CORE

Metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

Provided by Research Online @ ECU

Edith Cowan University

Research Online

Theses : Honours

Theses

1992

The pursuit of fulfilment: Desire in Peter Carey's Illywhacker

Jonas Byford

Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons

Part of the Literature in English, Anglophone outside British Isles and North America Commons

Recommended Citation

Byford, J. (1992). *The pursuit of fulfilment: Desire in Peter Carey's Illywhacker*. https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/413

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/413

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

THE PURSUIT OF FULFILMENT: DESIRE IN PETER CAREY'S *ILLYWHACKER*

BY

Jonas Byford

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

at the Faculty of Arts, Edith Cowan University

Date of Submission: 22.4.92

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

"I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text."

Signature..

Date..22.:4.:92...........................

Table Of Contents

Part		Page
1	Introduction	1
2	Book One	4
3	Book Two	22
4	Book Three	35
5	Conclusion	47
6	Notes	48
7	Bibliography	51

Part One: Introduction

"All desire springs from a lack, which it strives continually to fill."[1]

This paper is a close textual analysis exploring the different levels at which desire is manifest in Peter Carey's *Illywhacker*. It attempts to show how desire, and the expectation of its fulfilment, have the effect of propelling the narrative and implicating the reader in the text. It is also the aim of the paper to argue that, despite all *Illywhacker's* gestures to the contrary, and its expectation of fulfilment, at no level is this desire realized in the novel. It should be stated that this is not an evaluative judgement.

The first level at which desire is manifest in *Illywhacker* is in the realist aspects of the text. The discussion of this draws upon Derrida's notion of logocentrism which is defined by Raman Selden as "the desire for a centre"[2]. Selden explains:

> The notion of 'structure' ... has always presupposed a 'centre' of meaning of some sort. This 'centre' governs the structure but is itself not subject to structural analysis (to find the structure of the centre would be to find another centre). People desire a centre because it guarantees *being as presence* ... Western thought has developed innumerable terms which operate as centering principles: being, essence, substance, truth, form, beginning, end, purpose, consciousness, man, God and so on.[3]

The logocentrism of the realist aspects of the text is evident in a number of elements which include the organization and structure of the novel, its use of traditional genres such as the picaresque, and in the theme of characters desiring stability and order in their lives.

The metafictional elements, with their self-reflexivity and emphasis on the plural nature of 'reality' also enforce the notion of desire in the text. These aspects subvert the logocentric binary oppositions in the novel. Derrida's theory of the supplement is useful here in

conveying both the subversion and the subsequent desire. David Buchbinder provides a succinct explanation of the concept of the supplement:

> This may be defined as a text or element which is added to or is considered secondary to another, more complete textual structure or system. However...if the structure can be added to, it cannot be complete, and if the supplement can be added, it cannot be merely secondary. Thus [in the] opposition *nature/culture*, we can see that we commonly think of nature as primary and complete, while culture is secondary, because artificial, and, for the same reason destined to incompleteness: culture can be considered a supplement to nature. However, by the logic which Derrida articulates his theory of the supplement, nature, despite our post-Romantic attatchment to the concept, cannot be complete...otherwise culture would necessarily never have been invented. If culture is not supplementary to nature we must look for a third term *which includes both "nature" and "culture"*.[4]

This theory highlights how the metafictional subversion of binary oppositions in *Illywhacker* results in the 'oppositions' existing in a permanent relation of tension, being defined by what they are not, what they lack. As Eagleton comments in his discussion of Lacanian theory "All desire springs from a lack".[5]

Desire is manifest in both the realist and metafictional aspects of the text. If Derrida's theory of the supplement is applied to the relation between the logocentric (realist) elements and the metafictional elements then desire can be seen to be operating on another level. This paper will argue that, as in Derrida's theory, the metafictional and realist aspects of *Illywhacker* exist in an interdependent relation of tension in which neither element is ever able to assert complete dominance over the other.

Desire is also manifest in *Illywhacker* at the level of language itself. As Eagleton writes in his discussion of Lacan's theory of language:

> All desire springs from a lack. Human language works by such a lack: the absence of the real objects which signs designate, the fact that words have meaning only by virtue of the absence and exclusion of others. To enter language, then, is to become a prey to desire: language, Lacan remarks, is 'what hollows being into desire'.[6]

The paradoxical nature of language and the notions of deferral and difference which are essential to desire are encapsulated in Derrida's notion of *differance*. As Buchbinder explains:

> ... if signs - words - have meaning *only* through difference, 'essential' or 'absolute' meaning does not exist. Rather, what we have is the trace of those absent meanings whose differential relationship give meaning to the particular sign before us.
> ... the more a text reaches to encase meaning within its structure of signs, the more elusive that meaning becomes. This is the second meaning of *differance*, which in French can mean 'deferral'. Derrida argues that meaning is always *to be* attained, but never *is* attained.[7]

The final level at which desire operates in *Illywhacker* is in readers of the text. The paper takes up the position that meaning is not given to readers but constructed by them. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that readers respond to those aspects of the text which fulfil their desire and represses those aspects which do not. Readers are also implicated in the text by such factors as the generic and structural aspects which generate an expectancy of closure and fulfilment. A similar gesture toward fulfilment is offered by Herbert in his perception of the relationship between narrator and reader as being that of a salesman and his customer.

A particular focus in Part Three will be the desire which springs from the split between the signifier and the signified. This draws upon the Lacanian theory that the signifier points towards, but can never arrive at, the signified (the meaning it signifies). The impossibility of harmony between the signifier and the signified, the lack implicit in their relation of tension, a "potentially endless movement from one signifier to another is what Lacan means by desire".[8]

This analysis approximately follows the structure of the novel, with its division into three sections, in order to more effectively trace the sense of development and progression which the novel generates.

Part Two: Book One

An analysis of *Illywhacker* reveals the existence in the text of two competing views of reality. The metafictional elements of the novel have the effect of emphasizing the plural nature of reality and of undermining the text's own authority, whilst existing alongside, and competing against, a logocentric emphasis on order and authority. The relation of tension in which these elements exist gives rise to a sense of desire which pervades all aspects of *Illywhacker*.

The title itself embodies this tension in that it serves both to assert the authority of the text by virtue of being an established convention of literature (like the dedication which follows it) and to undermine this authority by its implied function as a *caveat emptor*. This oscillation between the imposing and undermining of authority is neatly reflected in Carey's use of definitions from *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* which attempt to impose a definitive meaning on the book's title. Similarly, by listing extracts from Mark Twain in 1897, Kylie Tennant in 1941, Baker in 1943 and Hal Porter in 1975, Carey places *Illywhacker* firstly, through the Twain extract, in a literary tradition and then more specifically through Tennant, Baker and Porter as following a tradition of Australian writing. This act of validation, along with the novel's division into three approximately equal books, serves as a reminder that the metafictional aspects of the text exist within this logocentric framework.

The text's tension between the assertion and the denial of authority is apparent from the opening paragraph of *Illywhacker*. The first sentence of the novel, an assertion of identity, generates a sense of narratorial authority that is immediately undermined by its juxtaposition against the image of the narrator as an exhibit, a prisoner of life, unable to comprehend how he "can feel so bad and still not die."[1] The tension is perpetuated by the stark contrast between the vigorous tone of the narrative and the destabilizing substance of what is actually being stated. It is with an ironic vitality that Herbert Badgery imparts to

his audience the destabilizing confession that he is "a terrible liar and (has) always been a liar" (11) and that his age is the only fact that can be relied upon. The suggestion of instability is compounded by images of the vigorous narrator as a figure of pathetic frailty who possesses a "foul-smelling mouth", admits that "It is a relief to not worry about my legs any more" (11) and describes himself as being "like some old squid decaying on the beach" (12). Herbert Badgery's name itself suggests an identity existing in a supplementary tension between animal and human. Badgery also carries a connotation of Herbert's narratorial role as a badgerer and teaser of the reader highlighting that logocentrism is subverted even in the smallest unit of meaning in the text.

Although the substance of the narrative is destabilizing, a number of devices are used to suggest order and authority. In the extract in which Herbert states " I feel no more ashamed of my lies than my farts (I rip forth a beauty to underline the point). There will be complaints, of course. (There are complaints now, about the fart - my apologies, my fellow sufferers.)" (11) the narrator is laying bare the construction of his own narrative by doubting the truth of his utterances, yet the humour and naturalistic coarseness of Herbert's analogy between farts and lies is such that it generates a sense of charm and warmth which overrides the instability created by the metafictional aspect, replacing it with a suggestion of security. The colloquial, naturalistic language evokes a sense of honesty and intimacy which, to a significant degree, nullifies the metafictional effect of Herbert's admission that lying is his speciality. The destabilizing impact of the metafictional elements of the narrative is lessened even more by the narrator's open attempt to control the reader's response, "my advice is not to waste your time with your red pen, to try to pull apart the strands of lies and truth, but to relax and enjoy the show."(11)

Herbert undermines the validity of his own narrative by foregrounding its element of construction. In his depiction of Annette Davidson's bookshelves he states, "But now, if I wanted to, I could invent a library for her. I could fill up her bookcases carelessly,

elegantly, easily, stack volumes end to end..." (12) and evokes a similar sense of constructedness and randomness when commenting on the subject of his father, "I will tell you about him later, perhaps, I make no promises."(12) The tension in the narrative between such destabilizing elements and the conflicting desire for stability is evident in the fact that Herbert's metafictional subversion of the validity of the text in these extracts is achieved by emphasising and asserting his control as a narrator. When Herbert says, "I will tell you about him later, perhaps, I make no promises" (12), he manages to evoke a certain metafictional randomness, yet this is undermined by a social realist evocation of narratorial control and spontaneity which has the naturalistic effect of concealing the construction of the novel.

The view that suburban Australia provides stability and security is subverted in the novel by the disdain Annette Davidson and Phoebe McGrath hold for the town of Geelong. With Annette's guidance, Phoebe sees her hometown as being stagnant rather than stable, restricting rather than secure. For Phoebe, Geelong's stagnation is encapsulated in its rural aspect which is evoked by repeated images of the town as a giant farmyard, its inhabitants possessing the narrow vision and dull conformity of livestock. Annette lives in Villamente Street, "a quiet, almost rural, lower middle class street [where] the people next door [keep] a cow" (15). The farmyard metaphor is reinforced by the statement that "The pigs sum up everything Phoebe hates about Geelong" (13) and by Phoebe's denouncement of Villamente Street as " a street full of pigs" (17). The narrator further reinforces the notion of stagnant suburbia with a description of Phoebe's schoolmates which echoes the people-as-livestock metaphor - "I cannot blame [Annette] for disliking Geelong ... : all those stout-legged daughters of squatters who displayed the dull certainties of their type" (13).

