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REPRESENTATION OF THE PAST: DICKENSIAN ORPHANHOOD AS A METAPHOR OF BRITISH COLONIALISM IN RICHARD FLANAGAN'S *WANTING*

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Abstract
During the process of colonial expansion and conquering new territories together with their people, the British Empire never took full responsibility for the citizens of its new overseas possessions. By forcing the colonised nations to accept European standards, British colonialism aimed at expunging their indigenous traditions in a process of acculturation. If colonial power dynamics can be metaphorically seen as parent-child relations, the dissemination of racist ideas eulogising the superior value of the white man over the colonised Other exposes British colonial parenthood as a fiasco. In this paper I will discuss Richard Flanagan's novel *Wanting* (2008), presenting it as an illustration of the Empire's lack of responsibility towards its overseas progeny. I will use the Dickensian motif of orphanhood which, when transferred into a colonial reality, can be construed as a metaphor of the colonial condition of the subaltern exploited by British hegemony. I will present the orphaned Aboriginal girl Mathinna who is separated from her community and coercively subjected to the social process of acculturation. In Homi Bhabha's terms, by adapting the coloniser's culture, Mathinna emerges as a hybrid, who, by mimicking the hegemonic culture, becomes a threat to the certitude of the colonial authority. In the end she is without any protective affiliation and abandoned by her adoptive parents, and thus falls into the pattern of the orphan as depicted in Dickens's fiction.

Key words
Orphanhood, Post-colonial, Richard Flanagan, *Wanting*, Mathinna, Charles Dickens, the Franklins

The colonial mechanism of conquering new territories by the British Empire not only substantially contributed to the economic growth of its centre, but also meant that the colonised societies literally became its citizens. One of the ways to read power dynamics between the colonisers and the colonised is to view them in terms of parent-child relations. By adopting imperial culture, religion and language, the colonised seemed literally to be assimilated by the Empire, figuratively becoming its

offspring in the processes of acculturation. Poor economic and technological development made the colonised communities be seen "as children, as men not fully grown, whose destiny had to be guided by the presumably more advanced states of Europe" (Cohen 1970, 427). In this way, the conquering European empires figuratively assumed the role of a parent responsible for the upbringing process of their children whose maturity could only be attained thanks to the intervention of the Western civilisation. Yet, the consequences of European "parenthood" were disastrous not only economically but also physically and emotionally, resulting in privation, commercial inequity, spread of diseases, loss of land, national identities and indigenous cultures. In cultural terms, orphanhood can be read as a manner of representation and as a metaphor of the colonial condition of those marginalised and unwanted by their new "mother" countries.

A metaphorical understanding of the British Empire as motherland, "Mother Country," indicates a sense of belonging of the subjugated peoples to the Empire and their dependence on its economy and ideology for their survival and well-being. The feminisation of the British Empire derives from the psychological meaning of the word because a mother has traditionally been seen as responsible for her children's emotional and intellectual development, protection, but also supervision. It seems to be coherent with the Victorian stereotype of the "Perfect Lady" who was responsible for "uniting and morally regenerating the country around the ideology of motherhood, the sexual restraint and moral order of which was believed to have immunised the country from overwhelming civil strife" (Alessio 1997, 241-242). However, the image of the "Perfect Lady" can be understood in a broader context. If "she" was supposed to "ensure the stability of the nation and the continued strength of its industrial and military might" (1997, 242), the "Perfect Lady" can also stand for "Mother Britain" whose imperial activity aimed at maintaining a similar stability among "her" new colonial offspring and military strength in the conquered areas.

Commenting on "a less male-centered, and more domestically orientated" rhetoric of imperialism in Victorian and Edwardian periods, the British dominions were described "as 'sister nations' or 'daughter dominions' of the 'mother country,' which, with the help of their 'parent,' had grown up from 'childhood' through 'adolescence' to the 'maturity' of self-government" (Thompson 1997, 175). Mridula Chauhan uses a similar metaphor, stating that child upbringing "is done by the mother with her full devotion, similarly to the land as a mother offers its inhabitants everything required for their growth and maintenance" (2012, 1376). By assimilating the overseas territories, the Empire became a new "adoptive" mother for the indigenous people inhabiting them.

