see for example Lesic-Thomas). In the article "Word, Dialogue and Novel" Kristeva refers to Bakhtin and states that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). This concept of mosaic is the core of the concept of intertextuality. No text stands all alone but is instead responding to earlier texts. It *also* promotes and seeks further responses, as all utterances depend "upon what has previously been said and on how they will be received by others" (Allen 19). So, there is also a future dimension to this, as a text will be received by others and live on in the form of reproductions and responses.

Since the 1960s when "Word, Dialogue and Novel" was first published, many have used the concept of intertextuality and the definitions of the term have varied. Today, it has transformed into a concept used to describe any kind of interrelation or communication between any number of texts (Allen; Lesic-Thomas). Some scholars have also used the concept in a quite narrow sense only referring to literary works and their relation to earlier literature. An important name within the intertextual field which should be mentioned is Harold Bloom. Bloom, however, has a very narrow definition of the concept of intertextuality where only literary texts are included. Bloom uses the term 'misreading' in order to explain how everything has already been written and how all new literary works are rewritings of some earlier text. However his theory is based on a male canon and has received critique for this foremost by feminist and postcolonial critics (Allen 133 ff). In this essay I will use the concept of intertextuality in the broad sense that Kristeva introduced. This broad conception of intertextuality might strike the reader as too broad and unclear. However, I would argue that the broadness and unclearness is the actual point of studying intertextuality. This means that these processes are very complex and function at many levels of text production and reproduction. Therefore we need to recognize all possible texts in order to grasp something of this complicated process.

Discussing discourse the linguist Norman Fairclough uses 'text' in a

broad sense, that is, text could be both written and spoken language (71). This means that it is not only literary texts that communicate but also other texts like, for example, dialogues, newspaper articles or political and religious texts. Kristeva points to this when she writes that “‘ambivalence’ implies the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history” (39). This means that any text is influenced by history (other *texts*) and this particular text will somehow influence history or society (other future *texts*). From this point of view no text can stand alone; texts are woven together while they are produced and reproduced.

When reading *Mister Pip* from an intertextual point of view the above understanding of text is crucial. The obvious intertextual theme in *Mister Pip* is of course how the text communicates with and writes back to *Great Expectations* as an intertext. There is however, in Kristeva’s definition of intertextuality, also a possibility to see more complex relationships and dialogues between texts *within* the text of *Mister Pip*. The novel contains a large oral tradition and folklore; most of the stories within the text of *Mister Pip* are told by someone and then written down by the narrator Matilda many years later. To understand the concept of intertextuality in *Mister Pip* it is important to recognize that these stories should be considered as texts as well as *Great Expectations* or Matilda’s own narrative. All these different texts are put together as mosaic in Mr Watts’s story around the campfire. In his story he uses his own experiences as well as the other villagers’ stories, the local folklore and the classic novel *Great Expectations* to produce new text.

In the article “Bringing Newness to the World: Lloyd Jones ‘Pacific Version of *Great Expectations*’” Monica Latham reads *Mister Pip* foremost as a rewriting of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (22). She argues that the migration of characters constitutes the “very core” of *Mister Pip*:

[T]he children’s voyage from Bougainville to Victorian England and also Pip’s voyage from Victorian England and his anchorage in tropical Bougainville. As “characters migrate,” their stories are by nature intercultural and intertextual. (28)

The idea of rewriting and of migrating characters is closely related to the concept of intertextuality. In my reading of *Mister Pip*, the emphasis is on the stories in the text and on the rewriting of them from an intertextual point of view. I would argue that the actual concept of intertextuality adds another level to the interpretation of

Mister Pip. The intertextual perspective highlights how all texts are related to one another and how people use threads of stories to weave stories of their own.