Phoebe does not derive a sense of community and security from her hometown, but instead, feels stifled by its claustrophobic insularity. Her misery and the denial of her self expression is clearly apparent in the passage - "She felt the unhappiness push into her,

thread itself through her like piano wire, push out through her stomach and bind her wrists" (17). Phoebe's release from this oppression is achieved by the schoolgirl virtually reconstructing her identity under the guidance of her teacher, Annette Davidson. The limitations of Phoebe's new found freedom and identity are apparent in the ironic fact that her individuality is obtained by adopting Annette's mannerisms and suspect values.

Both teacher and pupil take refuge from the small-town oppression in intellectual pursuits and aesthetic appreciation, which encourage Phoebe to study French and history and enable her to reveal herself as a "beauty" (15). Annette and Phoebe believe their attitudes and values to be antithetical to those held by the population of suburban Geelong, yet they are revealed to be similar in their insularity. Phoebe's new identity involves becoming the "most accomplished imitator of the Davidson walk" (14) and as Herbert relates:

> She knew the names of the streets of Paris and many of the people who had walked on them. She knew the stations on the metro. She knew what a bidet was. She read Ruskin and learned to scorn Henry Lawson ... and learned to mock his bush poetry with her mentor's one-sided smile (14).

Although Phoebe's newfound education opens up new areas of interest and provides outlets for self expression, they are shown to replace the insularity and social snobbery of the Hermitage Church of England Girls' Grammar School and Geelong with the elitism that characterizes intellectual and aesthetic snobbery. Phoebe's acquisition of aesthetic and intellectual snobbery is highlighted by her mockery of Lawson, her father's favourite poet, whilst her lack of real individuality is shown by the fact that she mocks "with *her mentor's* [italics mine] one-sided smile." (14). The construction of Phoebe's new identity, the elitist attitude toward suburban Geelong which she shares with Annette, and the couple's perception of the town as possessing an oppressive rural uncleanliness are all neatly conveyed in the image of Phoebe removing "ingrained dirt from her knees" with the assistance of Annette and petroleum jelly (14).

The novel's emphasis on the constructed nature of the lives of individual characters is illustrated by the importance both Annette and Phoebe choose to bestow on aesthetic appreciation. When, in middle-age, Annette Davidson decides to write a book about her life she chooses "to write about eight months in Paris in 1916 and ignore twenty-eight years in Australia" (13). A similar choice is made by Phoebe in her perception of the Australian landscape:

> Phoebe ... reduced the landscape to its most pleasing essentials. She ... allowed her eyelashes to strain out that which was not to her taste. She removed those piles of hard volcanic rocks, ... those lonely treeless farmhouses ... She turned those endless miles of sheep and wheat into something the men who farmed it would never recognize. All she retained was the cobalt blue sky above the plain of shimmering gold. You couldn't make a quid in one of Phoebe's landscapes (21).

The sense of authority and control Phoebe exhibits in life is also apparent in Herbert, in his role as narrator. Herbert, with an authoritative power, divides his life into chapters and milestones so that his detachment from his father at the age of ten is considered his day of birth whilst the incident at Balliang East is seen as the commencement of adulthood (40) and the decision to seek married life and domesticity is deemed to be "the first decent chapter of his life" (75).

The suggestion of control and stability evoked by Herbert's attempt to establish order on his life-story is undermined by its juxtaposition against the motif of characters being depicted in terms of animal imagery. The imagery, with its connotations of vulnerability and dependency, is the antithesis of order and control and culminates in the concept of a pet emporium housing Australians as exhibits. Herbert, at the outset of the novel describes himself as being "like some old squid decaying on the beach" (12), an image compounded by subsequent descriptions of him resembling a dragonfly and a bower-bird . The vulnerability implied in the depiction of characters as animals is most clearly apparent in the description of Molly McGrath as "a creature building a fragile stick nest on a beach that will shortly be deluged by tide" (19) and by the images of Molly as a caged humming-bird and her daughter "admiring herself like a budgie in a cage" (205).

The pattern of animal imagery is maintained in Book One through virtually every character. The catalogue of descriptions include Molly as a cat and a bird, with her husband Jack as "cooing" turtle-doves (18), while Jack, alone, is described in terms of a labrador and a snake. Phoebe is likened to a water bird and a budgie, Goog O'Hagen to a possum, Ernest Vogelnest to a crab, while David McCorkell, Ian Oswald - Smith, the Cocky Abbots and the English are all equated with rabbits. The fact that Molly is depicted in terms of both a cat and a bird suggests she embodies a supplementary tension between the prey and the preyed upon. This supplementary relationship is also evident in the depiction of Jack as being both a labrador and a snake, tamed and untamed, passive and threatening. The prevalence of bird imagery in the names of the characters reinforces the symbolic linking of characters with naming which runs throughout the text. Both Vogelnest (literally 'bird nest') and Cocky Abbot are suggestive of bird imagery.

Herbert perceives himself as being able to construct his own identity, a view shared by Phoebe: "You have invented yourself, Mr Badgery, and that is why I like you ... You can be anything you want." (91). Herbert, who by his own admission is "obsessed with houses" (33), applies the same enthusiasm to the construction of his identity as he does to the building of a home. The similarity between the two preoccupations is emphasised by Carey's use of the same metaphor to describe Herbert's embellishment of his aviator image and his construction of a home for Phoebe and family near the Maribyrnong River: "I was an Aviator. That was my value to them [the McGraths]. I set to work to reinforce this value. I propped it up and embellished it a little. God damn, I danced around it like a bloody bower-bird putting on a display" (33).

"I worked on that hall like a bower-bird, running in and out with nails in my mouth, hammer in my hand" (159). The desire for domestic stability and security implicit in the bower-bird metaphor is not fulfilled. The 'nest' at Maribyrnong becomes a cage for

Phoebe, who leaves Herbert breaking up the family unit, while the lies which he uses to impress the McGraths lead to the death of Jack and the eventual dissipation of the McGrath family.

As Helen Daniel points out Herbert is not in control of his life but "trapped inside his own snake-lie"[2]. By his own admission Herbert cannot control the snake : "It would not become tame or even accept its captivity" (47), a characteristic he sees as making it a "true Australian" (139). This notion of untameness being an essential Australian characteristic is extended to the Australian landscape when Herbert confides his inability to control his life:

> I had hacked at life like the O'Hagen's hacked at the bush, ring-barking, chopping, blistering my hands to bring it to heel, always imagining a perfect green kikuyu pasture where life would be benevolent and gentle. But where the bush had been bracken and thistles always appeared and then these had to be conquered as well (63).

For Herbert, living the life of an illywhacker, and trying to achieve a sense of order and stability from such an existence, is as futile as trying to conquer the unrelenting bush landscape. By highlighting his plight through such a comparison Herbert is reflecting the Australian cultural myth that a sense of identity and stability is attained through the 'authentic' experience of conquering the land.

It is in chapter twenty-four of the novel, after he has worked on the land with the O'Hagens, that Herbert comes to terms with the tension within himself. The metaphor of hacking at life "like the O'Hagen's hacked at the bush" (63) is extended to the point where Herbert's internal conflict between his destabilizing illywhacker approach to life and his desire for a sense of security and order is encapsulated by the tension within his work-sore hands:

> The skin on my palms was torn and blistered from the axe work and had dried hard. My knuckles were bruised and broken. I felt everything that was wrong with my character in those two painful hands - the palms and knuckles always in opposition to each other (74).

In a moment of self-awareness he regrets the existence of Herbert Badgery, seller of lies and T Model Fords: "I regretted that my actions confused people. I regretted being a big mouth, a bullshitter and a bully" (74) and sees himself as he really is: "I was thirty-three years old. I turned the rear-vision mirror so that I could see my face ... One morning, I knew, I would look into the mirror and see the rotting teeth and clouded eyes, battles not won, lies not believed" (74).

The fact that this revelation of self-discovery occurs at the age of thirty-three has the connotative effect of removing it from the immediate and more insignificant world of Balliang East to the level of biblical allusion and the Crucifixion of Christ. The connotations of the crucifixion are evoked by the image of the totally spent Herbert with a body that is "stiff and sore" and "two painful hands" with knuckles that are "bruised and broken" (74). The notion of this being the death of the old Herbert that precedes the birth and release of the new, is reinforced by the setting of the chapter. The saltpans are desolate and virtually lifeless with the only features of the landscape being a "dull grey cloud", the ominous sight of a crow which "sounded like a barbed wire" and the image of Herbert's "black motor car stranded and dying like a whale." (75). Within this chapter there is an exploration of Herbert's internal conflict and his desire for stability which is itself juxtaposed against the presentation of the struggle on both a denotative level of immediacy and authenticity (the setting of Balliang East) and on a connotative level (the world of biblical allusion). The stability suggested by locating the action firmly in the confines of the real world, Balliang East, is undermined by the ironic image of Herbert, the "big mouth", "bullshitter" and "bully" (74) undergoing a Christ-like resurrection of self.

Herbert's desire for stability drives him toward what he perceives as the security of the domestic ideal, represented by the McGrath family: "It was then I decided to marry Phoebe. It came to me quite simply, on the saltpans of Balliang East. I would marry

Phoebe, build the aeroplanes at Barwon Aeros, be a friend to Jack, a son to Molly" (74). The McGraths hold for Herbert the promise of family stability that has been absent in his life and the sense of identity that comes from being able to adopt the roles of husband, son, friend and father. Herbert's desire for stability is apparent in the fact that he seeks the physical reward and sense of control that comes from building a family and building his own aeroplanes. After experiencing the sense of insecurity that comes with selling lies as well as cars he is determined to be like Vogelnest, the German farmer, who, as O'Hagen states, has "made something" (72) and O'Hagen himself who tells Herbert "I had it in my head I wanted to *make* something of myself ... I wanted to make something, not just sell things" (71).

When Herbert walks away from the T Model Ford on the saltpans to embrace family life he sees his action as representing the death of his dependence upon selling lies and cars and the birth of a new beginning:

> I felt an enormous relief, a lightness. I was finished with Fords and the dizziness, the dryness in my throat, the pain in my hands, did not stop me appreciating the beauty of this landscape with the black motor car stranded and dying like a whale (75).

For Herbert, stability is not found in selling lies nor is it derived from the landscape. Despite "appreciating the beauty" (75) of it, Badgery's feelings for the landscape are more those of awe and distance than understanding and intimacy. The self-awareness Herbert has acquired, and the sense of rebirth he feels, is reinforced at the close of the chapter: "I could see myself. I saw how I walked. There, on the road: a man entering the first decent chapter of his life" (75).

Herbert's ideal of family stability, the McGraths, are unable to fulfil his needs and expectations. When Jack refuses to accept the idea of Herbert as his son-in-law he reveals the limitations of their mateship bond, and gives an indication of the instability that lies beneath the surface of the McGrath family unit. Herbert perceives Jack as a man who will

accept almost anyone for who they are, a man who owns "a house where you could put your feet up and drink French champagne or Ballarat bitter according to your mood" (34), "a man who made few social distinctions" (20). The limitations of Jack's openness are exposed to Herbert when he hints at the possibility of marrying Phoebe:

> My friend Jack was my friend in all things but was repulsed by what I really was. I admired and loved him, even though he could not abide the Chinese; but he could only like the bullshit version of me. He would have condemned me for what happened at O'Hagens, ...He would not have seen the abandonment of the Ford with any sympathy (79).

