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Space and its Dialectics in Peter Carey's *Illywhacker*: A Postmodern Reading

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Abstract

The notion of "space" has acquired a central position in postmodern geography. Its re-emergence in postmodern geography aptly demonstrates the crucial importance of the physical places in moulding human experiences, identity, culture, actions, and existence as well. Space in postmodern geography incorporates into the seminal aspects of the inseparable connection of place with human experiences, existence, and identity as well. These issues of space and place have great importance in the context of the nation of Australia due to the appropriation/misappropriation of the land and the consequent unsettling. All these have become areas of investigation in Australian literature, and here in this context the name of Peter Carey, an eminent Australian novelist in English, poses significance. Carey in his novels has dexterously portrayed the spatial issues in Australia and the continued contestations over the land between the British Whites and the Aboriginals. This article intends to critically appropriate the notion of space and its dialectics in the Australian contexts from a postmodern perspective based on a reading of Carey's one of the widely read novels namely *Illywhacker*. The article digs into the continuing spatial dilemma, politics, and contestations in the nation of Australia through illustrations from *Illywhacker* and eventually demystifies its ramifications and wide impacts.

Keywords: Postmodern geography, space, dialectics, place, Australia, Spatial contestation

Introduction

Space as a concept can be considered a crucial experiential phenomenon in human history. The theoretical propagations of postmodern geographers like Henri Lefebvre, Edward W. Soja, Gaston Bachelard etc., have explored the very concept of space and spatial dialectics in a meticulous manner across various disciplines. Thus, space today denotes something more than the common folk's understanding of landscape. Before this re-emergence of space in postmodern

geography, discussions on space did not systematically penetrate the importance of physical places in shaping human experiences, identity, culture, and existence as well. It is important to note here that common folk's understanding of space always lacked exploration of the relations of space with a place, inevitable tie of human beings with a place, spatial dynamics, and philosophical and ontological investigation. Thus postmodern geography revolutionized common people's understanding of landscape and surrounding and brought these out of the narrow application. Hence the essential re-emergence of space in postmodern geography paved way for "more critically revealing ways of looking at the combination of time and space, history and geography, period and region, sequence and simultaneity" (Soja 2). Besides, the analysis of spatial concepts and aspects has put great impetus in exploring geographical, cultural, locational, and metaphorical reflections functioning within the wide framework of space and its dialectics. After all, space, spatial practices, and dialectics have garnered increased attention and added new meanings in recent years. Moreover, the spatial propositions have also brought into fore the "innovative and potential" (Rau 2) rubrics associated with space. Importantly, these spatial dimensions have received great impetus and attention in the novels of Peter Carey.

Peter Carey is an Australian novelist of great repute. He was awarded the Booker Prize for *Oscar and Lucinda* in 1988 as well as for *True History of the Kelly Gang* in 2000. Carey's novels have prominently focused upon the issues of place and space in Australia and their ramifications. His novels can be reckoned as fictional biography of Australia. Carey's novels have interrogated "some of the most controversial issues in the Australian political fabric" (Gaile xxi). According to Gaile, Carey "has covered much of the geography of the Australian experience" and chronicled "his country's history from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first" (Gaile xxiii). The article intends to critically examine the notion of

space and its dialectics in the Australian contexts from a postmodern perspective based on a reading of Carey's second novel *Illywhacker*. The article digs into the continuing spatial dilemma, politics, and contestations in the nation of Australia through illustrations from *Illywhacker* and eventually demystifies its ramifications and wide impacts.

The notion of Space in Postmodern Discourse

The notion of space is found to have received scholarly and philosophical attention in an unprecedented manner in postmodern geography. Importantly, postmodern geography heavily stresses the crucial co-relation of space with manifest materiality-for instance, land. It has, indeed, brought place out of the existing narrow rubric and promoted perspectives to look beyond that. Postmodern geographers have extensively enquired into the impacts of space and place in shaping human experiences- the subject's emotive responsiveness and tendencies, psychological implications, and the affective qualities in a critical manner. In postmodern geography, it has been emphasized that space and place are closely related and tied to each other, and thus, cannot be reduced to mere physical extendedness and locations. In short, the concept of space is a broad and open one which encompasses numerous issues of importance including the inseparable interconnections between man and locality, the potential of the experience of space to be reckoned with epistemologically within a spatial dialectics, the human experiences inhered therein, and extending to the individual in terms of existence and identity as well (Malpas 22-3). However, before embarking upon the sense of space and its historically bound politics in the novel of Peter Carey selected for this study, it will be pertinent to establish the theoretical frame.