Tracing Texts

The obvious intertextual point to make about *Mister Pip* is of course how it is writing back to, or rewriting, *Great Expectations*. There are many similarities between the two texts; for a start they are both coming-of-age stories. The main characters, Matilda and Pip, are going through similar processes even though the times and settings are very different. There are important changes in their lives, a search for identity and the difficulty of leaving a loved home (Latham 36). This point is also made by Beverly Taylor. She argues that in order to identify with Pip, Matilda does a very selective reading of the novel. This is something that she realizes many years later while working on her PhD on “Dickens’s Orphans” (199) in London. Taylor makes a very interesting point when she argues that Matilda actually rewrites Dickens’s text in order to get closer to it and understand it. Maybe that tells us something about how the intertextual process works and what function it has. Taylor concludes by highlighting the importance of awareness of these processes: “[l]ike [Matilda], we should consider how we ‘magg’ [with the text] to suit our own ends, taking what we need at the moment while neglecting other patterns or overlooking other treasures” (103). This raises questions about how much we are allowed to select while we read and rewrite, and to what extent this is a conscious process. There are certainly no precise answers to that kind of questions but they are still important to consider in the light of intertextual theories and ideas. Sometimes it is the discussion in itself that matters the most.

Mr Watts declares himself to be against “mucking around” (196) with Dickens, since “[t]he word belonged to him [Dickens], the whole sentence did. To whip out an inconvenient word would be an act of vandalism, like smashing the window of a chapel” (196). This is Mr Watts’s response when Dolores is objecting to the use of “fancy nancy English talk” (195) in *Great Expectations*. Her opinion is that Mr Watts should remove this fancy nancy language when reading to the children. Later on, when Matilda arrives in Australia and gets hold of a copy of *Great Expectations* in a library, she realizes that “mucking around” is exactly what Mr Watts has been doing in order to make the story easier for the children to understand and relate to (196). It seems like Mr Watts is showing double standards

here, when teaching that it is not allowed to change anything of what is originally Dickens's but doing exactly that himself.

This means that our first meeting with the text of *Great Expectations* within *Mister Pip* is in Mr Watts's simplified version of Pip's story. The next version of Dickens's text is the children's retelling of the text to their parents when they come home after school (27). When "the redskins", i.e. soldiers from Papua New Guinea, who are much lighter in the skin than the dark Bougainvilleans (7-8), arrive in the village for the second time, Mr Watts's copy of *Great Expectations* is destroyed in a fire (103). Then we meet a third version of *Great Expectations* – the recollection of fragments. In order to save the story for the future, Mr Watts gives his students the task of trying to remember the story about Pip, one fragment at a time. He starts off himself by reciting the very first sentences: "[m]y father's family name being Pirrip and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" (108). The fragments are then written down and "saved". The children try hard to remember the exact words of Dickens or at least, as Mr Watts puts it, to find the *gist* of the text (113). They struggle to see Pip and his story in their everyday life and surroundings. For example, on one occasion Matilda is able to hear Estella's voice when her mother is yelling at her: "Do you not have a shadow of your own to play with?" (114) This, she realizes, is the voice of Estella being mean to Pip.

Latham argues that this collection of fragments makes the ties between the texts looser and looser. She writes that Dickens's text is rewritten over and over again and that "it mutates and expands to accommodate old and new elements" (31). I agree, but I want to highlight that it is not only a matter of a looser and looser connection between these two texts. It is also a matter of these texts *and* other texts being woven into each other in a complex process of intertextuality producing something new *and* reproducing the old at the same time. This new text contains elements of the intertext *Great Expectations*, but other texts are also visible. The new text is Dickensian as well as Bougainvillesque, "it is written and oral, Victorian and native, nineteenth and twentieth century" (Latham 32). This process of rewriting takes us further and further away from the original text of Dickens (Latham 33), but also closer and closer to something else – something new. Through the intertextual process Dickens's Victorian story is used in a quite different context. People are identifying themselves with the characters

and using the Dickensian text to write their own story. Something new is created with the old text as a base and so are peoples' different experiences, and texts linked.