Jack's failure to comprehend Herbert's incident with the Ford, as with his intolerance of the Chinese, reinforces the view of mateship put forward by Graeme Turner in his book *National Fictions*, that the concept is ultimately an 'anti-individualist' one which masks a "fear of difference."[3]

Jack is, like his friend Cocky Abbott, a "practical" man (104). His name with its suggestion of a 'Jack of all trades' reinforces this. Both men are able to "relax together in their certainties" (104) and Jack feels confident in assuring Cocky Abbott that Herbert, too, is "practical" (105). The mateship bond between Herbert and Jack is such that their first night together, spent talking and reciting Lawson and Paterson, is compared by Herbert "to the first night with a new lover" (37). When, however, Herbert attempts to reveal the other aspect of his character that places emotional needs over the 'practical' values of successful business, Jack exhibits an unwillingness to accept or understand difference. Herbert is disillusioned by his friend's lack of understanding:

> Jack, I reflected, ... had understood nothing. He had gone on in his blundering, amiable way, liking everyone without discrimination, anyone, that is, who was not a Chinaman or a Jew. Jack, who had read aloud the poetry of Henry Lawson, had understood nothing about it. He had let me down (128).

After convincing himself of the necessity of marrying Phoebe, Herbert perceives the McGraths as a perfect, stable family unit, eager to welcome him as Phoebe's husband:

> A veil of marriage fell across the table. I watched my future father-in-law dole out the pudding in heavy country slices and could easily have got up and hugged him. My mother-in-law was busy with the custard. My bride sat pale and beautiful with her head bowed (76).

The movement from the expectancy of, "my future father-in-law", to the certainty of referring to "my mother-in-law" and "my bride", exposes a dream-like state in Herbert which ill-prepares him for the instability that exists within the family and the unwillingness of Jack and Molly to have him marry their daughter. There is also a sense in which Herbert's idealized view of the family is being subverted at a linguistic level in this passage. The juxtaposition of the light veil with the "heavy country slices" and the image of this veil falling, rather than floating, implies a sense of instability in the McGrath family.

The vulnerability that is shown to be present in the mateship of Herbert and Jack is also apparent in the outwardly stable characters of Molly and Phoebe. When Herbert first sees Molly preparing for one of the McGrath's routine picnics, he comments: "I saw no terrors" (19), yet his retrospective assessment of her is that "She made happy optimistic cries but a practised observer would see she did not quite believe them" (p 19). Molly's mother refers to her daughter as "my song bird" (94) suggesting the pet-like security that Molly loses when she discovers her mother's suicide. The fragility that exists within her character is highlighted by the secret of Molly's earlier dependence upon "an electrically operated chastity belt" (110) to dispel thoughts of her mother's suicide and to prevent her own. When she tries to rid herself of the belt Molly experiences "the hostile nature of the bush" (108) and, as with Herbert, the landscape does not supply rejuvenation and stability, but rather alienation and threat: "... when Molly Rourke jumped it was as if the fires of Hell, not a tangle of blackberries, lay below her skirts" (108).

In Phoebe's character there are further warning signs, which Herbert is oblivious to, which suggest a degree of naivety and presumptuousness in his plan to use the McGraths as a

foundation for a secure future. The internal conflict within Phoebe and the vulnerability of her youth are emphasised when she falls naked from the roof and is faced with the prospect of her affair with Herbert being made public:

> In mid-air, naked, she wished for death, her chest crushed, her heart pierced, her legs snapped like quail bones. Her feelings were not those of a radical, Bohemian, free-lover, but a seventeen-year-old girl in Geelong who faces social ruin (113).

The image of Phoebe falling like Icarus from the sky is suggestive of the tension which is embedded in the connotations of her name. As with Molly's embodiment of the opposition between the prey and the preyed upon, Phoebe as the first moon goddess, is identified with the opposition between sun and moon (the male form Phoebus being the sun god). Despite the liberation from the parochial ideals of suburban Geelong that Phoebe receives through Annette, she reveals the limitations of her compassion for, and understanding of, people, when she observes a Chinaman in the street: "... Phoebe was her father's daughter because she saw, not a man, but a cartoon from the Bulletin: John Chinaman outside his den" (122).

Herbert's narrative is, itself, unstable in that it, at times, moves from the genre of social realism and enters the genre of the fantastic. In Brian McHales view:

> "The fantastic ... involves a face-to-face confrontation between the possible (the "real") and the impossible, the normal and the paranormal. Another world penetrates or encroaches upon our world ... , or some representative of our world penetrates an outpost of the other world, the world next door."[4]

Such an encroachment upon the 'real' world occurs in the novel when the ghost of Jack, wearing a snake "like a necklace" (194) around him, comes to haunt Herbert at his home near the Maribyrnong River. As McHale suggests: "The fantastic ... can ... be seen as a zone of hesitation ... between this world and the world next door".[5] With the episode involving Jack's ghost, 'hesitation' is invoked in the reader by Herbert's admission at the beginning of the book that he is "a terrible liar" (11). The reader thus hesitates between the fictional events of *Illywhacker* as Herbert tells them and the fictional events of the

book as they may have happened if Herbert is lying. The effect such hesitation has upon the reader is captured in McHale's comment concerning the fantastic in postmodern literature, in which he suggests that: "in the context of postmodernism the fantastic has been co-opted as one of a number of strategies of an ontological poetics that pluralizes the "real" and thus problematizes representation".[6] Hesitation between Herbert's account of events in the text and how they really, or may have, happened thus can be seen as having the effect of 'problematizing' and 'pluralizing' the 'real' world of Peter Carey and the reader, and the representation of that world.

The irony of Herbert's narrative lies in the fact that it ultimately undermines order and generates ontological uncertainty through Herbert's own authoritarian attempts to validate such episodes as the appearance of Jack's ghost. The narrator's attempt to dispel doubt in the readers mind and sell his version of events is highlighted by the fact that he prefaces his ghost tale with the comment: "A man who wishes his tale believed does himself no service by speaking of the supernatural; I would rather have slipped in some neatly tailored lie" (194). Instead of being convincing, the comment becomes paradoxical when juxtaposed against the earlier confession from Herbert: "I have always been a liar" (11). Herbert's attempt to establish order on his ghost tale is further apparent in the attention to detail which characterizes his description of the ghost:

> The ghost was not a single solid shape, but rather a confluence of lights nestling in a lighter glow, ... It sat at the kitchen table with the snake. The snake slithered like a necklace around the ghost, ... You could see the snake's innards pulsing: liquids, solids, legs of frogs and other swarming substances with tails like tadpoles (194).

Herbert's desire for credibility in his narrative is also apparent in the ironic fact that when he narrates stories of a surreal nature his language becomes more naturalistic and coarse as if a deliberate compensation for the incredulous nature of the tale. This is highlighted by his defence of his ghost tale, when he comments:

> You are free to argue it, but it makes and made no difference, not to the story, not to my prickling skin, or to my bowels which loosened and gave me a liquid shit to spray and splatter around the dunnycan ... (194-5)

and by his comment upon the psychiatrist's discovery that Herbert possesses fully functioning mammary glands: "When he discovered my tits he nearly wet himself" (154).

The inclusion of snake imagery in Herbert's ghost tale has the dual effects of undermining Herbert's authority and establishing an ordered pattern of snake and animal imagery in the text which culminates in the metaphor of the Pet Emporium. The snake's versatility as a symbol sees it invariably suggesting Herbert and his lying (the assertion that the snake is his pet is the first lie he tells Phoebe), Australia and its incapacity for tameness, Jack, and Herbert's lack of control over his life. The snake imagery can be seen to be like the novel itself in that it is polysemous while possessing its own linear pattern. The imagery is also revealing in that it first appears as a symbol evoking Herbert's illywhacker, liar, self and his ability to sell lies to the McGraths, yet concludes the first book of the novel as a, literally, haunting reminder to the narrator of how little control he has over his wife and family. Herbert sees the ghost with its snake as having robbed him of a sense of genetic ownership and control over his first child: "I knew I had been defeated in a battle I did not know the rules of, and my tormentor had slipped inside my defence and thrust his weapon home without his victim being aware of the nature of the wound" (195).

In asserting his narratorial power, Herbert undermines the logocentric order of the narrative through his sudden shift from ulterior narration to simultaneous narration, involving a one hundred year leap in time within the space of one paragraph. This narratorial intrusion in which the one hundred and thirty-nine year old Herbert meets his first psychiatrist also has the metafictional effect of alerting the reader to the psychoanalytic connotations of the text's imagery: "Snakes and aeroplanes, he says, are not snakes and aeroplanes at all, but symbols" (154). The narrator revels in the intrusion

and highlights the god-like power he believes he possesses in his role as salesman and narrator:

> There are other customers to take care of and I must push on to the years 1920 and 1923 and get them done with. I wish I had been able to control them as well as I can now, for half the time I blundered ignorant and blinkered in the dark, ...but now I sit behind my instruments like Christ Almighty summoning up a stolen letter from Jonathon Oakes' drawer to get the next leg started. (154).

The letter which immediately follows provides another temporal shift from the simultaneous narration which preceded it to intercalated narration. It also offers an alternative point of view in the novel by moving from the extradiegetic level of Herbert's narration to the hypodiegesis of Phoebe's letter. This shift in narrative levels, despite the fact it is 'summoned up' by Herbert, is in its juxtaposition against Herbert's claim of a god-like narratorial authority, an ironic subversion of the notion that the narrator is the singular authoritative voice in the text. The effect of this alternative point of view is highlighted by Phoebe's second letter to Annette which provides a different perspective on Herbert's dream of family unity: " ... I did not, even for a moment, guess that what he wanted was so *ordinary*: a fat wife with a dozen children and cabbage and stew every night" (190).