The necessity to define space in critical discussions figured prominently and specifically only in the second half of the twentieth century after its emergence and re-emergence in renewed

forms in postmodern discourses. In such a context, Bertrand Westphal writes how space appeared in the scene in the second part of the twentieth century in the “Foreword” to *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*:

> …we had to wait for twentieth-century literature scholars to put forward spatial conceptions of literature and literary theories of space-maybe even until the second half of that century, after the end of World War II's *decomposition loci*. The first half of the last century was still dominated by temporal studies (a la Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, George Poulet, and so on). In localized spots … then Bachelard with his poetics of space-but for the most part, we would have to wait until the 1960s to see significant changes. (x)

Notably, the significance of postmodern geography lies in the fact that none of the approaches before it made systematic efforts to deal with the diversification of space. It is against this backdrop that the ideas on space propagated by Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Gaston Bachelard pose significance. In other words, postmodern geography, and perhaps by extension, the postmodern 'sense' of geography, is credited to have pinpointed the spatial turn that evolved after the 1970s and paved the way for the rethinking of the concept of space and its inseparable relation to a place beyond the usual representations and "relationships between the so-called objective referent and its artistic representation, between the real world and fictitious world" (Tally Jr. xii). Moreover, the spatial turn in postmodern geography has extensively brought into light various perspectives associated with space including ontological, etymological etc. In short, the proliferation of ideas surrounding the notion of space and its inseparable connections with a place in postmodern geography has brought it out of the previous narrow frameworks and understandings. Apart from that, it has also been established in

postmodern geography that the concept of space is, indeed, "polysemous" (Rau 1) in nature, function and content as well. Significantly, this multiplicity of space is distinctly evident in modalities, modes of production, multiple dimensions, and "constructed nature and mutability" (Rau 1).

The postmodern sense of geography insists on the spatial imaginations, shifts, turns, and consciousness in a huge magnitude, and thus, covers all the seminal aspects of the body, everyday life, inextricable relation of space and place, immanence, and contours of space, and mapping and elevations. Along with the epoch's illustrious theorists on space, place, and mapping, the insistence of Michel Foucault is quite significant in this context. Citing the importance of space in postmodern philosophy and the necessity to investigate this extensively, Foucault writes significantly in the essay "Of Other Spaces":

> The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space…We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and that intersects with its own skein. (22)

Space—its turns, dynamics, and malleability—had, therefore, become the subject of wide discussion during the 1980s and thereafter in a much more vigorous and prominent manner. Henri Lefebvre, the French social theorist and philosopher, has, indeed, made influential interpretations in respect of space and spatiality in his socio-geographical studies and analyses. In *The Production of Space*, he made discernible attempts to discuss the concept of space in an extensive manner. Simply speaking, through his powerful insights and illustrations, he has

hugely contributed to the contemporary notion of space and spatiality and its relation to place and locale in postmodern geography.

Lefebvre extensively delineates upon the complexities inherent in the definition of space as well as the constant failure of the philosophical understanding basically before the emergence of postmodern geography. While discussing the disappearance of space from critical discourses and its re-appearance within the rubric of postmodern geography, Lefebvre comments that space involves a multitude of aspects and perspectives. Hence, space, to him, is a field that engulfs various aspects, directions, dimensions, types, variants, and elements as well, which need not pertain to the immediacy of the physical locale or the abstractions of subjective experience. Apart from these, he also points out the various sorts of spaces including social, physical (nature, the cosmos, etc.), and mental spaces (logical and formal abstractions). He states, "(…) confronted by an indefinite multitude of spaces, each one piled upon, or perhaps contained within, the next: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, global. Not to mention nature's (physical space, the space of (energy) flows, and so on" (*The Production of Space* 8).

Again, Edward Soja made significant contributions to the representation of space and place in postmodern geography. Pointing out the importance of space in Postmodern geography, Soja stated in the "Preface and Postscript" to *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* – "Today, however, it may be space more than time that hides consequences from us, the 'making of geography' more than the 'making of history' that provides the most revealing tactical and theoretical world. This is the insistent and promise of postmodern geographies" (1).

Thus, Edward Soja too strongly advocated the re-emergence of space as a powerful area of discussion in the postmodern epoch and vouched for “more critically revealing ways of looking at the combination of time and space, history and geography, period and region, sequence and simultaneity” (2). Moreover, Gaston Bachelard’s definition of *topoanalysis* in *The Poetics of Space* as “the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (8) poses huge significance in the analysis of place, space, and spatial connotations. Again, Bachelard’s emphasis on the vital link between human beings and location displays the roles and impacts that place and space leave in human psychology (8).