As has been indicated, the acculturation process of the natives in British colonies involved the replacement of indigenous lifestyle with the Empire. The educational system in colonised territories was based on English literature

considered an ally "to support [colonial administrators] in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education" (Ashcroft et al. 2002, 3). Its consequences can be noticed in the burgeoning tendency of postcolonial writers to revert in their fiction to literary texts of the source, Mother Britain, the canonical texts of British literature which formed the basis of their colonial education, and use them as points of reference and intertextual groundwork for their contemporary, often Neo-Victorian, literature.

Charles Dickens seems to be an author whose oeuvre and controversial life episodes have been of particular interest to many postcolonial writers and film producers. "Imperial" reading of Dickens's marginal comments on British colonies can be seen as one of the possible interpretations of the postcolonial "absorption" in the Dickensian world. The fascination with Dickens is also likely to stem from the presumption that the writer "has been particularly well suited to portraying the fantastic incongruities of colonial and postcolonial life" (Jordan 2008, 498). In a similar vein, John Thieme argues that postcolonial writers find it "easier to identify with the cultural and social politics of [Dickens's] reformist fiction than the work of many of his more middle-class contemporaries" (2001, 103). For postcolonial writers, Dickens seems to occupy "a central role in the canon and as an outsider who could be a trenchant critic of the dominant social codes of his day" (Thieme 2001, 102). According to Catherine Lanone, as the embodiment of England and Englishness, Dickens seems to bring "Britain to distant readers and [arouses] in them the desire to become a writer too" (2012, 20). It can be noticed in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1988) by V. S. Naipaul, where the narrator develops his vision of London through a lens of Dickens's novels: "The London I knew or imaginatively possessed was the London I had got from Dickens. It was Dickens – and his illustrators – who gave me the illusion of knowing the city" (1988, 133).

A motif of orphanhood is closely associated with Dickens for many reasons. The orphaned children in his fiction were depicted in the context of his criticism of child neglect, child labour, marginalisation of the poor, workhouses and the Poor Laws of 1834 as evidenced in *Oliver Twist* (1838), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1852), *Little Dorrit* (1857) and *Great Expectations* (1861). By lambasting the gross misdeeds of Victorian society through the prism of its weakest members, children and orphans, Dickens seemed to affect the society's sentiment and thereby establish his position as a sensitive and moralistic writer. Orphanhood, or, to be more precise, emotional orphanhood is also strongly attached to Dickens's own traumatic childhood. At the age of twelve, he became a sole breadwinner of his family when he had to stick labels on the bottles of shoe polish at Warren's Blacking Factory after his father had been incarcerated for debts. Peter Ackroyd states that Dickens's childhood "ended so suddenly that it did not gradually fade and disappear as most childhoods do" (1991, 73). In this respect, Dickens's own

orphanhood can be read as a sense of spiritual abandonment by his parents and a loss of parental care. Not only did the experience have a long-time effect on his later life when he strived to form emotional and financial security, but it also impinged upon his fiction which reveals him as empathetic especially towards orphaned and abandoned children.

Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008) is a post-colonial novel set in the Victorian period and composed of two intertwined stories. The first story centers on the life of Charles Dickens and starts in 1951 when he learns about the death of his infant daughter Dora. It is also a moment when lady Jane Franklin, at this point in the narrative, a widowed by the famous explorer of the Arctic, visits Dickens in 1854 to ask him to defend her husband against speculations that, after failing to reach the Northwest Passage, Franklin and his crew have committed cannibalistic acts in order to survive. The other story, takes place before Sir John's expedition. It presents a history of Mathinna, an Aboriginal orphan girl adopted by Sir John Franklin, a governor of Van Diemen's Land (officially Tasmania since 1856), and Lady Jane Franklin who arrive at Aboriginal camp at Wybalenna. The Franklins, especially Lady Jane, want to transform Mathinna into a "civilised" person. I suggest that the process of Mathinna's cultural denigration by the representatives of the Western culture emerges as a reflection of the imperial ideology stressing white race supremacy.