The first inclusion of an alternative point of view in the text, Phoebe's first letter, is immediately followed, as if it were an insecure reaction, by a passage in which Herbert describes the ordered structure of the city of Melbourne and emphasizes his own passion for ownership and control: "There is a passion in Melbourne you might not easily notice on a casual visit and I must not make it sound a dull thing, or sneer at it, for it is a passion I share - Melbourne has a passion for owning land and building houses" (157). As Phoebe's letters become less compatible with Herbert's point of view they are given less autonomy within the narrative. The first letter is a chapter in itself, properly addressed, dated and set out, the second, although formally ended and given a chapter unto itself, is without the formal layout of the first, whilst the third letter devoid of any formal structure

is incorporated within one of Herbert's "own" chapters. The content of the third letter, in contrast to that of the previous ones, is refuted by Herbert who prefaces the letter with an insecure sounding address to the reader: "Now you have those letters in your hand it is easy enough for you to take Phoebe's side and look at me as a fool, or something worse. It is your privilege and if I did not wish you to have it, I would have kept the letters hidden" (197). His attempt to establish his credibility with the reader culminates in a tone of impatience which seems to imply that Herbert is insecure about the possibility that he has failed to sell the audience his version of events: "So this knowledge about my wife not only cost me pain, also money. But it is yours. Take it. It goes together with the rest" (198). Herbert's offer to take his knowledge has the effect of contrasting an implied reader. His address suggests a surrender of narratorial authority, an enticement for the reader to construct his or her own meaning. This inversion is the result of a violation of what Teresa Dovey refers to as "the boundary between the world of which one tells and the world in which one tells".[7]

Herbert's passion for ownership and control is manifest in his attempt to build his ideal of stability, a family home. He assumes the role of "protector and provider" (159) and makes his family his life: "I lived for my family, and Phoebe in particular, ..." (160). Herbert's perception of his own stability is encapsulated in his feelings for his tenant, Horace: "Horace was cosy and comfortable and domestic ... It was comforting to have him in the house, like a pet who can be relied upon to give affection" (191). The pet metaphor which Herbert uses to describe Horace alerts the reader to the fact that Herbert's all-consuming passion for domestic stability may be at the expense of inhibiting the self-expression of those around him. Herbert remains oblivious to his wife's discontent as he articulates the realization of his dream: " ... I had at last, a home, a family, a domestic hearth" (191). This is reinforced in Herbert's retrospective analysis of his family life:

> I imagined my passion for building was shared by everyone. I did not doubt that it was understood: that my ruling love was for human warmth ... Aeroplanes and cars seemed, in comparison, cold and soulless things, of no consequence in comparison

> to the family we were building. For the first time in my life I felt I had a place on earth (198).

The reality of Herbert's lack of control over his life is highlighted by the ironic fact that the stable structure that he has single-handedly built, the family home, becomes a metaphor in Phoebe's poem: "I never knew I was a hired hand in the construction of my wife's one true poem" (201). Phoebe finds Herbert's family home more restricting than liberating and her response is to reverse its meaning by using the home and the bird-house which is part of it in her poem as symbols of her own oppression:

> Phoebe's great poem was not built from words, but from corrugated iron and chicken wire. She did not even build it herself but had me, her labourer, saw and hammer and make it for her. She had me rhyme a cage with a room, a bird with a person, ... my home with a gaol, myself with a warder ... (205).

Rather than fulfilling his desire for stability and authority, Herbert is seen to exist in a supplementary relation of tension. He creates yet is not author, he is both active and passive, an agent and a receiver. Herbert the character is shown to be like Herbert the narrator, and like the text itself, in his powerlessness in controlling the meaning of the structure he has created.

Book One of the novel, despite this strong assertion of the impossibility of completely controlling meaning, displays a sense of order in its pattern of imagery which undermines its own thematic assertion. The image of Phoebe at the end of Book One serves as a preparation for the depiction of Herbert at the close of the novel as a lifeless pet within a cage, within a pet emporium wanting only to be cared for and giving nothing in return. The similarity is evident in the passage:

> Nor is it of any importance that she [Phoebe] spent the rest of her life putting all her wiles and energies into being kept, cared for, loved, or that the love she gave in return was of such a brittle quality that Annette Davidson would finally take her own life rather than endure its cutting edges. It is of no importance that she would reveal herself to be self-indulgent, selfish, admiring herself like a budgie in a cage. She was a liar, but who cares? (205).

The paradoxical nature of *Illywhacker* is apparent in the fact that Book One closes with a carefully ordered pattern of imagery which, itself, evokes the impossibility of completely controlling meaning. The desire for stability and the impossibility of complete control are appropriately conveyed in the closing image of Herbert's frustration at his own powerlessness: "The poem was made , set hard, could never be dismantled or unravelled, although ... I did not understand, and battled against its timbers with an axe, howling more loudly than my terrified son. I did not guess how long I was destined to live with it" (206).

Part Three: Book Two

As Herbert's movement toward a sense of fulfilment through the establishment of a family is thwarted at the close of Book One, so to is the momentum of the novel. The loss of self-esteem experienced by Herbert at Maribyrnong is paralled in the second book by his lack of prominence, as he moves aside for the telling of Leah's story. The careful structuring of the novel is apparent in the fact that Book Two opens with a reversion to the narrator's childhood which parallels the refuge he seeks in the maternal security provided by Molly immediately after his breakdown. The reader, like the narrator, experiences a break in the momentum of the text and is forced to restart. Although Herbert has undergone a transformation of character, the tension and desire manifest in the first book are maintained in the second through different characters.

The desire manifest in the realist aspects of Book One is maintained in the second book through the theme of characters attempting to construct and control their lives. The young Herbert sees in Goon Tse Ying an almost magical ability to control life and establish authority:

> "He adopted [the English] dress when it suited him and spoke their language without a trace of accent" (210),
> "... he could look much younger and - when dressed in that formidable English suit - much older" (211),
> ... "[He] taught me to stand in such a way that I would appear bigger than I was, or, conversely, how to appear smaller" (214).

Herbert highlights the fact that the motivation behind Goon's assertion of control is the Anglo-Australian disrespect for the Chinese, when he observes: "Goon...was a man driven by a desire to prove himself civilized to the English he despised" (210). Goon's desire for authority and self-control is juxtaposed against the image of imprisonment and apathy he

perceives in his oppressed people: "They are in gaol. They have locked themselves up in Wong's. They have made themselves prisoners" (212).

Herbert perceives a similar authority and capacity to change in himself:

> I am Herbert Badgery, ... a man who nearly had an aircraft factory, a pioneer aviator anyway, a salesman of more than usual skill ... I ... have travelled the country with a cannon behind me, have built mansions, resumed land, skinned a crow with nothing but air from my lungs, and disappeared from human sight before witnesses (232).

He adds to this list of capabilities in Book Two by becoming "an accomplished Thespian" (339) and "a small-time confidence trickster" (344) and by using Goon's trick of making himself into "a small man" (333) following his breakdown at Maribyrnong. The sense of control Herbert believes he possesses is undermined by the fact that the changes he undergoes do not stem from his own choice but, rather, are forced upon him by circumstances beyond his control. His roles as thespian and confidence trickster are necessitated by poverty, whilst his description of his breakdown: "I made myself into a small man" (333) is an attempt to instill a sense of control in his involuntary emotional breakdown and loss of self-esteem.

The desire for control through making and building which Herbert sought in Book One is maintained in the second book. Herbert declares: "I like making things. It is always soothing, and the very simple things are the most soothing of all" (306). The desire that was present in Book One is still with Herbert, yet after the events of Maribymong, he is aware of the limitations that exist within his obsession of building and making: "I built my huts wherever we stayed, and left them for others to shelter in. This pitiful charity was hardly satisfying to a man like me. And yet I could think of nothing better" (338). The limitations inherent in the notions of building and owning are reinforced by Leah who places them into national and historical perspective in her argument with Herbert:

> There you go, land-house, house-land, you can't help yourself, can you, Mr Badgery? You're true blue. Dinki-di. You think you can put up some shanty

> and that makes it your place, but you can't, and it never will be ... 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 (307).

The concepts of 'truth' and 'ownership' that are inherent in Herbert's obsession with making, and which provide him with a sense of security are here revealed by Leah as societal constructs.

The obsession with making, evident in Herbert, the character, is also manifest in his role as narrator. The act of writing, 'making the narrative', can be seen to hold the same problem of blurring the distinctions between truth and lies, ownership and non-ownership as Herbert's making and owning of houses. As narrator, Herbert attempts to separate the notions of truth by placing lies in a system of hierarchy: "I would rather fill my history with great men and women, philosophers, scientists, intellectuals, artists, but I confess myself incapable of so vast a lie" (326). Herbert's attempt to validate his narrative by distinguishing between that which is created and that which is true is fraught with problems. The declaration at the opening of the novel that Herbert is "a terrible liar" (11) serves to subvert the distinction in the narrative as does Leah's assertion that the *facts* which provide the basis for white Australian history are constructions which ignore the reality that the country was "already occupied"(p 307) before British settlement. Despite Herbert's attempts to establish authority and validity in his narrative the concepts of fact and fiction are not separate in the novel, but exist in an interdependent relation of tension, each carrying a suggestion of construction. The origins of the terms fact and fiction, in themselves, suggest a degree of interdependence between the concepts. The term fact derives from the Latin *facere* ('to make or do')[1] whilst the term fiction carries a similar connotation of creativity, originating from the Latin *fictio*, meaning 'a fashioning'.[2]

Leah's deconstruction of Herbert's obsession with making and owning is followed by a similarly subversive analysis of his dependency upon Molly's elecric belt. The sustenance Herbert derives from the belt is revealed by Leah as nothing more than a hollow

dependency upon a customer product, which itself is merely a substitute for something more substantial:

> Nothing ... sustains you Mr Badgery. You are walking on hot macadam, quickly. All that sustains you is your filthy belt ... You are sustained by a gadget. The gadget does not believe in anything. It does not have an idea. It is just a product. (323).

After exposing Herbert's lack of stability and undermining his means of compensating for it, Leah extends her analysis to suggest that everyone is driven by desires which can only be satisfied on a superficial level: "What is wrong with us all ... is that we are sustained by gadgets, or desires that are satisfied by gadgets" (323).

Leah is able to identify the problem but when she attempts to supply a solution with the comment "my husband ... is sustained by something more substantial" (323) she lacks conviction, appearing to be motivated more from guilt over her voluntary absence from Izzie than from any insightful reasoning. This is evident when she attempts a self-analysis, which Herbert dismisses as "seeking rest in simple theory" (323):

> I cannot stay still anywhere. It is not a country where you can rest ... The blackfeller can rest but we must keep moving. That is why I can't return with my husband as he wishes...because I am selfish, addicted to movement" (323).

Leah's dismissal of herself as selfish and her implication that Izzie's communist ideals are a more valid form of sustenance are, themselves, undermined by Herbert's narratorial comment:

> She was wrong about herself - what sustained her were the threads from the famous suit which she had woven into something new and personal ... she had woven kindness into a philosophy that was as simply practised as sending money to Rosa ... (324).

The inadequacy of Izzie's ideals are apparent when contrasted with the kindness Herbert feels Leah has cultivated:

> What she had made had little in common with Izzie's giant dream, was like one of her proverbial baby swallows beside his giant canvas of smooth grey forms, that ... complex ants' nest bathed in golden light (324).

Leah speaks of Izzie's communism "without conviction" (324) and, against the intimacy and warmth of her own kindness, it stands as a well-meaning but impersonal idealism. Leah supports her husband by claiming the communist "intention is generous" (324), yet the limitations of its generosity are manifest in Izzie's betrayal of his brother and its endorsement by the Party.

Leah articulates the existence of desire in Herbert and highlights the inadequacy of his means of satisfying it. In addition she inadvertently exposes the shortcomings of her husband's source of sustenance and unwittingly leaves Herbert with a belief that kindness is a foundation for fulfilment. The substantiality Herbert feels kindness carries is evident in his depiction of Leah's attribute in terms of a metaphor of construction. The woven threads of kindness Herbert describes Leah as having "made" (324) evoke the same notions of solidity and ownership which fuel his obsession for building.