Thus the notion of space is multifarious in terms of its operation, agency, and nature, and therefore, it covers within its ambit various kinds of aspects like “physical, astronomical, theological, psychological, cultural etc” (Rau 4). Besides, the polysemous aspect of space has offered “multiple opportunities” (Tally Jr. xv) to examine and explore its wide spectrum. Moreover, the notion of space is replete with contestations, difficulties, and complexities. Importantly, the context of space and place has become more interesting and intriguing due to such complexities, contestations, and difficulties. Apart from these, the production of space takes place in spatial practices and “the spatio-temporal transformations” (Rau 3). All these have brought into light the dialectics and numerousness in space. In other words, the idea of space incorporates “a broad heuristic spectrum and a multitude of possibilities for investigation” (Rau 6). As a subject of interest in the context of postmodernist narratives, it finds expression and articulation in works such as the novel of Peter Carey.

It is important to note here that literary cartography assists highly in digging out the variables, constructions, geographical representations etc., of society and offers ideas about the "geocultural and geosocial formations" (Tally Jr. 3). In literary studies, the writer using the

literary cartography maps the interstitial aspects and dimensions of place and space and eventually portrays pictures of the spaces including the social ones “through his or her world” (Tally Jr. 1).

Australia, the Aboriginal-White conflict, Spatial dialectics, and Carey

The contexts of place and space are intricately linked to the very existence of the Australians. The spatial contexts of the island-continent of Australia and the issue of national origin have become central areas of investigation in Australian literature (Tompkins 6). Simply speaking, the issues of history, geography, space, and spatial contestations have immense importance in the context of Australia. Hence literary cartographic depictions of spatial contestations and anxieties in Australia have become crucial to unfold the geo-critical and various other aspects of the Australian landscape including spatial representations, the locations and dislocations of the subjects, cultural constructs, historical myths, the essence of human beings, and the issue of reconciliation. Simply speaking, the spatial dynamics and instabilities have made the Australian landscape a hotbed of discussion in literature and cultural narratives (Tompkins 6).

Importantly, in literary and cultural studies of Australia, the presence and importance of landscape has always been felt quite intensely and consistently even from colonial times. In *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative,* Graeme Turner strongly displays how the lives, identity, and experiences of the Australians are immeasurably and inexplicably connected and tied to the landscape. Importantly, in *Native to the Nation: Disciplining Landscapes and Bodies in Australia*, Allaine Cerwonka too showcases the significance and necessity of spatial investigations and representations in the context of the land

of Australia (1-2). Derek Gregory also in *Geographical Imaginations* crucially highlights the interrelations of the Australian landscape, geography, mapping, naming, spatial dimensions, dialectics, and the uniqueness that all these have possessed in the context of Australia (16-20).

Against such a backdrop, the reading of Carey's novels poses a huge significance. Interestingly, in almost all his novels composed to date, Carey has delved deep into these issues with renewed insights and novelistic possibilities. His depiction of territorial and spatial contestations in Australia offers wide scopes to enquire into the historical and current positioning of Australia as a nation and other important areas including identity, culture, and subject experiences. It is important to state here that the issues of landscape and location have acquired huge significance in the context of Australia due to the high stake of these in the formation of the nation and the nationalistic fervour. This significance of landscape unfolds Australia's challenges surrounding geo-critical, spatial, historical, and reconciliatory issues. It is worth mentioning here that the acquisition of the Australian territory by the British in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and their subsequent settlement overshadowed the natives, resulting in conflict, spatial contestation, and disharmony. This intervention of the British relegated the natives to a disadvantageous state and paved the way for territorial disputes and spatial instability. Notably, the representations of space, place, and location and the resultant geo-visualizations in the novels of Peter Carey have made the context of Australia a quite fascinating and curious one to delve deep into. Above all, Carey has dexterously displayed through his narratives the implications of spatial aspects in moulding Australian myths, culture, identity, and nationalism.