Also important to highlight is that, from an intertextual viewpoint, we cannot see *Great Expectations* as 'the original' only. We have to recognize that Dickens was influenced by other texts (and contexts or society) while writing his text and that those texts are visible in *Great Expectations* and therefore also in *Mister Pip*, even though it might not be possible for us to recognize them. This is the main idea of intertextuality – a never ending relationship or communication between different texts. Getting deeper into the reading of *Mister Pip*, it strikes the reader how all these stories work together in an intertextual process to create newness. Because of the complex intertextual process there are probably millions of threads within this text that I as a reader will never be able to pick up. Even so I will try to outline some of the different texts that are to be found within Jones's text and that are later on found in Mr Watts's text.

The local folklore, traditions and beliefs are important parts of everyday life in the village. Dolores is offended by her daughter's great interest in the fictional character Pip, an interest that threatens everything Dolores knows. Matilda writes that her mother thought that she was "show[ing] off" (30) with her knowledge of another world – a world that Dolores does not want her to explore further. This is because she is worried that she will lose her daughter to Victorian England. Matilda's and Dolores's different approaches to the British classic are interesting from a postcolonial perspective. Dolores is clearly critical to almost everything that is connected to the 'white' world, a world that she feels threatens her own (41). White men are responsible for the loss of her husband, for the copper mine which had a devastating impact both on village life and on the environment (Ewins) and also for the blockade, that were imposed in the first half of 1990 (41). When the redskins visit the village for the first time Dolores's response to the fear is to reach for the family history and pass on everything she knows about "sea gods and turtles" (41) along with a "long list of people" (relatives) to her daughter. This information is however going "in one ear and out the other" as Matilda is much more interested in Pip and his story (39-41).

With the concept of 'the Other' and the matter of difference in mind, it is interesting to see how *Mister Pip* is to a great extent about identification, living through a text and melting into it. Matilda identifies with Pip, but Dolores on the

other hand sees Pip and Dickens as ‘the Others’. Coloured by the postcolonial context the characters identify with or reject different texts and stories. Whether they embrace the Victorian text (like Matilda) or not (like Dolores) the colonial past is significant.

The local perspective is also visible in the classroom when Mr Watts invites the villagers to share their knowledge of the world with the students. Here the villagers contribute with their knowledge of “the colour blue” (50-51), “names of winds” and “broken dreams” (52) as well as their opinion about boys’ and girls’ sexuality (54-55). This shared knowledge of the world is later written down by Matilda who narrates her autobiography. When they are transcribed these stories can be regarded as “texts” and later in the novel we can see how Mr Watts uses these texts when telling his story.

When Dolores enters the classroom another text appears. She starts to lecture the children on the importance of faith, stating that “[y]ou must believe in something. Yes you must. Even the palm trees believe in the air. And the fish believe in the sea” (36). She talks about how the missionaries came to the island teaching the villagers that they should have faith and she continues by stating that faith is like oxygen. She concludes her speech with some words from the first chapter of Genesis to learn by heart: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ...” (37). Later on, Dolores is back in the classroom giving a lecture on the devil “just in case she [will be] intersected by a redskin bullet” (75) and no one else will be able to tell the children. Mr Watts is in Dolores’s opinion “no blimmin’ good” (75) in this particular area. At one point she also states that “[s]ome white fellas do not believe in the devil or God ... because they think they don’t have to” (67). The text of the Bible and Dolores’s own religious beliefs are important texts which play a significant part in Mr Watts’s story later on. Interesting to note is how Dolores has accepted the Christian text as her own and as a part of her identity. Even though she is aware of the fact that it was brought to the island by the missionaries, the Bible is still seen as her text comparable to her family stories. On the other hand she strongly objects to *Great Expectations* which is also a text brought from the outside.

When Mr Watts’s wife, Grace, dies, the villagers gather for her funeral. In the silence around the grave they are reminded that something has to be said, and Dolores offers a prayer and recites “the Lord’s Prayer” (122). Someone else remembers the words “from dust to dust ...” (122) and then the villagers start

to share their memories of Grace as a girl with Mr Watts. They tell stories of how she was the brightest girl in school, how she could speak German with the nuns in school and of how beautiful she was. In this way the villagers give Mr Watts different fragments from the life of his wife. They are showing him who she once was and reminding him of how he knew her before she became ill. These stories are another example of collecting of fragments similar to what the children do with *Great Expectations*. This time however it is fragments from a woman's life. These fragments will also come back in Mr Watts's story, even if they will be differently phrased and woven together with other stories.