From a critical perspective, Bożena Kucała notes that *Wanting* demonstrates the inner split of two reputable Englishmen: Charles Dickens and Sir John Franklin, that is to say, their difficulty in reconciling the Victorian morals with their inner dark yearnings. The critic aptly states that the Victorians and Dickens are shown in the novel as "driven by conflicting impulses [...] failing to achieve a balance between social respectability and personal fulfilment. As a result, they appear misguided and lost rather than intentionally hypocritical" (2019, 163). Focusing on the theme of cannibalism in the novel, Tammy Ho Lai-Ming acutely underlines the fact that "Flanagan's evocation of cannibalism [is] to comment on and critique the British Empire's treatment and exploitation of the land and its people" (2012, 14). Salhia Ben-Messahel, on the other hand, states that Flanagan "reconfigures and renames history by exposing the wanting elements in colonial discourse" (2013, 21), pointing out "the fallacies of rationalism and utopianism in colonial times" (2013, 22). Under that reasoning, Kerstin Knopf also underlines the colonial dystopia and the unwarranted conviction of the Western hegemony, principally evident in the scientific experiments conducted on the natives, which was also accentuated in *Wanting*. For Knopf, Flanagan explicitly undermines the "scientific racism" of the Western nations, exposing "such studies [phrenology, craniometry, anthropometry] as unfounded pseudoscientific experiments that were conducted in the name of Western cultural supremacy" (2015, 97). Margaret Harris remarks that "history is not the subject of

Wanting" (2018, 137). The novel emerges as "the moral drama played out in a particular set of historical contexts" (2018, 137) or, as Larissa McLean Davies says: "a meditation on desire, that explores the notion that life is finally determined never by reason, but only ever by wanting" (2011, 137).

I am going to focus on Mathinna's story, where her orphanhood can be read as a metaphor of the colonial mechanism in the nineteenth century, or, as Bożen Kucała defines: Flanagan constructs "a tale of a child (comparable with Dickens's portrayals) coupled with victimisation through imperialist cultural arrogance" (2019, 165). Western arrogance towards the indigenes inhabiting Australia, and Van Diemen's Land seems to be intensified by the fact that, from the geographical perspective, this remote part of the globe was considered "the end of the world if something else – probably: Europe – is its origin" (Crane 2019, 158). In this sense Aboriginal population, sequestered from the civilised world and treated as its absolute countertype, was viewed as subhuman and imbued with wilderness that had to be uprooted. In the novel this attitude is reflected in Mathinna's strict acculturation process aimed at eradicating "other imaginations of the world, other understandings or epistemologies" (2019, 158). By foregrounding the destructive dominion of a white man who stands for "a culture that was confident of its own superior 'civilised' status" (Montero and Kelly 2016, 85) over the Aboriginal community, Flanagan's novel emerges as a graphic account of the Van Diemen's Land Aborigines shaped by privileged British elites and their ideologies:

> The repertoire of white discourses of race relations encompassed: Romanticism and the idea of the 'Noble savage', Aboriginal people as vermin, Social Darwinism, doomed race theories, protection, the 'civilizing mission', assimilation, self-determination and reconciliation (Elder 2009, 20-21).