The story of settler colonialism in Australia goes back to the arrival of the first fleet in 1788. The first fleet comprised a total of 1066 (one thousand sixty-six) people including the convicts and eleven vessels. It is important to state here that the marathon voyage lasted over

eight months. The vessels started the journey from Portsmouth, a southern English naval town, and finally reached the north shore of Botany Bay in New South Wales on January 18, 1788, via Tenerife, Rio de Janeiro, and Cape Town. It is important to note here that a total of 31 (thirty-one) people died en route in that prolonged voyage. The voyage eventually landed in Botany Bay on January 26, 1788 (observed presently as Australia Day. It is worth mentioning here that Botany Bay was located in a cove of Port Jackson (currently known as central Sydney), and twelve kilometers to the north. Immediately after their landing in Botany Bay, the captain of the fleet Arthur Phillip took control and possession of the new territory. Interestingly, the published accounts of the voyage and other sources including official instructions revealed that the people of the fleet also brought with them "the livestock, plants, seeds, even the books" (Macintyre 16) apart from other essential commodities to settle in the new territory. However, it is important to state here that it was the English voyager James Cook who arrived in the continent much before the first fleet and explored it initially during his first voyage from 1768 to 1771. Importantly, Cook further explored the south towards the Antarctic seas in his second voyage during 1772-1774. However, he had to lose his life at the hands of the islanders in his third voyage during 1777-1779 (Macintyre 25-26).

The arrival and settlement of the British in the last quarter of the eighteenth century brought tremendous and far-reaching changes in the lives of the Aboriginals in terms of cultural and historical aspects. The Aboriginals became fragile in their native land and struggled constantly for their subsistence after the settlement of the British and their control over the land. In other words, the occupation and invasion of the pastoral lands and the subsequent cultivation of various produce resulted in the loss of habitation of the Aboriginals and the advent of their inevitable desolation. Thus the Australian outback became sites of massacres of the Aboriginals.

The Aboriginals too resorted to violence on a massive scale during the 1820s and 1830s. Importantly, the violent incidents during the 1820s and 1830s were of such a magnitude that the settlers themselves called it a 'Black War'. The incidents like the shooting of more than sixty Aboriginals in the northern part of New South Wales in 1838, the firing of the blacks in 1841 near the Rufus River etc., (Macintyre 59) bear testimony of such atrocities, and violent discords between the settlers and the Aboriginals. In short, the incursion of the settlers into the Australian outback outnumbered the natives and subjected them to traumatic life experiences. In consequence of pastoral incursions, the population of the Aboriginals had been estimated to have dwindled from 600,000 in 1821 to even fewer than 300,000 in 1850. It is also worth mentioning here that such warfare between the Aboriginals and the Europeans became subjects of intense scrutiny in the twentieth century in the hands of eminent historians like Geoffrey Blainey and Henry Reynolds. Notably, Blainey in 1979 recommended the inclusion of the Aboriginal-European warfare in the Australian War Memorial, while Reynolds in 1981 pushed for recognition and inclusion of the names of the fallen Aboriginals in the memorials of Australia (Macintyre 60).

Such violent encounters between the Aboriginals and the Whites erupted frequently into the scene due to the incompatibility of their ways of living. Instead of acknowledging the presence of the Aboriginals in the Australian territory, the British settlers chose to subject them to traumatic life experiences. Besides, the settlers' disregard for the rights of the Aborigines on their soil, the extermination of the Aboriginals, and the consequent conflicts between the Aboriginals and the Whites disrupted the order and resulted in violence and mass killings. Eventually the British became the proprietor of the land by reducing the Aboriginals into penury in Adelaide, Melbourne, and other places as well (Macintyre 59).

Since the time of the arrival of the First Fleet, the British settlers promoted the rhetoric of *terra nullius* to legitimize their acquisition of land in Australia. Importantly, this concept of *terra nullius* is of crucial importance in understanding the spatial and geo-political conditions in the nation of Australia. Defining this widely known and circulated term *terra nullius* in Australia, Sven Lindqvist writes in *Terra Nullius: A Journey through No one's Land*- "Terra nullius. From the Latin *terra*, earth, ground, land, and *nullius*, no one's. Thus: no one's land, land not belonging to anybody. Or at any rate, not to anybody that counts" (3).

In actuality, the British settlers from the beginning of their arrival in Australia claimed that the island continent was empty before their landing. In fact, after the arrival of the first fleet, the British government initially occupied eastern Australia through the introduction of a simple proclamation of sovereignty. They subsequently took possession of the entire continent. In other words, unlike in North American colonies, the British government introduced a legal framework in the form of the proclamation of sovereignty and allowed the newcomers to claim the *terra nullius* as theirs. The proclamation urged on the aspect that Australia was nothing but a *terra nullius*, and hence the land belonged to nobody before they arrived in the island continent. In short, the proclamation allowed the newcomers to take possession of the land and ensured the dispossession of the Aboriginals from their land.

