

## **After Rebirth: Transformation of Harry Joy from a Capitalist to a Storyteller in Peter Carey's Bliss**

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### **Abstract**

*Peter Carey depicts in Bliss that how Harry Joy transforms himself from a 'capitalist' to a 'storyteller' and from a business man to a bushman. Carey describes that how the industrialized world is corrupted and how the relationships are polluted in the society through Harry Joy's family. In the beginning of the novel, Bliss in which Harry Joy, an innocent, advertising man lives happily with his wife and children but when he experiences his first death, he knows that he is in Hell and wants to be good. Hence he decides to fire his clients who uses chemicals which cause cancer then he is treated as a mad man and sends to mental hospital meanwhile Honey Barbara meets him and changes him. After taking place of many events in Harry Joy's life, finally he becomes a good story teller in the forest.*

*Carey uses cancer as a metaphor in the novel Bliss and how Australians have the influence of America is shown through Harry Joy's wife. Harry Joy who feels that he lives in Hell, with his wife's affair and incestuous relation of children, finally he reaches Heaven in the forest. Harry becomes a good storyteller in the forest and he is very happy there.*

**Keywords :** bliss, capitalist, storyteller, hell, heaven, polluted, corrupted, advertising, first death, cancer.

### **Introduction**

Bliss novel is set in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s. Peter Carey wants to suggest that the lack of morality is not completely Australian; rather it is a feature of the industrialized world during the several post-world war II decades.

Carey wants to portray this, to show how it creeps into other territories of human existence and pollutes them to posit a substitute which is an ecotopia managed by Honey Barbara. The industrialized world is satirized with its corrupt business dealings. Carey shares his personal elements which are related to advertising agency and hippies through the novel. Carey says that how storytelling is important and how it turns into a ritual in this novel.

Bliss opens with the moment in which Harry Joy, middle-aged advertising executive, escapes his life. He lies apparently dead on a lawn at his home. "His straight grey hair, the colour of an empty ashtray, hangs over an eye. And, although no one seems to have noticed it, a cigarette still burns between two yellowed fingers, like some practical joke known to raise the dead." (Carey, 1981, p.11) Carey uses a smart conceit that runs through the novel: "Harry Joy was to die three times, but it was his first death which was to have the greatest effect on him, and it is this first death which we shall now witness." (Carey, 1981, p.11)

He dies for nine minutes. After his first death, there is a rebirth of Harry Joy from an advertising man to a storyteller.

Harry Joy is a thirty-nine year old man, who has a wife who loves him, two children who give no trouble, an advertising agency which provides a good enough living. He is very happy with his family and business but when he encounters his first death, he comes to know that his business is like cancer. His advertising business is evoking an expose of the effects of capitalism. The advertising business is the embodiment of the imperialist forces of Western capital and it shows the nature of capitalist delusions.

When he is lying in hospital, he remembers his father's stories which are about Heaven and Hell and the tortures of Jesus and thinks about all aspects of death. In fact he is worrying more about where he goes after his death than dying. When "He wakes up from a heart operation and believes that the life he has known is in fact Hell: his wife is having an affair with his business partner, his clients poison the environment, his daughter uses drugs, his son is a communist; they have an incestuous relationship. Harry must die again before he is free from the world he hates. Carey's satirical target is the business world he knew very well through advertising. He uses cancer as a metaphor for

the corrupt social order of capitalist society.”(Sistani, 2011, p.10) So he feels that he is in Hell when he thinks about his wife, children and business.

Before his first death, “Harry had had no interest in anything but a successful business and now he was acting as if he had sole proprietorship of the moral dilemmas of life.”(Carey, 1981, p.91) After his first death, he decides to be good and wants to fire Krappe Chemicals because three of their products cause cancer so. Harry says to Alex who is an Account Director at him that “we’re going to be good.”(Carey,1981,p.90)

When Harry informs this information to Adrian Clunes, Marketing Director of Krappe Chemicals, who then tries to convince Harry like this“...they release something like eighty thousand totally new organic compounds every year.They’re not properly tested. God knows how many cause cancer.Cancer takes years to show up. The whole of the Western world is built on things that cause cancer.They can’t afford to stop making them. For Christsake, look at your client list. Mobil have benzine in petrol which is carcinogenic. Firestone use it making tyres too...everytime an announcement is made that something causes cancer, it makes people less worried because they can’t believe that half the things they breathe and eat are carcinogenic.”(Carey,1981,p.124) After listening to Adrian Clunes explanation, but Harry doesn’t change his decision and decides to fire Krappe Chemicals.