Despite the positive power of Leah's kindness, it fails to provide total sustenance for her. The extract depicting her train journey home to Izzie and her family highlights a similar insecurity and emptiness in Leah, to that which she had earlier articulated in Herbert. The train trip, for Leah, becomes a psychological journey in which her own insecurities become manifest. Her powerlessness is evoked by the image of her exhibiting a child's fear of venturing into the outside world away from the symbols of security which surround her:

> Like a child who imagines herself locked in her room and then finds the door not locked at all, she stood uncertainly in the corridor, wondering if she would not, after all, be better to stay in her room with her dolls and her books (350).

Leah experiences a similar sense of alienation from the landscape to that which Herbert had earlier confessed to her, when he confided that "the landscape had...always seemed alien to [him], that it made [him] ... melancholy and ... that [he] preferred a small window in a house ..." (308). Leah's dislocation from the landscape is, however, more intense than Herbert's, in that not only is she unable to experience any affinity with it, she also feels that the melancholy the landscape induces in her is, itself, "unrelated to her own experience" (351).

The notion of Australia adopting the dreams and mythologies of other cultures in place of their own, which Graeme Turner refers to in terms of "a colonised subconscious"[3] in his exploration of this theme in Carey's fiction, can be seen, here, as operating on an individual, instead of, national level. Leah's feelings for the landscape are not hers but Herbert's. As the narrator relates: " ... she saw the landscape with Herbert's eyes. It was his, not hers. She could feel nothing for the place, and only sense the things he had told her" (351). Leah's reactions are not governed by any sense of personal history but by Herbert's stories. The effect of this is not only to convey the depth of Leah's dislocation from her surroundings, but also to highlight a degree of self-reflexivity in the text. Leah's plight as an Australian, devoid of a strong sense of her own national and personal history, is, itself, suggestive of her role as a character in the text, trapped within the confines of Herbert's narrative. Leah's position of powerlessness in Herbert's narrative is reinforced by the remote, omniscient authority of his third person narration of the passage.

Just as Leah is devoid of any sense of affinity with the landscape she is also unable to obtain any comfort, or a sense of identity, from her country's history. As Goon highlighted to Herbert in his account of the slaughter at Lambing Flat and Leah reinforced in her description of the country as "stolen land" (307), white Australia has an insubstantial history founded on lies and violence. Leah's desire to resolve her feeling of rootlessness drives her to question her father about the loss of her family's religious

heritage: " ... why he had abandoned the ritual of their race which might have sustained them better in a foreign place. Why ... he denied himself [and her] this comfort" (351).

The emptiness Leah sees in the white Australian culture is conveyed by the juxtaposition of her contemplation of the rituals of Judaism against the Australian social ritual of old ladies chatting while handing out "squashed lammington cakes" (351). The ladies' conversations operate on the level of social ritual to the extent that they are devoid of any substance, or understanding of the surroundings. They are merely: "a series of calls and answering calls like crows will do just before sunset" (352). The bird metaphor maintains the pattern of imagery which dissolves the distinction between humans and animals in the text in order to convey the powerlessness of the characters in their own surroundings.

As Herbert had, in Book One, imagined "a perfect green kikuyu pasture where life would be benevolent and gentle" (63) only to find it ruined by the appearance of "bracken and thistles" (63), Leah thinks of the "ferny glades and cool green places on the other side of Melbourne where the Goldstein family had once motored in search of walks ... " (352). The Edenic image is just as remote for Leah, lost in a past where her family were once a strong unit, in a time when they all: "moved and stopped with a single mind" (352). The strength and sense of identity she gained from being part of such a unit has been replaced by feelings of isolation and dislocation: "She felt lonely, no longer joined to anything" (352).

The term "sustenance", that Leah frequently uses, in its verbal form carries dual connotations of support and deferral which encapsulate the essence of desire. As with Herbert, Leah is driven by a desire to fill a sense of lack in her life, and, as with Herbert, her ultimate response to the empty feelings of isolation and dislocation is to write: "She took out her writing pad - never, ever, did she travel without one - and began the first of many letters in a long and complicated correspondence" (352). Herbert's and Leah's desire, on one level, drives them to write, entering the realm of language, where they

encounter desire on another level. As Eagleton writes: "To enter language ... is to become a prey to desire"[4]. The sense of their deferral of fulfilment is maintained by Herbert's and Leah's immersion in the Lacanian sense of desire which Eagleton articulates as a "potentiallly endless movement from one signifier to another"[5]. This foregrounding of the writing process highlights the self-reflexivity of the narrative by exposing the limitations imposed on the text itself by its immersion in language.

The text's self-reflexivity is also evident in the fact that the split between Sonia's source of sustenance and that which sustains Charles is an embodiment of the tension between the pluralistic and the realist elements in the narrative. This conflation of Herbert's roles as father and author is highlighted by the depiction of the children as products of his lies and imagination. As with the narrative itself, Charles and Sonia are: "Spawned by lies, suckled on dreams, infested with dragons" (359). Their contrasting philosophies echo the narrative tension between a realist belief in the stability and order of the world and a metafictional recognition of plurality and instability:

> ... the difference ... between Charles and Sonia was that Charles, once he could see no *result* from his efforts to disappear, gave up and concentrated on things that were of more *use*, whilst Sonia would not give up and was like someone who has survived a cyclone and can never quite believe in the solidity of a house or the permanence of a tree (359-60).

Charles demonstrates the same belief in being "practical" as the Cocky Abbots, Jack McGrath (104), Molly McGrath (329), and the older Goon Tse Ying (370). The philosophy involves conforming to a Western faith in the existence of rationality and order, and deriving a sense of stability from the solidity of material possessions. It is manifest in Herbert's obsession with building and owning which serves to give him a sense of identity and authority and to reinforce his faith in the permanent nature of things. The philosophy is also apparent in the suggestion of control Herbert instills, with the use of a building metaphor, in his description of the development of Charles' and Sonia's

characters: "They *made* their futures in the same way that people fossicking in a tip must *build* a life, from the materials that come to hand. They made their philosophies from fencing wire ..." (359). The desire to impose order and to control which is suggested in the image of a philosophy being made from fencing wire, is apparent in Charles' own obsession with "birds and reptiles" (359). Charles' love of these creatures ultimately finds expression in the establishment of a pet emporium in which he is able to control and order them at the expense of their freedom.

In contrast to Charles, who only concentrates on things which are of use to him, Sonia is obsessed with "the unsubstantial nature of life ... like someone who ... can never quite believe in the solidity of a house" (359-60). Recognizing the instability of the physical world, she looks to the metaphysical realm of religion for a sense of fulfilment. The split between signifier and signified which is thematized in the text is manifest in Sonia's desire to disappear from the physical world and join Christ. Her endeavour to reach Jesus involves immersing herself in the iconography of Christianity. This embracement of Christian iconography extends to having herself confirmed five times (335), dressing up in her church dress and gloves, clutching a bible (336) and carrying around a "holy picture" of the Assumption of the Virgin (337). Sonia believes Herbert capable of transcending the physical world and reaching Christ, and informs a clergyman of her intentions to follow the example set by the Virgin Mary and "her father Herbert Badgery (who art in heaven)" (337). In her eventual attempt at assumption she again embraces Christianity at a symbolic level, yet falls well short of the sublime, being forced to make do with a blue robe made by Nathan Shick's wardrobe mistress and wearing a: "little white dress which would not, no matter how she tried, come down as far as the Virgin's dress had when she hovered in the clouds above the astonished worshippers below" (p 361).

Sonia is like her father and brother, with their respective obsessions for building and owning, in that she ultimately requires her objective of fulfilment to take a physical form. She is unable to make do with faith and physical iconography, her desire forces her to

pursue physical evidence. Her desire cannot be fulfilled, but, instead, exhibits the perpetual deferral of the realm of the symbolic. The impossibility of transcending the level of signifier and arriving at the signified is conveyed by the irony and black humour in the fact that Sonia's attempt to emulate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary results in her undignified descent down a mine shaft at Clunes. Sonia's fate can be read as a self-reflexive metaphor for the limited, symbolic nature of language and the text itself, in that her attempted ascension to enlightenment and fulfilment becomes a descent to the darkness, and permanent entrapment, of a mine shaft.

The spilt between signifier and signified is also evident in Herbert's attitude toward Christianity. As Herbert highlights when he says of his daughter: "I envied her faith" (336), he recognizes in Christianity the ability to articulate desire, yet he is unable to derive any sense of fulfilment from this source. This is because Herbert's perception of religion is one which is tied to the physical world rather than to any notion of the metaphysical. As with Sonia, Herbert's perception of Christianity is bound to the level of the signifier, but in contrast to his daughter, he equates its meaning with icons which have lost their potency as symbols of spirituality and have become, instead, symbolic of materialism and the physical world. Herbert highlights this by his equation of: "the power of the Christian god [with] electric crosses, holy pictures [and] Irish priests at country football matches." (325)

Herbert does not seek fulfilment in spirituality but in his materialist obsessions with building and owning. These obsessions, as Leah pointed out to Herbert in her speech concerning the construction of white Australian history, are, themselves, materialist symbols of authority and identity. Having failed to find fulfilment in his construction of a family and a home Herbert attempts to construct a second childhood for himself containing the love and security he felt his original one lacked. As Herbert states of his time with Molly McGrath: "I had the childhood I never had, was petted, cosseted, indulged ..." (333) The childhood metaphor is reinforced in his description of Molly's

nursing: "She came to me to attend my wound, smelling of disinfectant and Velvet soap. My mind was not right. I blubbered like a baby, howled and hugged her, raged like a warrior, giggled like a girl," (331) and in the imagery and language of his confession: "I, Herbert Badgery, took a breast in my mouth like a child, while the north wind turned to rock the little house of my disgrace" (332).

Where the construction of Herbert's second childhood differs from the earlier constructions of a home and family, is in the fact that it is built, not by Herbert the character, but, by Herbert the narrator. By couching this chapter of his life in metaphors of childhood, child development and the surreal, Herbert appears to be in control of both his life and the narrative, but in fact he is powerless and suffering an emotional breakdown. Herbert chooses to emphasize the abnormality of the period: "I will not plead normality and go rifling through my bureau to pull out birth certificates to show that she was only six years older than I was. For making it normal would miss the point." (332), yet it is also a time of entrapment for Herbert as is apparent in his futile attempt to subvert Phoebe's poem and liberate himself from its confines: "I ran out to the birdcages and released them. I shooed them out, as if this magic might bring back my wife. I wrung the neck of a parrot that would not leave. Not just wrung its neck, but pulled its head off." (331). In addition to giving this period of powerlessness a sense of purpose with the metaphor of a second childhood and bestowing upon it a degree of uncertainty with the images of abnormality, Herbert also undermines its validity by prefacing the "story" with the comment: "Most of it is lies ... [a] way to tell Leah Goldstein that I loved her" (328). This final means by which the narrator attempts to undermine his powerlessness has the ironic effect of ultimately subverting Herbert's narratorial authority by dissolving the distinction between truth and lies in the narrative.