Although it was discovered by Phillip and his officers later that there were a considerable number of Aboriginals living in the island continent unlike their constructions of Australian situations, yet they did not recognize the fact that the land was occupied before their arrival. Thus even after revealing these facts, the British claimed their ownership and total sovereignty upon the continent based on their judgment that the land was a *terra nullius* and devoid of any customary laws, regulations, and order. That false claim of ownership continued thereafter until

the Mabo judgment of the high court in the year 1992. Interestingly, the Mabo judgement provided legal recognition to the Aborigines regarding the ownership and possession of the traditional lands. Unfortunately, despite the legal recognition of land rights of the Aboriginals in the Mabo judgement, no official recognition has been accorded yet in respect of the Aboriginals' possession of their ancestral lands before the arrival of the British. Commenting on the rhetoric of *terra nullius*, Sven Lindqvist states that "in Australia, this meant legitimizing the British invasion and its accompanying acts of dispossession and the destruction of indigenous society" (4). Various studies on the prehistoric times in Australia demonstrated human habitation in Australia and opined that the Aboriginals inhabited for several centuries in this remote island continent. Famous historian Macintyre in his *A Concise History of Australia* confirms this claim as well (9). It is against this contested idea of space and place, that the present reading is done.

Representation of Space and Spatial dialectics in *Illywhacker*

Published in 1985, Carey's *Illywhacker* delves deep into twentieth century Australian history through the family saga of Herbert Badgery. The novel is also full of different sub-narratives, and all these sub-narratives have brought into light the views of such characters as Jack McGrath, Leah Goldstein, Molly, Herbert's son Charles etc. However, it needs to be stated that Herbert remains the central figure and dominates the narrative despite the presence of numerous other sub-narratives. The novel looks into the issues connected to the territory of Australia and provides crucial inputs about the spatial contestations. The novel begins with an epigram from Mark Twain's *More Trams Abroad* (1897) which is worth quoting here in the context of the spatial contestations and instabilities in Australia:

> Australian history is almost always picturesque; indeed, it is so curious and strange, that it is itself the chiefest novelty the country has to offer and so it pushes the other novelties into second and third place. It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies; and all of a fresh new sort, no mouldy old stale ones. It is full of surprises and adventures, the incongruities, and contradictions, and incredibilities; but they are all true, they all happened. (Mark Twain, *More Tramps Abroad, London*, 1897)

As described in the novel, Herbert, a man of 139 years, was born in the year 1886. These facts regarding the birth and age of Herbert point out clearly that the present narrative takes things into account up to the year 2025. In fact, through postmodern playfulness and unreliability of storytelling, Herbert constantly makes the readers self-conscious to ponder over the authenticity/ unauthenticity of *terra nullius* in Australian history. Herbert also consciously tries the credulity of readers "by revealing that he is 139 years old" (Woodcock 55) and plays tricks in his foregrounding of personal and national themes.

The conversations between Herbert and Leah have constantly portrayed the Australian realities and the continued spatial anxieties. In a conversation, Leah once said to Herbert, a man of British origin, that "I am not attacking you personally" (Carey 230). Leah, thereafter, significantly says, "I am attempting to analyse the history of this country" (230). In another conversation of theirs, Leah exposes Herbert's recurrent urge of settlement in Australia and warns him subsequently by reminding him that "This is not your place and never can be" (307). Interestingly, Herbert reacts by saying that "It is public land" (307). Leah immediately retorts to that- "You think you can put up some shanty and that makes it your place, but you can't, and it never will be" (307). Reacting further to the words and denials of Herbert, Leah says:

> Forget what we did. The matter is obvious. The land is stolen. The whole country is stolen. The whole nation is based on a lie which is that it was not already occupied when the British came here. If it is anybody's place it is the blacks'. Does it look like your place? Does it feel like your place? Can't you see, even the trees have nothing to do with you. (307)

Leah again talks about the Australian land and emphasizes that the White Australians do not have any belongingness in Australia. Outlining that, Leah says to Herbert in another conversation:

> …I can stay still anywhere. It is not a country where you can rest. It is a black man's country: sharp stones, rocks, sticks, bull ants, flies. We can only move around it like tourists. The blackfeller can rest but we must keep moving… (323)

Thus such an assertion has put forward ideas of national delusions, spatial contests, and insecurity of the subjects in Australia. In other words, Leah lucidly points out the British settlers' stealing of the land from the 'blacks'. All these have blatantly exposed the politics of the British Whites and their illegal occupation of the land of Australia in the name of *terra nullius*. Exposing the false claims of the Whites over the land and the hypocrisy around the craftily circulated propaganda of *terra nullius*, Leah Goldstein also refers to the exploration of gold and calls the exploration of gold "the curse of this country" (229). Leah Goldstein reminds Herbert that the history of Australia is filled with lies only. She even reminds Herbert how their pioneers demolished the culture of the natives to authenticate their presence- "(…) was not the people, but the landscape and its roads, red, yellow, white, ochre, mustard, dun, Madeira, maize, the raw

optimistic tracks that cut the arteries of an ancient culture before a new one had been born" (553, *Illywhacker*).