These ideas bring the white discourse to the forefront in establishing social structure in Australia and Van Diemen's Land, diminishing the importance of the non-whites and stigmatising them, which is explicitly depicted in *Wanting*. Orphanhood, or "the juxtaposition of innocence and vulnerability [which] [...] exercised a particular fascination for Dickens" (Tomalin 2012, 47) was used by him to portray victims of gross deficiencies of social British system. Flanagan uses the same metaphor of orphanhood and his depiction of the orphaned, physically and psychologically displaced Aboriginal girl subjected to the process of cultural denigration, serves as a representation of all victims of British colonial exploitation. It can be said that Mathinna becomes a representative of the colonised and discriminated peoples who were never treated as fully-fledged "children" of Mother Britain.

Commenting on the origin of the novel, Ron Charles explains that as a young Flanagan visited the Hobart Museum and noticed "a watercolour of a child in a pretty red dress" which became the inspiration for the novel. It depicted Mathinna, the

Aboriginal girl adopted by the Franklins with a view to being transformed from a "savage" into a civilised person. Thomas Bock, an English-Australian artist sentenced to transportation to Australia, on commission of Lady Jane Franklin, painted Mathinna and portraits of other Tasmanian Aborigines. The frames of the painting intently hid the bare, black feet of the girl in order to cover up any vestiges of her link with the Aboriginal community, and focus on the beginning of the cultural assimilation, which bespeaks the fate of the orphans of colonialism deprived of their land, relatives and identity.[1] When first met, Mathinna is seven years old and lives on Flinders Island, Wybalenna, a territory where the remaining Aborigines from Van Diemen's Land are pressurised by the British to resettle to a colony based on European standards. From the very beginning of the novel, Flanagan exposes what the noble notion of bringing the light of civilisation really means, showing the disastrous outcome of a clash of two cultures. Despite his ardent efforts to be the saviour of the savages, the Protector of the island, Augustus Robinson, feels that the people "whom he had brought to God's light were yet dying in some strange way, in consequence of him," and is confident that "this rotting stench [of the dead bodies] related to him, to his actions, his beliefs" (Flanagan 2016, 11). In such situations, the Protector resorts to the power of words and endeavours to search for the most appropriate ones "that might act as a covering strip for some inexplicable yet shameful error. But words only amplified the darkness he felt" (2016, 13). Kerstin Knopf notes that "Robinsons' inability to recount and explain the deaths of the Natives here participates in the British Empire's discursive erasure of such dreadful facts" (2015, 96). Abandoned by authorities and isolated from the outside world, Robinson knows that no matter how hard he tries, the colony he is in charge of is a pathetic imitation of England. The recurring feeling of entrapment and loneliness harasses him. Natives on the island keep dying and Robinson, aware of the failure of his noble mission, begins to long for "their dances and songs, the beauty of their villages, the sound of their rivers, the memory of their tenderness" (Flanagan 2016, 19). His colonial life "surrounded by corpses, skulls, autopsy reports, plans for the chapel and cemetery" (2016, 19) – which directly refers to the scientific racism being part and parcel of colonial practices – has become too overwhelming. The Protector wants to be unchained from British society who "all practiced closing down

[1] It echoes the fates of the orphans of the Stolen Generation, a phrase used to refer to indigenous children of Australia and Canada, forcedly taken from their parents to be adapted to the white community. In Australia, between 1910 and 1970, the scheme was aimed at children born from a relationship of Aboriginal woman and a white man. According to the originator of the idea, A. O. Neville, those children had to be biologically absorbed to white society to "breed out the [black] color" (Knightley 2001) whereas the pure-blood Aboriginal children were believed to vanish. In Canada, Aboriginal children of Indian and Eskimo (Inuit) origin were put in residential schools whose main objective was to "uproot [the children] from [their] former 'inferior' cultures" (Carpenter 2017) in the process of Christianisation and Europeanisation. Mathinna's cultural assimilation alludes more at the Canadian pattern of deracination because of her full-blood Aboriginal origin.

themselves and everything around" (Flanagan 2016, 61). Convinced by the natives, the Protector takes off his clothes, allowing his body to be involved in a lascivious dance.