Following the death of his daughter, Herbert again attempts to assert narratorial control in order to detract from the emotional disintegration he experiences as a character. Herbert presents an insecure-sounding defence of his reaction to Sonia's death, choosing to omit

any detailed reference to his stay at the mental home and instilling a degree of uncertainty in his depiction of the mourning:

> It was alleged I hit my son and caused him lasting damage to the ear.
> There was a funeral with no coffin.
> At the funeral there was a small upset we need not dwell on. As a result of this upset my friend Nathan Shick drove me to Sunbury where he placed me in the care of the doctors. Perhaps he imagined grief was medical (362).

Herbert addresses the reader in a defensive tone prefacing his account of events with the words: "let me tell you" (361) and punctuating his defence with the insistence "I will not shriek and groan before you" (361).This tone places him in a position of subservience which, conversely, bestows upon the implied reader a sense of being wiser and more authoritative than the narrator. The narratorial authority is, thus, no longer fixed with Herbert but alternates between him and the implied reader. He attempts to give authority to his defence by moving beyond the fictional confines of the text and drawing upon the real and topical case of Lindy Chamberlain: "who was condemned for murder, almost certainly, because she did not show adequate grief for her lost child" (361). This intrusion of the real world in the narrative, although an attempt to validate Herbert's own history, as with the self-reflexive confession of the earlier story as "lies" (328), ultimately highlights a supplementary state of tension between the actual and the fictional in the text.

Herbert's desire to regain a sense of control after the loss of his daughter drives him back to the paternal figure of Goon Tse Ying and the expectation of magical powers. This sense of movement towards resolution and fulfilment is, however, subverted, as is Herbert's narratorial authority, by the inclusion of Goon's view that Herbert's belief in magic is perhaps the product of him being: "one of those fellows who sees tricks everywhere and thinks that nothing is what people say it is" (370). Goon also reveals to Herbert that the dragon which he believes caused his daughter's death is not so much an evil spirit but rather the "name for a frightening story ... [and] a name they give to liars in [his] mother's village" (370). Herbert, having, as a character, failed to find fulfilment in

his reunion with Goon and as a narrator had his authority undermined by the old man, proceeds to exhibit an instinctual animal-like desire for control by engaging in a physical struggle for Goon's *Book of Dragons*. The reduction of the struggle for control to the level of animal instinct is conveyed by the image of Goon as: "a spider, a hairless huntsman ..." (373) and by Herbert tearing off his victim's finger and by the prominence of sensual imagery in the depction of the encounter with Goon: "stinking of garlic" (373), "hissing", managing to "grease from Herbert's grasp" and finally disappearing.

Herbert's struggle for control and possession of Goon's book can be seen as a self-reflexive metaphor for his struggle for control over his own text. As Herbert, the narrator, ultimately finds himself trapped in the confines of the symbolic nature of language, Herbert, the character, finds himself sentenced to a term of imprisonment in what he describes as: "the house I invented to frighten the draughtsman in Geelong" (375).

The element of picaresque in the novel is manifest in Herbert's comment, concerning his own development, at the close of Book Two: "So it was, at a time when it seemed too late, that I began to have some understanding of the power of lies" (375). The picaresque aspect of the novel, combined with the carefully structured, and symmetrical pattern of imagery of entrapment which closes Book One and Book Two creates a sense of progression, engaging the reader, and thus having the effect of establishing deferred fulfilment at another level in the text. The reader's implication in the text's own process of deferral is reinforced by Herbert's narratorial plea to "read on, read on" (375). The closing image of Book Two is of Herbert imprisoned by his own stories, reduced to finding solace in "the mustard-yellow lies ... composed by Leah Goldstein" (375). As with the reader, all that ultimately remains for Herbert is a perpetual state of deferral enforced by language.

Part Four: Book Three

The structural pattern, begun in Book Two, of establishing a break in the momentum of the narrative at the outset of the book which parallels Herbert's own breakdown at the end of the previous one is maintained in the third book. As Herbert, the character, moves nearer the passive authority of his role as narrator, Charles assumes the more active and central role vacated by his father. Despite this shift in emphasis, the notion of desire that was manifest in Herbert in the previous books is still maintained in Book Three through the character of Charles.

In contrast to his sister, Sonia, who sought sustenance in the metaphysical realm of Christianity, Charles has faith in the substantial nature of the material world and exhibits an unswerving devotion to the concept of truth. He perceives the notions of lies and truth as clearly distinguishable and as Herbert states of his son: "he was so eager to tell the truth that he could never simplify ... with Charles the truth was an obsession" (386). He bestows a similar solidity and permanence on the concept of love. This is evident in the loyalty he shows to his close friends and family, in his devotion to his wife, despite her preference for living in a cage with a goanna, and in Herbert's comment: "He would fall in love with anyone, a butcher's cat that rubbed itself against his legs. And once he had done it he would be loyal for life" (437).

Charles differs from his father in that he is not concerned with building things himself or with finding out how things are constructed. This is highlighted by Herbert's comment concerning his son's ignorance of machinery: "Charles would never have any understanding of machinery. It eluded him. His mind, confronted by something as simple as a tyre valve, would suddenly go blank and refuse to function sensibly" (418). Charles'

ignorance of how things are constructed ultimately leads to his entrapment in the Chaffey home when Les, out of "intense curiosity" (416), disassembles his motorcycle before losing interest and abandoning its reassembly. Charles' entrapment in the Chaffey home can be read as a metaphor for the entrapment he experiences in life as a result of his desire for truth and faith in solidity, in a world where these concepts are constantly being deconstructed.

The insubstantiality of the world Charles inhabits is highlighted by Herbert when he takes the young Hissao on a guided tour of Sydney. Herbert dissolves the oppositions between truth and lies, substantiality and fragility:

> I showed him, most important of all, the sort of city it was - full of trickery and deception ... It is never, for all its brick and concrete, quite substantial and I would not be surprised to wake one morning and to find the whole thing gone ... (547).

The deconstructive tour extends to symbols of Australian identity, as Herbert highlights when he leads Hissao up the South Pylon of the Harbour Bridge: "I was showing him that the pylon was a trick, that while it appeared to hold up the bridge it did no such thing"(574). The apparent physical insubstantiality of this symbol of national identity suggests the constructedness and fragility of Australian cultural identity. Herbert reinforces this, and discourages Hissao from holding the same devotion to truth as his father, when he gets the young boy to draw:

> I had him do drawings, of buildings that lied about their height, their age, and most particularly their location. There was not one that did not pretend itself huddled in some European capital with a weak sun in summer and ice in winter (547).

In contrast to his father, Hissao is defined in terms of a supplementary tension. The sound of his name, Hissao, is a combination of the hiss of a snake and the miaou of a cat. As with Jack McGrath he embodies a tension between the untamed and the tamed, the threatening and the passive. Naming in the text can be seen to have moved to a further level of deferral, now relying upon onomatopoeic representation.

In a world in which oppositions such as truth and lies exist in a relation of tension Charles' desire for an essential truth becomes unattainable. Despite achieving capitalist success with the establishment of the Best Pet Shop in the World and gaining enough wealth to care for his family and friends, Charles remains a victim, in Herbert's words: "a skin-wrapped parcel of fucked-up dreams" (578). His faith in an essential truth is such that the sense of entrapment he experiences at the impossibility of fulfilment drives him to suicide. The insecure questions he asks of his son just prior to his death reveal his frustrated desire for centrality in a decentred world:

> There was never a day...when I did not want to be the best at what I did. Do you believe me? ...Do you think there's a God? ...Would you say I was a success? (574)

For Charles, who embraces the values of his society, the suppression of desire has no other outlet than the ultimately unfulfilling pursuit of material success. For the other central characters, who are less conformist than Charles, the suppression of desire is made manifest in the exhibition of instinctual, animal-like behaviour. This is apparent in the image of Emma and Hissao taking refuge from the disorder of the outside world and seeking security and comfort in an animal cage:

> It was the inner sanctum in which they were both, mother and son, loved and cared for, protected from the world, and they felt themselves to be circled by so many loving defences...that it was a shock, sometimes, to look up and see the skylight was thin, so brittle, so fragile a barrier between their comfort and the cold of a storm (498).

The suggestion of desire emerging from suppression at an instinctual level is reinforced by the depiction of Hissao pursuing his dream of reconstructing the all-Australian Pet Emporium with an animal savagery:

> He ripped the guts out of the old building as if he were a goanna feeding on a turkey. He attacked it viciously, took its entrails first, and left it clean inside, a great empty cavern of slippery ribs (597).

The predominance of animal imagery in the text, evident in the central metaphor of the Pet Emporium, is such that the relation between the concepts animal and human becomes a supplemental one in which clear definitions and distinctions become impossible. The dissolution of the opposition is highlighted by Emma Badgery's perception of the finger in the glass jar as: "a tiny foetus ... half goanna and half human" (432). The chameleon quality of the finger, as with the conflation of the concepts of animal and human, highlights the unstable nature of identity in the text. The finger invariably takes the form of a goanna foetus, a collection of "shifting miasmas" (578) and a minature dragon, which Herbert states is capable of "changing from a deep black green to a bloated pearlescent grey" (579). As Herbert points out, its identity and meaning refuses to stay fixed as if belonging to the symbolic world of dreams: "The finger changed. It changed all the time. It changed like a face in a dream" (415). Sergeant Moth highlights the transient nature of things in dreams, the impossibility of grasping stable meaning when he comments to Herbert:

> Have you ever noticed ... how in a dream nothing ever stays still? Things are always moving ... You look at a face and you think you've got a fix on it, but it changes ... You cannot grasp it, isn't that right, like mercury between your fingers? (413-14).

The movement from realism to the genre of fabulation which as M.D. Fletcher points out, is evident in the episode involving Goon's finger[1], signifies a self-reflexive foregrounding of the limitations imposed upon the text by its own emersion in the symbolic order of language. As Terry Eagleton writes: "To enter language is to be severed from what Lacan calls the 'real' that inaccessible realm which is always beyond the reach of signification, always outside the symbolic order".[2] Despite the impossibility of reaching the real, the act of writing still attempts to do so, as Herbert highlights, with his admission of the difficulty he has, as an author, with encapsulating the character of Leah: "... her character will never stay still and be one thing, refuses to be held down on my dissecting

board, pulls out a pinned-down leg and shakes it in the air." (230). The text's juxtaposition of Herbert's desire for narratorial authority and control against a metafictional subversion of the same authority, is characteristic of the genre of fabulation. As Robert Scholes, the originator of the term explains: "Modern fabulation accepts, even emphasizes, its fallibilism, its inability to reach all the way to the real, but it continues to look toward reality"[3]

The act of writing as a means of producing an outlet for unfulfilled desire is taken up by Leah Goldstein. Leah, who feels dislocated from both her religious heritage and the country she inhabits, finds solace as a writer of fiction. As Herbert states: "Honest Leah had become Lying Leah" (395). Writing for her becomes more than just a source of communication with the imprisoned Herbert it becomes, an obsession, a means of filling the lack in her own existence. As a disgruntled Herbert points out:

> She is doing it for herself. And before a year is out she has the whole thing out of control and she has presented imaginary Rosa with imaginary grandchildren, made curtains, planted passionfruit and worried herself about the whooping cough in a world that exists between nine and eleven o'clock in the morning (396).