The words from the Bible and from the Church Liturgy that are used at Grace's funeral show another level of intertextuality. Graham Allen writes that when a ship is named and the words "I name this ship so-and-so" (41) are uttered the one who says it might think that it matters that they themselves are speaking. This, however, is not the case, Allen writes:

[W]hat matters is that the clichéd phrase has been spoken, as it has many times before, and the fact that it is addressed to an audience, who are taking up a position of witnesses to an event (naming the ship) which has occurred many times previously and will occur countless times in the future. (41)

This could also be applied on the funeral situation where things are uttered again and again. The examples of a funeral or a naming ceremony for a ship illustrate what poststructuralists would say happens in all language use; there is a substitutability in all language use. When we use language our subjectivity is lost and we are repeating clichés rather than telling something new (Allen 41). Therefore Grace's funeral is interesting from more than one point of view since different levels of intertextuality are visible at this point. There is the intertextual use of old words from the Bible and the liturgy that has been used by the Christian Church for a long time, but there are also the more personal fragments of texts that will later be used again in the same way.

Before getting into the actual storytelling of Mr Watts we need to recognize his own experiences and memories as another text. He has, in contrast to the other characters on the island, seen more of the world outside Bougainville. For example he knows what a "rimy morning" (29) is in contrast to the tropical heat on the island. He has also been to two or three of the *Englands*. When reading

Great Expectations Mr Watts explains to the children that there have been different Englands and that he has visited some of them. These are Englands that are very different from the England that Mr Dickens lived and wrote in (24-25).

The concept of different Englands is an interesting hint to the postcolonial context of *Mister Pip*. It refers to the industrial development of England and also to the 'British Empire'. Perhaps Mr Watts means to suggest that Australia and New Zealand are also versions of England in this sense? In *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid writes, in anger over colonialism in the Caribbean island of Antigua:

And so all this fuss over empire – what went wrong here, what went wrong there – always makes me quite crazy, for I can say to them what went wrong: they should never have left their home, their precious England, and the place they loved so much, a place they had to leave but could never forget. *And so everywhere they went they turned it into England.* (24, my italics)

Kincaid points to the same thing as Mr Watts, when she argues that the English created new Englands wherever they arrived as colonizers. Are there in fact "rewritings" of England all over the world? Linked to the process of intertextuality it is interesting to phrase it like that, because it gives a somewhat different image of what happens to a colonized culture that in a sense is "robbed" of its own culture and forced into another.

In addition to the experience of the outside world, Mr Watts has the experience of being the only white man on an island. At one point one of the students, Daniel, is courageous enough to ask what all the children want to know – what is it like to be white? Mr Watts explains this with the image of what the last mammoth might have felt like – lonely at times (81). He then turns the question around and asks his students – what is it like to be black? Daniel answers on the behalf of all: "normal" (81). As we can see here, 'blackness' is discussed in contrast to 'whiteness' in the classroom in terms of being normal or lonely. This difference and 'otherness' is also visible in the characters' interactions. Mr Watts's whiteness makes first the villagers and then the redskins and the Rambos suspicious. So, Mr Watts knows what it is like to be lonely and an outsider – to be different. These experiences could also be described as a text and as a thread used

by Mr Watts in his storytelling.

Personal experiences regarded as texts are a borderline case. These experiences are not transcribed in the same way as for example the local folklore is, since Matilda does not know all of Mr Watts's past. Some things we learn later on when Matilda visits New Zealand and some things we can only speculate about. Even so, reading Kristeva and Fairclough it is clear that these experiences should be regarded as "text". This is because they are working in the same way as the other, clearly transcribed, texts. They play an important part in the rewriting of Mr Watts's story and we would miss a great deal of the intertextual process if we overlooked them.