Hence "[T]he role of lies in popular perceptions of the Australian political fabric" (488) has been accentuated in the novel to demystify the Whites' claims over the land in the name of *terra nullius*. Such revelations have clearly shown the various underpinnings behind the politics of space and spatial contestations in Australian society. Importantly, the novel also shows the spatial instability, anxiety, and aloneness of the White Australians through the confessions of Herbert in private:

> …as carefully as she exposed these nervous systems of her own; I was much affected and stepped down from my drum, with my own confession tumbling from me. I admitted I could not read and that the landscape had, indeed, always seemed alien to me, that it made, in many lights, melancholy and homesick for something else, that I preferred a small window in a house, and so on" (308).

Such realizations of Herbert have exposed the inner insecurity and alienation of the British settlers in Australia. Ironically, Herbert once told Leah with impudence that "This is my country…not yours" (307*)*. These spatial instabilities in Australia have pushed the people into a state of captivity. Besides, these spatial dilemmas, insecurities, and contestations have pushed both the natives and the British settlers into a state of instability, anxiety, split, and disharmony. The intricate relation of place with human identity and space acquires great importance in the Australian context, and it is in this context that the theories of Bachelard and Lefebvre on space need to be recalled. Bachelard explored this intricate relation of space and place with human life, identity, and existence. To him, the human mind is formed based on the experiences of the individual from his/her surrounding and dwelling place; and space and place heavily influence

human memories, feelings, thoughts, actions, reactions, and so on. In short, the external spatial experiences of the individuals impact upon the inner urges and their manifestations in a notable manner, and the manifestations of inner urges, self, memory, and the human mind is just an outcome of the outer experiences of the individuals (Bachelard vii-iii). Lefebvre too points out that spatial practices widely involve the processes of productions and reproductions and incorporate the locational and characteristic specificities of the sites. He further states that the spatial dialectics also bring into light the continuity, actions, inconsistencies, and cohesion associated with place and locations, and hence, all these considerations and practices eventually result in the revelation of the process of production, its tight relations with the 'order', the evolving knowledge and codes, and the complex and underlying structures as well (Lefebvre 37). Soja too recognized space and spatiality as a social product or outcome and a shaping force in social life which renders critical insights on socio-spatial dialectic and historico-geographical materialism (Soja 119-20). Thus the spatial dilemma, contestation, and dialectics as delineated in the novel demonstrate the relevance of these theoretical propositions of the postmodern geographers.

The novel further divulges the spatial instabilities, lies, myths, and the falsity of the rhetoric of *terra nullius*. Herbert while in prison has gone through a fictional history book namely *History of Australia* by M.V. Anderson. Interestingly, the invention of a fictional history book within the framework of the novel is a novelistic technique to explore the issues of the national origin and spatial instabilities in Australia. The opening paragraph of Anderson's book invented within the fictional narrative demonstrates the lies in Australian history and the consequent spatial anxieties:

> Our forefathers were all great liars. They lied about the lands they selected and the cattle they owned. They lied about their backgrounds and the percentage of their wives. However, it is their first lie that is the most impressive for being so monumental, i.e. that the continent, at the time of first settlement, was said to be occupied but not cultivated and by that simple device they were able to give the legal owners short shrift and, when they objected, to use the musket or poison flour, and to do so with a clear conscience. (Carey 456)

All these are clear examples of the spatial contestations in the nation of Australia and the tightly tied relation of place and space in terms of subject experiences and formation of identity. Apart from these direct references, the novel also brings into light various images viz. prison, snake, etc. to showcase the spatial dialectics and contestations in Australia. Such images have significantly assisted in bringing into light the great events of Australian history, the inevitable consequences, and the various sorts of captivities.