> He was momentarily beset by the terrifying idea that this was what he truly desired in life. Naked, he found himself leaping, stamping, flying, lost in a strange abandon beneath the southern lights. Was this his true reward, rather than the money he would be given if he brought all the natives in? (2016, 60).

The last sentence reveals Robinson's real reason for his civilising mission of the indigenous community. Behind the veneer of the "saviour" (Flanagan 2016, 11) of Van Diemonian Aborigines, there is a money-oriented lackey of the Empire. At the same time, this telling episode calls into question Robinson's coloniser's identity and dignity. Giving himself up to the momentary bodily ecstasy, he discovers "ideation that unduly inhabits his imagination" (Deyo 2013, 103) which for a moment is capable of obviating the imperatives of his race, reason and Christianity.

When the Governor, Sir John Franklin, and his wife Lady Jane arrive in Wybalenna in order to inspect the fruit of bringing civilisation to this remote corner of the Empire, the couple decide to adopt Mathinna since, as Sir John nobly declares, "if we shine the Divine light on lost souls, then they can be no less than we. But first they must be taken out of the darkness and its barbarous influence" (Flanagan 2016, 69). Although Mathinna belongs to the so-called "dying race" and is prone to exhibit her wildness, she retains self-possession almost equal to the British while watching her father's death. Robinson takes delight in his civilising work when he observes Mathinna's silence and gravity sitting by King Romeo's body. This situation makes the Protector believe that "she might be more amenable to a civilising influence" (2016, 18). Mathinna's orphanhood after she loses her father in dramatic circumstances seems a pivotal "precondition for narrative development [where] the protagonist [assumes] the role of the hero" (Bainbridge 2010, 9). Yet, it may also mean that assuming the role of a hero after the death of her father will entail her acknowledgement or acceptance of suffering a similarly tragic fate, or even a premature death largely caused by the presence of colonists.

Mathinna's orphanhood has double meaning: she is literally being orphaned after the loss of her parents but also her ties with her Aboriginal tribe are brutally cut, which shows that her identity is undermined by the representatives of the British Empire. Mathinna's resistance to be taken to the Franklins' crumbling Government House in Hobart Town, manifested in her crying, disappearances and escapes, is finally suppressed by Robinson. A ring-tailed albino opossum, tamed by Mathinna at the camp, accompanies her during the journey to the Franklins' house. The opossum seems to be her only ties with her past and the only companion of her plight. Flanagan's choice of the animal is not accidental – its prevalent white colour dominates over the darkness of her skin. Its immaculate whiteness corresponds with

the whiteness of the skin of the colonisers, with the assumed immaculateness of their moral standards, purity of their intentions. Ironically, however, it becomes a perverse symbol of the subordination of Aborigines to British authority, and becomes a herald of Mathinna's clash with the "civilising light" of the Franklins.

Upon arrival, the girl is instantly subjected to the civilising process which "is marked by her subsequent acculturation and fall" (Ben-Messahel 2013, 25). Lady Jane, Mathinna's educator is a staunch proponent of the Evangelical principle in relation to education. She states that "The distance between savagery and civilization is measured by our control of our basest instincts. And the road travelled to civilization is, I intend to show, enlightened education" (Flanagan 2016, 126). The woman is portrayed by Flanagan as an iron-willed and fanatic person, whose craving for domination and fierce determination become the real reason for Mathinna's inevitable demise. It must be noted that Evangelicalism promoted a particularly harsh code of children's upbringing, "the Evangelical's anxious eye was forever fixed upon the 'eternal microscope' which searched for every moral blemish and reported every motion of the soul" (Altick 1973, 188).

It is noteworthy that in his novels, such as *Oliver Twist, David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations,* where the Evangelical doctrine is pursued for the sake of orphaned children, Dickens vehemently reprobated this pedagogy. It is especially evident in *David Copperfield* when the dictatorial Murdstone siblings do their best to tame David's "undisciplined heart", which is manifested in Mr Murdstone's ill-treatment and even beating of the boy. In Flanagan's *Wanting*, Mathinna's "undisciplined heart" is supposed to be quelled by the endeavours of Lady Jane Franklin, for whom diligence, intellectual discipline and moral upbringing are supposed to suppress the girl's cravings.