In this section I have outlined some of the different texts that are to be found within *Mister Pip*. These are: the different versions of *Great Expectations*, the local folklore, the local traditions and beliefs, the Bible and Dolores's personal faith and Mr Watts's and Grace's life experiences. These texts will soon be tied together around the campfire.

Around the Campfire

When the Rambo rebels arrive in the village Mr Watts's whiteness, which by and by has lost its importance in the villagers' eyes, is suddenly a delicate matter again. The rebels, drunk on jungle juice, find him and one of them threatens to "fuck him up the arse" (138). Mr Watts responds calmly that "nothing of the sort" will happen, instead the Rambo will sit down and listen. The Rambo leader asks for Mr Watts's name and Mr Watts answers "my name is Pip" (139).

So, Mr Watts here takes the name of Pip and begins to recite from *Great Expectations*, even though it is a somewhat different phrasing than Dickens's own words: "My Christian name is Philip, but my infant tongue could make of it nothing longer or more explicit, so I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" (139). Everyone around the campfire falls silent and Mr Watts, using his "natural authority" (141), now begins his story:

'You have asked me to explain what I am doing here', he said. 'In a sense, you are asking for my story. I am happy to oblige but I have two conditions. One, I do not want to be interrupted. Two, my story will take several nights. Seven nights in total.' (141)

As Latham points out, this episode is very Scheherazade-like. Like the Arabic princess in the frame story of *One Thousand and One Night*, Mr Watts is now trying to save his life with an ongoing story – his Pacific version of *Great Expectations* (23). Every night he has to deliver the next part of his story to his audience to stay alive. In his story there are “Dickensian hooks” (Latham 34) in the end of each part. These are hooks that end a section or a chapter in a fashion that will make the reader (or in this case the listener) want to read or listen to the next part. This technique of telling a story will buy Mr Watts time.

In Mr Watts’s story we can see the complexity of intertextuality, because it is not just *Great Expectations* that is working as an intertext here but also other stories or texts, like *One Thousand and One Night* which has been stated above. We do not know to what extent Mr Watts is aware of these connections. Certainly he knows about *Great Expectations* and his, more or less, direct citations from the novel but when it comes to *One Thousand and One Nights* we cannot know if he is aware of the intertextual process or not. This exemplifies how intertextual processes can be at work whether or not we are aware of it. Mr Watts is evidently aware of this when he chooses to appear as Pip:

Mr Watts’ decision to introduce himself as Pip to the rebels was risky, but it was easy to see why he’d made it. Pip would be a convenient role for Mr Watts to drop into. If he wanted he could tell Pip’s story as Mr Dickens had written it and claim it as his own, or he could take elements from it and make it into whatever he wished, and weave something new. Mr Watts chose the second option. (142)

Weaving something new is exactly what Mr Watts does camouflaged as Pip. Sometimes he uses actual lines from *Great Expectations* in his story (142) but he also uses other texts. Mr Watts’s Pip grows up in a brick depot on a copper mine road (143). This is a reference to the important mine, which has been located in Bougainville since the findings of copper in 1964 (Ewins). The mine was also the working place for Matilda’s father and is the reason why he left for Australia (6-7).

In Mr Watts’s story, Pip’s father was “lost at sea” (143) and his mother, being drunk on jungle juice, fell off a tree inside the house and lost her memory. ‘The orphan’ Mr Watts/Pip is brought up by a Miss Ryan in a big old house. In the story of Mr Watts’s/Pip’s childhood we can see the connection to Dickens’s text as well as to Matilda’s Bougainville reality. This is an example of what Kristeva points to when she writes about how society is visible in texts and texts in history

(39). The context of society and history is visible in this new text. Mr Watts's Pip, just like Dickens's, has no parents (to count on anyway) but as we can see it is for somewhat different reasons – with a local touch. There is a significant likeness between Mr Watts's mother and Pip's sister – both lost their memories after injuries to their heads. Also, the father figure is “lost” in all three cases; one “at sea”, one is dead and one is out of reach in Australia. Miss Ryan's story is quite similar to Miss Havisham's tragic destiny; they were both abandoned on their wedding days (144). As we can see, these three different texts are connected and linked together in an intertextual process.