Images of "caging animals and birds" (Woodcock 64) have powerfully emblematized the conflicting condition in Australia and abrogation of native rights. Herbert's capture of the snake to sell it to Mr. Chin, a Chinese herbalist, as well as his purchase of parrots to win back the mind of his wife Phoebe aptly indicate in the narrative the misappropriation of these animals and birds for mercenary and individual gains. This act reminds readers of the British colonial invaders' misappropriation of the land as a *terra nullius*. Through the image of prison, Carey depicts Australia's "fucked-up dreams" (Carey 578), the condition of the subjects, and their entrapment. It symbolizes Australia's perverted dreams and subsequent trapping of the Australians in "their own aspirations and mythologies" (Woodcock 68). Interestingly, Herbert also compiles his

prison experiences in the book titled *Gaol Bird,* and in one context, he significantly says that "*Gaol Bird* was a pack of lies" (Carey 409). Such manipulations of the experiences on the part of Herbert symbolize the fakery and false claims perpetuated by the Whites regarding the Australian territory. The irony is that the British settlers have also found themselves in a state of capture in Australia despite their continuous claim over the land. Regarding the spatial contestations and entrapment of the subjects in the nation of Australia, Jack once says to Herbert that "We're a young country" and therefore, "We've got to crawl before we can walk" (Carey 141). Commenting on this, Woodcock notably states that "the gaol imagery becomes expressive of the state of contemporary Australian society, trapped by its history, imprisoned in its self-created present, caught by these legacies in the future" (67).

Carey's deployment of the image of a snake functions critically to expose the misappropriation of the land by the settler British in the name of *terra nullius*. As described in the novel, Herbert undertakes a "snake trick for money" (Carey 344) along with Leah and his son Charles. This exploitation of the snake for mercenary purposes is quite suggestive as it refers to "the first colonial invaders' misappropriation of the land as a *terra nullius*" (Woodcock 65). In other words, the image of the snake, its captivation, and using it later for money-making symbolize the true nature of the White Australians- their past, historical guilt, imprisoning, expropriation of the territory, and the use of the rhetoric of *terra nullius* to authenticate their presence in the land. The image of the snake, to Woodcock, has also functioned in the novel "as the emblem of the true untameable Australian" (Woodcock 61). Referring to the untamed natives, Herbert once said to Jack- "This snake", I explained, "has been in gaol. It is a mean bastard of an animal and it cannot be bought" (Carey 140). This equalization of the locals to savage animals as well as categorizing them as slaves and "giant negroes" (Carey 485) distinctly

signal White colonial mentality- their arrogance, and dehumanization of the natives. Such conditions unequivocally point out the spatial instabilities in Australia and the consequent gaps and fissures.

However, Herbert later feels that the capture of the snake and using it for "snake tricks for money" (Carey 344) was injudicious and a great mistake. Regarding the captivity of the snake, Herbert expresses his realizations:

> …you can mistreat a horse and be forgiven it. You can kick a dog and it will come back and lick your hand. But a snake is another matter, and once you have wronged it, it will carry the memory of you with it, like a bolted convict with lash marks on its back, crisscrossed, burned in like a loaf of fancy bread. And there is no doubt that the greatest mistake I ever made in my life was to keep that Geelong snake a prisoner in a Hessian bag, to starve it, to use it for tricks. (231)

Interestingly, Jack too said to Herbert in the same conversation that he was "wrong about the snake," (141). The conversation between Herbert and Phoebe regarding the captured snake is important in this context- ""What's the snake for?" Phoebe said (…) "It's a pet," I said (…) In any case, it was no trouble to lie. I always lied about snakes" (27). All these references have pinpointed the extent of spatial contestation in Australia. Such spatial instabilities have brought into light the captivity of various sorts on the part of the subjects irrespective of the Whites and the Aboriginals in the nation of Australia. The images connecting the caging of animals and birds in the narrative can be construed as significant emblems to decipher the story of Australia, captivities of various sorts, and the current spatial conditions. All these illustrations show the numerousness associated with space and the consequent multifariousness in terms of its operations, agencies, and nature. Moreover, the spatial contestation in Australia brings into forth

various other aspects like “physical, astronomical, theological, psychological, cultural, etc” (Rau 4) involved in analyses of space and its dialectics.

Apart from these, the image of the pet shop in *Illywhacker* is extremely important in the context of the Australian condition. The pet shop here denotes that although the Australians are well fed and think themselves happy, yet the truth lying behind their existence is that the Australians are living in a kind of captivity (Woodcock 64). The pet shop, a personal venture of Charles, metaphorically celebrates “the uniqueness and beauty of Australian birds and animals” (Carey 485) and also exposes the guilt of the British settlers for the caging of animals. Leah’s guilt for her insult and negligence to Charles metaphorically indicates the guilt of the British settlers for their seizure of the land from the Aboriginals- “She had neglected the boy. She had been selfish. She had left him alone to be patronized and insulted by city people. He was alone in the world and she, his only friend, had betrayed him” (Carey 408).