Lady Jane's authoritative stance towards Mathinna can be read in terms of Bhabha's ambivalence of the colonial stereotype. The fixity of the stereotype aims at confirming the confidence that the colonised are supposed to be seen as the Other that are in opposition to colonisers' culture. The stereotype is to help the colonisers to tame the Otherness of the conquered peoples (Branach-Kallas 2022, 25). Driven by racial bias, Lady Jane categorises the girl in terms of inferiority, savagery and dirtiness. Thus her strict and principled approach towards Mathinna allows her to suppress the feeling of fear and uncertainty that the colonised could appear more human while, paradoxically, the coloniser could become more foreign (2022, 25), which can be applied to Lady Jane. The ambivalence of the stereotype causes the coloniser's anxiety and identity crisis, "[t]he stereotype produces on the part of the colonizer both power and pleasure and also anxiety and defensiveness" (McRobbie 2005, 110). The stereotype always carries the burden of "*both* an aggressive expression of domination over the other *and* evidence of narcissistic anxiety about the self" (Huddart 2006, 29). From Bhabha's standpoint, the coloniser's narcissistic feeling of

superiority that "reminds [him] of his inherent difference from [the Other]" is threatened by "his aggressivity [that] masks this difference in terms of the politics of identity with the colonized" (Chakrabarti 2012, 11). Lady Jane's behavior seems to be in line with the concept of ambivalence because her unremitting authoritative stance can be read as a latent anxiety about being tainted by the culture of the Other, and consequently losing her Self and her dominance over the girl. As David Huddart says, Bhabha puts emphasis on "unexpected anxieties that plagued the colonizer despite his apparent mastery" (2006, 5). In a similar vein, Brett C. Mcinelly reads Robinson Crusoe's encounter with Friday, when the white man, to master his fear of the Other, has to master the Other (2003, 18). Crusoe is able to preserve his authority by "[composing] himself as 'master,' in control of himself as well as the native Other" (Mcinelly 2003, 18). A parallel conjuncture seems to be reflected in *Wanting*, when Lady Jane, by repressing her own "undisciplined heart" and the unsettling feeling to develop a parental relationship with Mathinna, is able to control herself and the Other.

Mcinelly's reading of the relationship between Crusoe and Friday in terms of Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and ambivalence can also be addressed to Lady Jane--Mathinna relationship. Even if Mathinna tried hard to imitate British culture, she would invariably be seen as the Other. Such ambivalence of Bhabha's colonial mimicry results in Mathinna's – the colonised subject – "partial presence", which also "produces a fragmentary vision of the colonist's own identity" (Mcinelly 2003, 17). In other words, Mathinna is unable to recreate a faithful refection of the coloniser, the Franklins, simultaneously disfiguring their fixed "self-image by casting back an unfamiliar and, at times, unidentifiable image" (Mcinelly 2003, 17). Commenting on Lacan's "technique of camouflage" (Bhabha 1994, 85) as a metonym of mimicry, Bhabha considers it implicit in colonial discourse – "mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically" (1994, 90). Reflecting the notion of colonial mimicry, Mathinna also "revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history" imposed by the British hegemony, "[rearticulating] presence in terms of [her] 'otherness'" (Bhabha 1994, 91). In this respect, the Franklins' "desire for mimicry" (Chakrabarti 2012, 15), that is to say, their desire to civilise the girl, seems to be subverted, becoming the girl's share. In other words, from disadvantageous, Mathinna's position changes into the threatening one. From Bhabha's standpoint, mimicry is an integral part of colonial hegemony, but it also carries the "menace" of disruption of colonial authority. This conjuncture seems to echo in *Wanting*. The experiment of civilising the Aboriginal girl does not only turn out to be disastrous for Mathinna, but also for the Franklins. Both Van Diemen's Land supposed to be the imitation of England and Mathinna intended to mimic its culture overwhelm the Franklins who leave the island

defended. The both lose their authoritative stance: Sir John Franklin can no longer bear office of a governor because he is not able to deal with the matters on the island whereas Lady Jane leaves not as Mathinna's mother, but merely as the girl's foster guardian.