When Miss Ryan dies, Mr Watts inherits her house and decides to convert it into two flats. He rents out one of the flats to a beautiful black woman from Bougainville – Grace. Only a thin wall separated them and Mr Watts tells his audience how he used to listen through the wall, hearing her move around, living her life. Then, one rainy day, they finally end up together (145-146). When Matilda is later visiting New Zealand looking for threads of Mr Watts's life, she realizes that he was married to another woman at this point, a woman who wondered why her husband was so obsessed with the wall and who bitterly remembers his lies (204). Thus, we can trace this part of the story back to Mr Watts's own experiences with the exception that he left out the unflattering part of seeing someone else while already being married.

Mr Watts continues his storytelling with the birth of his and Grace's daughter, Sarah, and how they decide to create a room for her (167). In their house they had a ‘spare room’ which they used for storing, but when Sarah was born they decided to put their different worlds side by side in the room for their daughter to “pick and choose what she wanted” (153) when she became old enough. Now the local folklore and knowledge enter into Mr Watts's story:

And now, to the startled ears of all us kids, we began to hear all the fragments our mums and uncles and aunts had brought along to Mr Watts' class. Our thoughts on the colour white. Our thoughts on the colour blue. Mr Watts was assembling his story out of the experience of our lives, the same thing we had heard shared with our class. But, Mr Watts' introduced new information as well, such as Grace's thoughts on the colour brown. (154)

Grace and Mr Watts begin to argue over the walls of the spare room that are now covered with their different worlds. There is information about “things that tell you where home is”, “the history of the world”, “a history of memory”, “broken

dreams“, “how to find your soul”, “your shoelaces” and “boundaries” (157-160). The fact that both Grace and Mr Watts have some particular wisdoms of life that they want their daughter to inherit, and the fact that neither of them wants to admit this lead to conflicts (161). They mainly argue over whether to believe in God or not. Grace does believe in God and she writes down a lot about faith on the walls. However, many of the things that Grace, according to Mr Watts, writes on the walls are in fact Dolores’s vision of the world. This Matilda and the other children recognize from the classroom. Mr Watts also introduces the conflict between the devil and Pip from the classroom. At one point he challenges Grace to describe the devil and here Matilda recognizes how Mr Watts is using her mother’s words directly (162). In this way Mr Watts is using his real conversations or silent arguments with Dolores in order to describe his relationship with Grace, and the boundary between what is real and what is made up is flattened out (see also Latham 33).

On the sixth night the audience is told about Sarah’s death (167). Grace’s grief causes a depression and Mr Watts realizes that the only way of “mending” her is for her to reinvent herself. This is where the story of Queen Sheba is woven into the text. Mr Watts asks his audience if anyone knows about the Queen of Sheba. Dolores quickly answers that “it is in the Bible” (167). She then summarizes what is to be found in the tenth chapter of the Kings: “[t]he Queen of Sheba was a very wise black woman who sought out Solomon to see if she could match his legendary wisdom with her own” (168). The Queen of Sheba remains a mystery to Matilda until she visits New Zealand years later.

This is where Mr Watts’s story abruptly ends and the Rambos disappear into the jungle. Next morning ‘the redskins’ arrive in the village again, this time hurt and with torn uniforms (171). They bring one of the Rambos and ask him to point out who is Pip – Mr Watts is now discovered. Mr Watts is shot dead and then “they chopped [him] up and threw him in pieces to the pigs” (173). This horror leads to Dolores’s heroic action of standing up for her old enemy before the redskin soldiers, claiming that she saw what terrible thing they did to the white man, even though this means that she has to sacrifice herself (175). This is also *Mister Pip*’s answer to the main theme of *Great Expectations*, of what it actually means to be ‘a gentleman’ or as Jones describes it here with the gender neutral “moral person” (180). Matilda recalls how the question about whether a poor person can be a gentleman or not came up in class, and how Mr Watts told the

children that to be a gentleman is to always do the right thing and a poor person “most certainly can” (46) be a moral person. He also says that to be human is to be moral – “and you cannot have a day off when it suits” (180). In this way *Mister Pip* clings on to the theme of its intertext *Great Expectations*, but in a sense it gets even further in trying to get to the actual core of the concept of a ‘gentleman’ or a ‘moral person’. In this sense *Mister Pip* is writing back to *Great Expectations* and adding other perspectives.