Ironically, the White Australians deny the same and the very nature of such captivities, and all such denials are evident from the attitudes of the White characters in the novel including Herbert, Jack, and others. Carey also questions aspects of freedom, independence, and authoritarianism in Australia and asserts through his narrative that although the Australians showcase themselves as wonderful and feel proud of their systems, yet they are all living in cages or leash on all fronts including economic, cultural, spatial, political, and so on. Pointing out this peculiar condition in Australia, Herbert states at the end of the novel:

> There is a spirit in this place. It is this that excites the visitors. The shearers, for instance, exhibit that dry, laconic anti-authoritarian wit that is the very basis of the Australian sense of humour. They are proud people, these lifesavers, inventors, manufacturers,

> bushmen, aboriginals. They do not act like caged people. The very success of the exhibit is in their ability to move and talk naturally within the confines of space. (Carey 599)

Besides, citing the coup and fall of the Whitlam government in 1975 and the events thereafter, Carey frequently questioned the ludicrous attitude of the Australians who think themselves wonderful, and do not feel much about caging or leashing. Spatial instabilities as presented in the novels of Carey have remained a crucial area of contestations in Australia's socio-political history. Contextualizing these, Joanne Tompkins writes in *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*:

> …an underlying instability in spatiality that remains a chief concern in Australian politics. Debates over land rights, anxieties regarding nationalism, settlement, reconciliation, traces of what was known as yellow peril and subsequent invasion scares are preoccupied with space. These debates have resulted in the paradoxical depiction of Australia as an unlimited, empty land, at the same time as it is said to be too "full" to accommodate outsiders, such as asylum seekers. (6)

Significantly, how the spatial contestations have shattered the dreams of the Whites along with the Aboriginals is also evident in the novels of Carey. Herbert in *Illywhacker* feels something wrong in the nation and says "how the lies that once smoked like dreams have diminished to such an extent that by 1931 they are ignoble snivelling things, excuses more than lies" (228). Again, how people have become perverted due to the imprisoning and spatial anxieties is expressed in the conversation between Phoebe and Emma- "I wish I were dead. Look at what we've done. Look at all his cages. Look at you. We are all perverted. Everything good in us gets perverted. I wanted to be good and kind and I made myself a slave instead. I lie awake at night planning how I am going to leave him, but I can't…" (473).

Such perversions of dreams have wide ramifications in the Australian context, and most importantly, all these perversions are clear illustrations of the eroding of the dreams of the Australians due to the spatial contestations. This projection brings into light the inner insecurity and sense of alienation among the subjects in Australia and the consequent spatial contestations, dilemmas, insecurities, and dialectics. Pointing out this peculiar Australian condition and the spatial contestations further, Herbert says that his children were "spawned by lies, suckled on dreams, infested with dragons" and that's why his children "could never have been normal, extraordinary" (359). All these references have exquisitely pinpointed the lies in Australian history and the consequent spatial anxieties. Through these utterances, the novel questions the very rhetoric of *terra nullius* and deconstructs the politics of space in the Australian landscape. The novel further shows how the politics of space in Australia has severely affected the people in all spheres of their lives including private and public.

However, Herbert in his narrative appears to have a high belief "in the potential of Australia as a place of self-transformation" (Woodcock 62) and sees Australia as "something imagined by men and women, and if it could be imagined into one form, it could be imagined into another" (Carey 561). From all these analyses, it can thus be said here that place and space have left innumerable and varied ramifications in shaping human experiences, existence, psychology, identity, actions, and subjective responsiveness in Australia.

Conclusion

Carey's *Illywhacker* has incorporated into the spatial contestation and dialectics in Australia in an extensive manner. Interestingly, spatial instabilities in Australia as manifested from the illustrations of *Illywhacker* have derived from the problematic of land and the

settlement of the British. These spatial instabilities in Australia surrounding the territory have resulted in inevitable anxieties and conflicts between the British settlers and the Aboriginals as evident in the cases of Herbert and other characters. Moreover, the fears of dispossession and extinction on the part of the Aboriginals in the Australian landscape have contributed immensely to the spatial dialectics, contestation, and instabilities. Apart from these, the spatial contestation in Australia as presented in *Illywhacker* has subjected both the British settlers and the Aboriginals to disharmony, anxiety, and traumatic experience as well.

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