The Franklins' attempts to culturally assimilate Mathinna can also be interpreted through the lens of the colonised subject whose identity is split. Mathinna embodies Bhabha's notion of "hybridity" because she appears to inhabit a space in-between, she is drawn to the memory of her indigenous culture and wants to mimic the culture of the colonisers. If read as a hybrid of two cultures, Mathinna emblematically represents a threat to the notion of "the inherent purity of cultures" (Bhabha 1994, 58) and the unquestionable originality of the stereotype in the colonial discourse. The existence of cultural hybrids questions cultural homogeneity because "the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply there to be seen or appropriated" (1994, 114). Mathinna directly threatens the notion of binary oppositions between the Western and non-Western worlds "[breaking] down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside" (Bhabha 1994, 116).

In the course of the novel, Sir John Franklin desires the child's warmth and touch, but his communion with Mathinna awakes his hidden instincts, especially when the girl performs the dance of a black swan. The swan provides a symbolic connection between Aboriginal and European worlds. For Aboriginal people of Van Diemen's Land black swans were their staple food, for Europeans a swan is a symbol of rareness rather than an element of diet. The narrator refers also to its meaning in mythology: Zeus takes the form of a swan to seduce and possess a young woman called Leda, which is Mathinna's given name. The costume of a black swan that Sir John wears at the fancy dress party on the expedition ships "Erebus" and "Terror" epitomises his indomitable desire to possess Mathinna, the climax of which takes place when Mathinna passes out after her uncontrolled dance in front of the guests. Sir John, placing the half-conscious girl on a cabin bed and "looking down on Mathinna, her diminutive body, her exposed black ankles, her dirty little feet, the suggestive valley of her red dress between her thin legs, [he] felt thrilled", and after venting his revolting yearning, he "was thrilled no more" (Flanagan 2016, 152). It seems that this unspeakable act of violence he commits overtly refers to Kurtz's "unspeakable rites" in Conrad's novella, which, in a wider scope, exposes the truth about barbarity of white colonisers.

Unable to civilise the Aboriginal child, Lady Jane sends Mathinna to revolting St John's orphanage in Hobart Town. Flanagan's account of the conditions in the orphanage and the state of its abused children reflects Dickens's depiction of wronged children living in similarly deplorable conditions in the heart of the Empire. In his biography of Dickens, Ackroyd maintains that, in Victorian period, these

children were victims of the so called "baby farming." It meant that "the parish and local authorities gave the orphaned or the abandoned into the care of minders who were paid a certain amount each week per head of child," which Dickens termed simply "a trade" (Ackroyd 1991, 586). The novelist openly called for the improvement the dire living conditions in workhouses and asylums for pauper children, objecting to "the systematic starvation and mistreatment of children who were emaciated, covered in boils, unable to eat, and who ran the risk of being horse-whipped if they complained of their treatment" (1991, 586). By means of exposing and bringing to light in his novels the fate of children, and especially orphans, Dickens censured the deficiencies of Victorian social system and indifference of society. The same inhumane system is duplicated in British colonial territories. In fact, Flanagan's depiction of St John's orphanage in Hobart Town is analogous to the institutions in Victorian England so vividly delineated by Dickens, especially in *Oliver Twist*:

> The children slunk away from lady Jane like animals, one part fearful and two parts desperate for food and life; Their faces were subdued and empty, their skin chapped and often scabby, their expressions expressionless. The children seemed too exhausted to do much more than cough and hack and scratch, beset with everything from consumption to chilblains, the tormented wounds of which scabbed their arms with bloodied buttercups (1994, 190-191).