In this section I have outlined how Mr Watts, with a starting point in *Great Expectations* invents a new story containing also other texts. In his story Mr Watts is using Dickens’s text but he spices it with local touches letting his mother get drunk on jungle juice and his father get lost at sea. Further on in his story he weaves in also other texts, from his own experiences as well as from the villagers’ lives and the local folklore. I have also highlighted how *Mister Pip* writes back to the main theme of *Great Expectations*, discussing what it is to be a ‘gentleman’ or a ‘moral person’.

Weaving Threads Together

As Mr Watts’s story at the campfire goes on Matilda realizes that it is not really his own story at all, rather it is a made-up story to which all villagers have contributed with their threads (163). She recognizes parts of what has been told in the classroom of local folklore and experience (154), but she is not able to see all of the threads at this point. Years later, Matilda travels from her new home in Australia to New Zealand. There she looks in the telephone catalogue for ‘Watts’ and she finds June Watts, who appears to be Mr Watts’s ex-wife, the woman who he cheated on with Grace (201-202). Among other things it turns out that Grace and Mr Watts have been involved in an amateur theatre group and performed “The Queen of Sheba” (208).

As mentioned above Mr Watts’s storytelling ends with him and Dolores introducing the Queen of Sheba. Now Matilda finds out what importance this story and identity had for Grace. June Watts tells Matilda how Grace was sent to a mental hospital because she could not step out of character and believed that she was the Queen of Sheba (209), while in Mr Watts’s story he puts it like she had to ‘reinvent’ herself. The baby girl Sarah is not mentioned at all by June, and we can only speculate about whether she is just a dream thread in Mr Watts’s head or

perhaps a recognition of all the children in Bougainville dying in malaria during the war due to the lack of medicine (8; 43). Either way, Matilda is now able to see her teacher as a much more complex individual than she thought back in Bougainville. He has been her teacher, magician and saviour (210) but also, as June declares, he was “a weak man” (204). These different images of Mr Watts and the secrets Matilda finds out about him give her a more realistic image of him. As time passes Matilda also gets a truer image of *Great Expectations* and Dickens as well as of her own reading and rewriting of the text.

As Zoë Norridge points out, in the end Matilda comes to realize that there is of course no right or wrong reader response to Dickens’s text, there is “only endless variation” (Norridge 69). This is an insight that grows in her while she is working on her thesis on “Dickens’s Orphans” (199) in England, learning more about Dickens and about the novel that meant so much to her. The “mucking around” seems to be part of the reading-process and also part of a world and a culture where Dickens had a great influence (Taylor 103). This becomes clear to Matilda when she visits Rochester during her stay in England. In Rochester “[e]verywhere you look Dickens is a shopkeeper, a restaurateur, a merchant in second-hand goods ...” (217). This means that, being in Rochester, everywhere Matilda looks she sees some sort of business named after Dickens’s characters. Everywhere people are using the story of Pip for their own purposes. Hence, it might not be possible to read a text without “mucking around” a little. It might even be a good thing to do as long as we are able to see what we are doing. In a sense, at this point in Rochester, Matilda comes to peace with her own selective reading of *Great Expectations*, Mr Watts’s simplified version and the recollection of fragments (see also Taylor 103).