This passage can be read as a self-reflexive comment on the restrictive nature of fiction. In Leah's writing as in the text itself, desire can only be realized on an imaginary level and participation in the world of the imaginary, as either author or reader, is subject to the limitations of time. In another self-reflexive passage, Herbert, upon discovering the fictive nature of Leah's letters, expresses the frustrations of a reader at the inability of fiction to *be* that which it represents: "There was a time, when I finally learned the truth, that I could have killed her for her deception, to have made me feel so much about what revealed itself as nothing" (396). In an ironic reversal of his narratorial role as seller of lies, Herbert has become the customer, the buyer of Leah's lies. The powerlessness Herbert exhibits in his dependency upon Leah's letters is compounded by his physical entrapment in Rankin Downs Prison. This movement toward a state of total dependency and powerlessness is complete when he suffers a stroke and becomes physically

incapacitated. As Herbert states: "I lay in bed ... with half my brain collapsed and nurses whispering around my peripheries" (548).

At the same point as Herbert, in his role as character, reaches a level of total helplessness, his narratorial authority undergoes its most extreme subversion in the form of a bitter narrative intrusion from an outraged and drunken Leah. The split between Herbert's desire for control as a character and as a narrator is dissolved as Leah systematically deconstructs his narratorial authority. The tension between Herbert's desire for control of the narrative and the limitations imposed upon him by its unstable nature is evident in the initial struggle he puts up against Leah's intrusion. His resistance takes the form of three interruptions of Leah's opening address of "Dear Mr Badgery" (548), beginning with his own detailed and omniscient depiction of Leah writing: "her head on one side, her pencil crooked between her finger ..." (548), and culminating in the insecure and resentful denunciation of her first three words as "so sarcastic" (548).
Leah's narrative intrusion proceeds to subvert the concepts of ownership, truth, objectivity, authority and autonomy which Herbert pursues in his role as narrator. She undermines the sense of control Herbert derives from the notion of ownership, when she says to him: "you have stolen so much of what I have written" (549) and expresses the fictive nature of his writing by emphasizing the act of construction: "And even then you have not done me the honour of thieving things whole but have taken a bit here, a bit there, snipped, altered, and so on" (549). Leah's foregrounding of narrative construction also acts as a self-reflexive comment on the text's own constructedness and serves to emphasize the tension that springs from the metafictional subversion of the realist aspects of the text. The notion of objectivity implicit in Herbert's assertion of narratorial authority also becomes subverted when Leah alerts Herbert to the"casual superior tone" (549) of his narrative. The careful deconstruction of Herbert's narrative is extended to the perception Badgery has of his own autonomy. His desire to tie the writing exclusively to himself in order to try and circumscribe its meaning, provokes Leah's inquiry: "But why do you give no credit to anyone else?" (549). She suggests that this authority is, itself,

fictitious when she remonstrates: "You have treated us all badly, as if we were your creatures" (550).

Herbert's reaction to his state of powerlessness as a character and his failure to find fulfilment, is to follow Leah's example and channel his desire into the process of writing. As Herbert states: "There was nothing left for me but to teach myself to be an author. It was the only scheme available" (548). This development in Herbert's life signifies a progression toward his own narratorial present and suggests a corresponding movement toward closure in the text itself. The tension between the ordered aspects of the text and the elements which subvert them is such that the sense of progression implied in Herbert's decision to teach himself to be an author is itself undermined by Leah's testimony: "You say you had to teach yourself to be an author, which you know is a lie" (550).

Herbert foreshadows the progression toward making himself an author by constructing a series of identities. While in prison he adopts the mannerisms of an old man: "I was educated frail and decent ... I modelled myself on M. V. Anderson ... Oh, I was a cute little popsy. You would have loved me" (488-9). Upon leaving Rankin Downs he assumes the role of a threatening and dangerous ex-convict: "I was Herbert Badgery and I was a nasty bastard, no doubt about it, and I traded my wireless ... for a blade" (490) before finally settling for a more passive role: "I had made myself into an intellectual..." (491). Herbert displays the restlessness of an unfulfilled desire for a sense of security and identity in his life. He recognizes a similar desire in Leah, and attempts to articulate his own, when he comments:

> She had what she always had, I thought - a yearning, and that was fine, but I would not be blamed for it. It was the same misunderstanding that had plagued me all my life. All I ever wanted was a fire and slippers (538).

Herbert's adoption of the role of writer and the movement nearer his narratorial role brings with it a subsequent reduction in his physical activity. As Leah points out, he assumes the lifelessness and dependency of a pet: "You want to be a pet ... You want to lie on your back and have your stomach rubbed" (537). As Herbert's physical activity and control over his body diminishes he adopts the powers of an author in his everyday life. He perceives himself as being able to construct and determine the life of his grandson, as he highlights when he comments about Hissao's reconstruction of the Pet Emporium: "He was opening out the pet shop, living out the destiny I had mapped for him ..." (597). Herbert again exercises this authorial power when he attempts to bring Sonia back to life by dressing up the six-year old Hissao in a dress, in an action reminiscent of Leah's ressurection of Rosa in her letters:

> You see, the little fellow was the spitting image of Sonia in certain lights, and you can say it was mad, but I bought him a little blue dress and a pinny and I had him put them on ... Then I got him to stand up on the chair and I went down to the street to have a look ... I looked up, and there she was. What a pretty little girl my Sonia was (547).

The difference between Leah's resurrection of Rosa and Herbert's resurrection of Sonia is that Leah's action occurs within her fiction, whilst Herbert's reflects a movement toward the conflation of the roles of narrator and character by occurring within his own life. The self-reflexivity of this passage is evident in the fact that, as with fiction, Herbert's resurrection of his daughter is limited by its symbolic nature. For Herbert, Hissao, as a signifier, can never properly arrive at the signified, Sonia. The impossibility of this union undermines the authorial power Herbert has exercised in the construction of the fantasy. The sense of powerlessness he is left with is effectively conveyed in the image of the reprimand Herbert receives from his son: "Then they all looked down at me but it was Charles whose figure now comes most strongly to mind - I will not easily forget the beckoning finger he put my way" (548).

The conflation of Herbert's roles of character and narrator develops to the extent that Badgery becomes like an omniscient presence watching and controlling those around him,

as the passage in which Hissao, watched by Herbert, leaves to accompany his father on his last car journey highlights:

> The colour of the eyes could not, surely not, have been discernible from the street, but Hissao was sure it was. He felt, later, that the eyes had bullied him, and made him hold out his hands for the key when he had been meaning to shake hands, to say goodbye (371).

The progression to omniscience is reinforced by Herbert, himself when he exclaims: "There is no God. There is only me, Herbert Badgery, enthroned high above Pitt Street while angels or parrots trill attendance" (572).

As he aquires a narratorial power, Herbert becomes more aware, and more accepting, of the constructedness of the world around him. As the passage in which he reacts to the slogan of the Holden being "Australia's Own Car" (505) highlights he is now able to recognise that lies form the entire framework of society:

> Twelve years before this piece of deception would have got me particularly excited, but now I saw it from M.V. Anderson's point of view, and noted it, not as something new, but one more element in an old pattern of self-deception (505).

His awareness of constructedness is also suggested by the fact that, as the narrative progresses, Herbert, in his role as narrator, regularly addresses the reader as "Professor", and once as "my dear sticky-beak" (521). The use of these names suggest a self-reflexive awareness of the text's own capacity to be, like Herbert, "poked ... and prodded" (11), and for its constructedness to be exposed. Herbert's progression to the level at which he is "poked ... and prodded" is juxtaposed against a shift in the position of the implied reader in the text. As Herbert has moved from a salesman issuing a caveat emptor at the opening of the text, to an exhibit in a shop, the implied reader has moved from the status of customer to being addressed as "Professor".

Herbert's progression to a position comparable to his narratorial omniscience makes him more aware of his own limitations as he highlights when he ponders how he may be perceived, sitting at the window below the neon sign of the Pet Emporium:

> The question is: how would you take me, sitting there in my chair, neon lit, surrounded by these swirling signs? Am I a prisoner in the midst of a sign or am I a spider at its centre? (545)

The conflation of narrator and character is such that this passage can be read as a self-reflexive comment on Herbert's narratorial limitations within the text, an enquiry as to whether Herbert is a prisoner of the text as sign, the symbolic nature of the text, or an authoritative constructor of his own text. The Emporium, with its "swirling signs" serves as a metaphor for the constructedness of the novel. Herbert's identification with the emporium can be seen as a conflation of his authority with that of the text. Herbert, the Emporium and the text all operate within a symbolic order and their authority is thus restricted to the limited authority of the sign. Herbert highlights the powerlessness of the emporium when he compares it to a decaying pet: "... the groaning noises of the building...which seemed to wheeze and fart like an old labrador, old, moth-eaten, too stubborn to die" (562). Herbert, as character and narrator, is similarly powerless and entrapped in a seemingly endless process of deferral:

> I have nausea, giddiness, the discomforts of incontinence, the itch of psoriasis, and I lie here, with my skin scaling, peeling like a whithered prawn" (p 598).
> "You would not believe you could feel so bad and still not die, but I cannot die" (600).

As Leah points out to Herbert: "... you are out of one prison, and making another one" (538).

The Emporium, as with the text itself, is made up of a series of signs. It is composed of a collection of Australian types metonymic of their culture, "lifesavers, inventors, manufacturers, bushmen [and] aboriginals" (599). The friends and family members who inhabit the establishment are similarly immersed in the symbolic order. Emma Badgery exists in an imaginary world in which: "her ambitions are ... to be adored and worshipped ... [She lives as] her husband's pet...kept by a keeper of pets" (536). Mr Lo, too, derives entertainment from playing imaginary games of baseball whilst Leah's identity is defined by "the sign on her door [which] says 'Melbourne Jew'. As Herbert states: "[Leah] spends a lot of time explaining that she is not a Jew, that the sign is a lie ... but visitors prefer to believe the printed information" (599). The difference between Leah and her sign which she attempts to enforce is the gap between signifier and signified which the text seeks to disguise. The readers of the text, as with Leah's visitors, prefer to go along with the illusion of unity between the two elements. The Pet Emporium and the novel are built on this illusion as Herbert highlights in his comment about Hissao's reconstruction of the place: "here, in the city of illusions, he was building a masterpiece ... He built like a liar,

like a spider - steel ladders and walkways, catwalks, cages in mid-air ... in a gallery spanning empty spaces ..." (597).