Lady Jane's visit to the orphanage becomes a turning point in the novel which exposes the real effects of attempts to enlighten this and other Aboriginal children. Despite seeing Mathinna, "already scabby, shaven-headed in a drab cassock who sat alone and unmoving in the dirt below" (Flanagan 2016, 192), Lady Jane manages to tame her own "undisciplined heart" which still possesses vestiges of affection and compassion towards the protégé, understanding that her experiment turns out to be an ignominious defeat – Mathinna returns to her primal roots. Driven by her imperial superiority and lack of conscience, Lady Franklin abandons the idea of taking the girl back home, which becomes the beginning of her decline. From a witty and charming child, Mathinna changes into an alcoholic prostitute who ends up in the Aboriginal community at Oyster Cove, being brutally raped and killed by her corrupted companion, Walter Talba Bruney.

> The back of [her] body, ragged clothes partly torn away, was crawling with so many lice it more resembled an insect nest than a human being. Several bloody holes gored the exposed flesh where forest ravens had eaten, their unreadable footprints in the mud around (2016, 250).

In *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire*, Laura Peters provides a riveting study of the significant role the orphan played in Victorian

culture and mind-set. For the burgeoning middle-class, the family was of great value and the orphan figure was seen in binary representations: as a poison since the orphan "embodied the loss of family", a disturbance "[of] the structure of home, identity, nation and discourse" (2000, 19) and a promise because the orphan enabled the family to "[reaffirm] itself through the expulsion of this threatening difference" (2000, 2). This twofold reading of the orphan in Victorian period seems to be transferred into socio-political sphere. The state considered the orphaned children as a threat to the society because they were supposedly most likely to become paupers and criminals. Thus, to prevent it, the Board of Guardians and the prisonlike workhouses, as evidenced in *Oliver Twist*, were established as the supervisory institutions aimed at ensuring that the orphans would be given due upbringing and education (Peters 2000, 9-10). It also generated hope because the poor orphans (residing in the workhouses) could be shaped by the state and become "both obedient citizens and a constant supply of respectable and dutiful servants" of the country (2000, 8). If seen as "inferior" subjects without rights, coercively subjugated to and shaped by the country that took the role of a parent, in a colonial context, Victorian orphans can be viewed as a metaphorical reflection of a parallel insight into the indigenes in the Empire's overseas territories. As has been said, the discriminatory dogma created the false portrait of the non-white Other who was forced to be taken under the "parental" care of the Western civilisation, and subsequently re-formed in the process of cultural assimilation to serve the white man. It can be said that the Other seemed to elicit a similar ambivalence of threat and promise as the Victorian orphan. In Bhabha's words, the Other seemed to be a threat to the pure originality of the colonial stereotype by the articulation of the difference of "race, colour and culture", which was tantamount to the Other being visible. The colonial discourse strived for the purity of the stereotype and rejected any possible divisions to reaffirm its colonial authority. In addition to this, the culture of the Other embodied "the threat of chaos" (Bhabha 1994, 133) that had to be prevented "by those [promising] moralistic and normative ideologies of amelioration as the Civilizing Mission or the White Man's Burden" (1994, 83). This metaphorical conflation of the domestic orphans and the natives requires an emphatic predication – in both cases, the Empire failed as a parent. It seems to be reflected in *Wanting*, where the Franklins' failure to fulfill their parental duties towards Mathinna, make them the exact manifestation of the imperial ideology intended for spreading a protective umbrella of parenthood over the 'uncivilised' world. Mathinna becomes an embodiment of colonial orphanhood. Devoid of homeland and brutally cut off from her roots, she is removed from colonial history, unworthy of being remembered. The girl symbolises "the disenfranchised, the marginalized, the unhomed" (Tyson 2006, 428), that is to say, the Aboriginal colonial condition.

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