Harry Joy’s rebirth makes him to be good in the society but he is not happy due to his polluted family and business hence he feels that he is in Hell.

He transforms into a hippy with Honey Barbara’s companionship. Honey Barbara, who lives at Bog Onion Road with her father, whoring is her commercial talent, once a year she comes to city and signs up for two months with the Executive Escort Agency.She learns how levers work and how bees live and look after them and grafting fruit trees,killing hens,making soap and many things from his father Paul Bees.

Harry learns his first lesson with Honey for survival in Hell and he becomes her client and she becomes his guide in Hell. Harry is sent to a mental hospital because he wants to be good so.He gets shocked to know that when the doctor says about hospital that this is also a business

and she does to make money. Finally Harry comes out from the hospital.

Harry wants to leave the city and live in the forest at Bog Onion Road,Honey Barbara’s place because of his wife Bettina’s death and he gets most shameful period of his life, five hours of panic and fight with his son for money so he decides that there is no safety in Hell.Hassall believes that “among all Carey’s characters, Harry is the first break out of the circle, to escape from the prisons of city and family, to metamorphose positively from telling the lies of advertising to telling the ritual, life-enhancing stories of the forest.”(Sistani,2011,p.36) Hassall says : “This change in Harry represents a significant turning point in Carey’s career.”(Hassall,1994,p.81)

When he is at Bog Onion, in the beginning the people who live there starts to criticize Honey Barbara for troubling them by bringing strangers into the forest.Harry gradually enjoys his life and learns work like planting trees, digging holes foe plants for growing fast. He seems very happy to talk about the clay he digs and the trees he plants and he begins to talk like a farmer. He adopts his life at Bog Onion. “He had planted peas and watched them grow. Could this corny, ordinary human act really be so earth-shattering to a man, that at the age of forty he is reduced to open-mouthed amazement by the sight of a pea he has planted uncurling through the soil?”(Carey,1981,p.284)

He starts his work with fear initially slowly it becomes love.“...although his work with the trees had begun as Honey Barbara had correctly guessed as a fearful response to his new environment, it had slowly became different,and from his fear,through his fear, he had discovered love and with his love he was trying to make amends.”(Carey,1981,p.285)Everyone praises his work in the forest. And Harry is also famous for his stories in the forest. Paul Bees says to his daughter Honey Barbara that “He knows good stories,” (Carey,1981,p.289)and he says that “He knows stories. He knows stories for trees...”(Carey,1981,p.290) Everyone likes Harry’s stories and they feel that they need a story for everything like for birth, funeral, fun, and weep also.

He is very happy with his new hut which is built by him and this is the richest and happiest period in his life. He has many friends who like him and he is necessary for them. Harry gains pleasure from his relationship with the

people of Bog Onion. He digs a decent-sized hole for a tree; he tells a story for a funeral and a story for a birth. At night when they sit around the fire he tells a story for fun. He tells old stories of his father but tells them in a better way because he understands them now. He retells the stories of Bog Onion Road. When he tells stories about the trees and the spirits of the forest he only dramatizes the things that people knows and he is sewing together merely the patchworks of lives, legends, myths, beliefs, hearsay into a wonderful cloak that gives an abundant glow to all their lives. He knows that when it is correct to tell one story not another.

He knows that how a story gives strength or hope. He knows very important stories he tells them barely for weeping. He gives value to the story which is as important as a strong house or good dam. Harry tells, when he tells a story that "He insisted that the story was not his, and not theirs either. You must give something, he told the children,

a sapphire or blue bread made from cedar ash. And what began as a game ended as a ritual." (Carey, 1981, p. 291)

Therefore the storytelling begins as a game and ends as a ritual. In the forest the people are hungry for ceremony and story. Finally he is not a leader or a strange man with a long white robe, he is not a shaman, a magician or a priest. But he is a bushman and he is a good storyteller.

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