Herbert asserts an omniscient authority when he claims responsibility for Hissao's reconstruction of the Emporium: "He was my flesh and blood, my creature, my monster" (597). Yet the construction he claims as his own is one, which, despite looking toward freedom, ultimately imprisons its creator. The roof of the Emporium "disappears completely" and Hissao "has it opening and closing like an eyelid" (598) enabling the building, and Herbert, to look toward the same sky that he looked to for solace at the close of Book Two. Herbert and the text itself, are like the rosellas imprisoned in the Emporium, yet continually pushing toward the freedom they can never attain. As Herbert observes from his bed:

> ...the rosellas, when they are released, fly up towards the open sky ... [They] reach the point just opposite me where the sonic curtain operates. When they hit it they falter, lose height, and then, because they now feel as ill as I do, they go back to their perches below. When they feel better they try again. When they die, Hissao gets a new lot (598).

The text's push toward a sense of completeness and closure is generated by its movement toward the narratorial present. The sense of closure is reinforced by the fact that this movement, in the tradition of the bildungsroman, is also the development of Herbert's journey toward becoming an author. The novel also generates the expectation of seeing how Herbert reaches the age of one hundred and thirty-nine years. He states that: "The chart on my door says I am a hundred and thirty-nine years old. It also says I was born in 1886, but there are no complaints" (599) and as Tony Thwaites points out, this passage reveals the promise to be merely another lie, "a teaser to keep the reader reading".[4]

On the final page of the novel Herbert adopts an omniscient tone which suggests he has finally progressed to a position of authority and control. This is evoked by the tone of superiority and power he uses to discuss Hissao's plight: "He must feel dreadful - he was such a nice boy - everybody liked him - he has not been prepared to be the object of such intelligent and necessary hatred" (600). Herbert's authority is reinforced in the passage in which he demonstrates an awareness of the constructedness and the limitations of the world he inhabits whilst maintaining an omniscient distance from his images of insubstantiality:

> It would be of no benefit for [Hissao] to know that he is, himself, a lie, that he is no more substantial than this splendid four-storey mirage, teetering above Pitt Street, no

> more concrete than all those alien flowers, those neon signs, those twisted coloured forms of gas and glass that their inventors, dull men, think will last forever (600).

Herbert's authority is ultimately subverted by the fact that he is, himself, a prisoner of that which he has created, the Pet Emporium and the narrative. He is subject to the entrapment and the sense of deferral which derives from the symbolic nature of both constructions. As Herbert states: "You would not believe you could feel so bad and still not die,but I cannot die, because this is my scheme. I must stay alive to see it out" (600). Herbert is forced to stay with his text with its promise of closure being within reach:

> Did I hear crashing glass, the sound of the first wave breaking as it enters the ground floor? It is this which Hissao fears, this which I wait for, which keeps me alive through all these endless days (600).

yet it is never attained: "But it is not time, not yet" (600).

In the penultimate paragraph of the text Herbert again emphasizes his arrival at a sense of authority and closure:

> I close my eyes and do the only thing I can do. I am, at last, the creature I have so long wished to become - a kind man. With my swollen blue-veined breast I give my offspring succour - the milk of dragons from my witch's tit (600).

His belief is self-deceptive in that, like the text he is part of, he is the embodiment of a series of dissolved oppositions existing in a supplemental relation of tension and deferral of completeness. He is a 'creature' neither animal nor human, male nor female. As a character in a novel he has some form of existence within the mind of the reader, yet he remains fictional. The text itself, in this paragraph, displays a tension between the naturalism suggested by the coarseness of the phrase "my witch's tit" and the fantastic nature of the action: a one hundred and thirty-nine year old man breastfeeding his middle aged grandson "the milk of dragons". Herbert's reference to himself as a "creature" also serves to undermine his sense of fulfilment and authority with its connotation of him as an entrapped pet inside the Pet Emporium. The image, rather than being suggestive of development, seems to be a continuation of the entrapment Herbert experiences at the conclusion of Book One and Book Two. This suggestion of deferred rather than fulfilled desire at the close of Book Three is reinforced by the cyclical effect generated by the repetition of phrases from the opening of the novel on the final page. On the first, and final, page of the text Herbert states that: "It was hard to believe you can feel so bad and still not die" (11) whilst his comment at the end of the text about at last becoming almost kind, appears at the beginning of the novel when he states: "I may even, at last, have become almost kind" (12). The text, despite going to great lengths to place itself in an

Australian literary tradition and in the wider tradition of the novel exhibits a post-structuralist resistance to closure. The suggestion of endless deferral and resistance of closure is enforced by the sense of continuance in the final line of the text: "It will give him strength for the interesting times ahead" (600).

Part Five: Conclusion

This paper has concentrated on the way in which desire operating on a number of levels, propels the novel *Illywhacker*. By emphasizing the way in which language is embedded in notions of lack and desire the text becomes an exploration of its own creative process. *Illywhacker*'s exposure of its own contradictions and gaps is not only a comment on the production of fiction, but also, on the way in which the reader makes sense of the world (or worlds) of, and outside of, the text.

The conflation of the various levels at which desire operates in the text; the levels of character, narrator, reader and language itself, is what Brian McHale speaks of as a violation of worlds. McHale points out that the effect of such a violation is to generate a sense of ontological insecurity and raise questions such as: "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?"[1] These questions about the plural nature of reality which *Illywhacker* provokes, provide a starting point for further study of the degree in which these ontological issues are characteristic of post-colonial literature and, in particular, post-colonial Australian literature. The fact that the novel goes to such great lengths to place itself in a tradition of Australian writing (Graeme Turner has pointed out its similarity to *Such Is Life*[2]) and draws upon such a variety of genres, suggests that it is both a part of, and removed from, a colonial tradition.

Expectations are generated in the reader by the logocentric realist language which are challenged by the metafictional. The implied reader, who moves from customer to "Professor", must meet the demands of different levels of language (realist and metafictional), but also suffer the lack that is implicit in all language. With the tensions that emerge from these oppositions in *Illywhacker* there is a sense of continual process, the creation of a supplement and the deferral of the fulfilment of desire.

Notes

Part one: Introduction

1 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory - An Introduction* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1983), p.167.

2 Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory - Second Edition* (Hertfordshire, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.88.

3 p. 87.

4 David Buchbinder, *Contemporary Literary Theory and the Reading of Poetry* (Perth, Western Australia: Curtin University of Technology, 1991), p. 58.

5 p. 167.

6 pp. 167-168.

7 pp. 61-62.

8 Eagleton, p. 167.

Part Two: Book One

1 Peter Carey, *Illywhacker* (Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press,1985) p. 11. Further references to this novel will appear in parentheses in the text.

2 Helen Daniel, " 'The Liar's Lump': Or, "A Salesman's Sense of History: Peter Carey's Illywhacker' " *SOUTHERLY*, *47*, 2, (1986) p. 162.

3 Graeme Turner, *National Fictions- Literature film and the construction of Australian narrative* (Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p. 92

4 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 74.

5 p. 74.

6 p. 74.

7 Teresa Dovey, "An Infinite Onion: Narrative Structure in Peter Carey's Fiction," *ALS 11* (1983), p. 201.

Part Three: Book Two

1 G.A. Wilkes and W.A. Krebs (Ed), *The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language - Second Edition* (Australia: Collins, 1988), p. 399.

2 p. 413.

3 Graeme Turner, "American Dreaming: The Fictions of Peter Carey," *ALS 12* (1986), p. 440.

4 p. 167.

5 p. 167.

Part Four: Book Three

1 M.D. Fletcher, "Post Colonial Peter Carey," *SPAN 32* (1991), p. 17.

2 p. 168.

3 Rober Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1979) p. 8.

4 Tony Thwaites, "More Tramps at Home: Seeing Australia First," *MEANJIN 46* (1987), pp.400-409.

Part Five: Conclusion

1 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 10.

2 Graeme Turner, "American Dreaming: The Fictions of Peter Carey," *ALS 12* (1986), p.438.

Bibliography

(a) Books.

Aizenberg, Edna (Ed). *Borges and His Successors: The Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts*. Columbia, U.S.A.: University of Missouri Press, 1990.

Buchbinder, David. *Contemporary Literary Theory and the Reading of Poetry*. Perth, Western Australia: Curtin University of Technology, 1991.

Carey, Peter. *Illywhacker*. Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 1985.

Daniel, Helen. *Liars: Australian New Novelists*. Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 1988.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

Hutcheon, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. London: Methuen, 1980.

Hutcheon, Linda. A *Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Lass, Abraham, Kiremidjian, David, Goldstein, Ruth (Ed). *Dictionary of Allusions*. London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1989.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1987.

Scholes, Robert. *Fabulation and Metafiction.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory: Second Edition.* Hertfordshire, England: Harvester Press, (1989).

Turner, Graeme. *National Fictions: Literature, film and the construction of Australian narrative.* Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1986.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction.* London: Methuen, 1984.

Wilkes, G.A. , Krebs, W.A. (Ed). *The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language: Second Edition.* Australia: Collins, 1988.

(b) Journals.

Daniel, Helen. " "The Liar's Lump': Or 'A Salesman's Sense of History': Peter Carey's Illywhacker". *SOUTHERLY* 47, 2, (1986), 157-167.

Dovey, Teresa. "An Infinite Onion: Narrative Structure in Peter Carey's Fiction". *ALS*, 11, 2, (1983), 195-204.

Ferrier, Elizabeth. "From Pleasure Domes to Bark Huts: Architectural Metaphors in Recent Australian Fiction". *ALS*, 13, 1, (1987), 40-53.

Fletcher, M.D. "Post-Colonial Peter Carey". *SPAN*, 32, (1991), 12-23.

Gelder, Kenneth. "History, Politics and the (Post)Modern: Reading Australian Fiction". *MEANJIN*, 47, 3, (1988), 551-559.

Goodwin, Ken. "Muecke's Map for Reading Australian Literature: Some Alternative Legends". *NLR*, 17, (1989), 551-559.

Hassall, A.J. "Telling Lies and Stories: Peter Carey's Bliss". *MFS*, 35, 4, (1989), 637-653).

Liddelow, Eden. "New Model Carey". *SCRIPSI*, 7, 2, (1991), 93-104.

Manning, Greg. "Reading Lesson: The Fat Man in History, Teaching and Deconstructive Practice". *SPAN*, 21, (1985), 38-55.

Muecke, Stephen. "Wide Open Spaces: Horizontal Readings of Australian Literature". *NLR*, 16, (1988), 1-17.

Neilsen, Philip. "Waiting for the Barbarians: An Interview with Peter Carey". *LiNQ*, 15, 3, (1987), 66-73.

Sharrad, Paul. "Responding to the Challenge: Peter Carey and the Reinvention of Australia". *SPAN*, 25, (1987), 37-46.

Tate, Trudi. "Unravelling the Feminine: Peter Carey's 'Peeling' ". *MEANJIN*, 46, 3, (1987), 394-399.

Thwaites, Tony. "More Maps at Home: Seeing Australia First". *MEANJIN*, 46, 3, (1987), 400-409.

Turner, Graeme. "American Dreaming: The Fictions of Peter Carey". *ALS*, 12, 4, (1986), 431-441.