Matilda concludes her autobiography with the words: “Pip was my story, even if I was once a girl, and my face black as the shining night. Pip is my story, and in the next day I would try where Pip had failed. I would try to return home” (219). Matilda comments here on the fact that she identified so strongly with Pip even though their realities were so different. Still, she manages to link them together. Matilda writes that:

I could only follow him through some strange country that contained marshes and pork pies and people who spoke in long and confusing sentences (...) But then the story would switch to Pip, to his voice, and suddenly you felt yourself reconnect. (39-40)

She continues with stating that “[a]t some point [she] felt [herself] enter into the story” (40). Pip becomes Matilda’s friend and *Great Expectations* her frame of reference. As we have seen she connects things in her everyday life, like her mother yelling at her, to what happens in Pip’s life and in the flood she names the log that ‘helps’ her “Mr Juggers” (186). Matilda’s identification could be seen as her overmastering the discourse of difference, recognizing in what way Pip is like herself and in what way they can meet. Dolores on the other hand is captured in this discourse and unable to see that this text that comes from ‘the Other’ might be good.

However, one could also turn it around and argue that Matilda is actually colonized by *Great Expectations*. Jones himself writes that “I think the Spectator [the Newspaper] reviewer was the only one to grasp the point that Matilda, in a sense, is colonized by the book *Great Expectations*” (Norridge 68) in an e-mail to Norridge. From this perspective Dolores’s actions might be justified because she sees that her daughter is ‘colonized’ and lost in another culture – a culture that has colonized and mastered others throughout history. In this sense Dolores is a freedom fighter and a rebel, which is an interesting thought. If this is the case, Dolores actions earlier in the novel are misinterpreted by Matilda and perhaps also by the reader. When hiding *Great Expectations* and lecturing in class Dolores appears to be quite harsh and not very understanding towards her daughter. But maybe she understands much more than we think, maybe she has realized that she has to fight in order to keep what is hers. Actually Dolores heroic action shows more of her real character than we have seen before. She declares that she will be “God’s witness” (175) to the terrible murder of Mr Watts, who is her former enemy, and then, in order to protect Matilda from being raped, she sacrifices herself and give her own life for her daughter. In the end Dolores turns out to be the perfect example of a moral person, the gentleman that Dickens was once looking for.

Conclusion

Mr Watts's storytelling is a very good example of intertextuality. In his storytelling, Mr Watts makes use of the other texts that have appeared in the novel and creates something new. This illustrates the very core of the intertextual process; how all texts are visible in other texts. With his story Mr Watts is "mucking around" with Dickens's text as well as the texts that belong to the villagers in order to produce new text. With Kristeva as a starting point I have tried to illustrate the process of intertextuality with the image of threads being woven together. One could also picture how old clothes are torn and then woven together, forming a rug.

As we have seen, *Mister Pip* contains many different themes and discussions. For example, there is the idea of the story as an escape from reality and as a tool for creating new identities. This is to a great extent connected to the power of literature; many things can be conquered through the power that lies in a literary piece of work. It has not been possible to explore all of these themes in this essay. However, the postcolonial aspects of *Mister Pip* are visible throughout the novel and because of the colonizers' great influence in the cultural sphere these aspects are important to highlight and discuss in connection to stories and literature. The characters' receptions of the different stories are coloured by the colonizer's gaze upon the colonized. Identification and difference are important concepts here, especially linked to the concept of 'the Other'. This is a discussion with many layers to it and it has only been touched on briefly in this essay. Hopefully, though, it will raise questions and new thoughts in the reader.

In conclusion, the process of intertextuality allows us and *makes* us pick up threads of different stories and texts, real as well as imagined and to weave something new out of them. This is something that Matilda's experience, the different versions of *Great Expectations* and Mr Watts's storytelling show us. The process of producing and reproducing texts is complex and it is not possible to trace every thread of a particular text. However, what *is* possible is to follow some of them and try to see how the stories that are told and the texts that are written are influenced by others and how they will influence others in turn. At one point Dolores says that "[s]tories have a job to do. They can't just lie around like lazybone dogs. They have to teach you something" (74). *Mister Pip* is certainly

not lying around like a lazybone dog. The novel is rich in so many ways and teaches the reader about such various things as intertextual communication, postcolonial identities, how to be a moral person, the power that lies in a story and the importance of imagination.

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