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ALTERNATIVE MYTHICAL STRUCTURES IN THE FICTION OF PATRICK WHITE

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BRENDA EVADNE BOSMAN

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IN CELEBRATION OF MY PARENTS - MY FIRST DISSIDENTS

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BRENDA EVADNE BOSMAN

Promoter: Professor M. van Wyk Smith
Department of English
Doctor of Philosophy

ABSTRACT

The texts in this study interrogate the dominant myths which have affected the constructs of identity and history in the white Australian socio-historical context. These myths are exposed by White as ideologically determined and as operating by processes of exclusion, repression and marginalisation. White challenges the autonomy of both European and Australian cultures, reveals the ideological complicity between them and adopts a critical approach to all Western cultural assumptions.

As a post-colonialcolonial writer, White shares the need of both post-colonising and post-colonised groups for an identity established not in terms of the colonial power but in terms of themselves. As a dissident white male, he is a privileged member of the post-colonising group but one who rejects the dominant discourses as illegitimate and unlegitimating. He offers a re-writing of the myths underpinning colonial and post-colonising discourses which privileges their suppressed and repressed elements. His re-writings affect aboriginal men and women, white women and the 'privileged' white male whose subjection to social control is masked as unproblematic freedom.

White's re-writing of myth embraces the post-modern as well as the post-colonial. He not only deconstructs and demystifies the phallogocentric/ethnocentric order of things; he also attempts

to avoid totalization by privileging indeterminacy, fragmentation, hybridization and those liminary states which defy articulation: the ecstatic, the abject, the unspeakable. He himself is denied authority in that his re-writings are presented as mere acts in the always provisional process of making interpretations. White acknowledges the problematics of both presentation and re-presentation - an unresolved tension between the post-colonial desire for self-definition and the post-modern decentring of all meaning and interpretation permeates his discourse.

The close readings of the texts attempt, accordingly, to reflect varying oppositional strategies: those which seek to overturn hierarchies and expose power-relations and those which seek an idiom in which contemporary Australia may find its least distorted reflexion. Within this ideological context, the Lacanian thematics of the subject, and their re-writing by Kristeva, are linked with dialectical criticism in an attempt to reflect a strictly provisional process of (re)construction.

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PREFACE

> Nothing is anywhere ever simply present or absent
>
> Derrida

The paper 'Writing and Re-writing' presented under the above epigraph by Johan Degenaar explores some of the implications of post-structuralist thinking 'for the way in which we create a human world, articulate experience and write history' (1988:69). Degenaar considers two examples of post-structuralist thinking, deconstruction and social criticism, both of which profoundly affect the way in which one does aesthetics, and, by extension, the way in which one attempts a thesis. In order to situate the study that follows, I draw extensively upon Degenaar's philosophical exploration of post-structuralist idiom.

In his discussion of deconstruction, Degenaar points out that once language, and writing as constitutive of language, become the necessary condition of understanding in the place of perception, there is no longer any possibility of an unmediated experience of a work of art or of the world. (Writing, as the Derridean metaphor, refers to all human activities which constitute the human world by making distinctions, by continually placing signs differently within a process of differentiation that is always already taking place.) It is only through the mediation of writing - 'a continual process of situating signs differently' (Degenaar, 1988:71) - that we arrive at an unprivileged, contingent and provisional understanding. The writing of a thesis is thus situated within a continual process of writing and re-writing; it is a contingent, unprivileged activity that may (must) entail a new interpretation of signs, 'one which looks critically at the assumptions of previous interpretations <u>and of course at its own assumptions</u>' (Degenaar, 1988:75, my underlining).

The second relevant point that Degenaar makes about a deconstructive position relates to hierarchical relations, those traditional binary oppositions in Western thinking: truth/ fiction, male/female, conscious/unconscious, presence/absence, in which the first term is given priority over the second term 'suppressing the contribution it can make to understanding' (Degenaar, 1988:70). While acknowledging that Western critical concepts and methods continue to make use of such hierarchical relations, Degenaar stresses that constant exposure of hierarchies is essential in order that such critical concepts be seen as part of the general problem of interpretation and not as the innocent supports of an unproblematic system of fixed meanings. The writer of a thesis is unlikely to escape such hierarchies, even while she herself is exposing similar binary sets through the writing of another. However, since her discourse is neither 'final' nor 'true' but a text situated within a network of differences, it is the presence of such undeconstructed hierarchies that, paradoxically, marks her discourse as 'natural' and 'human'.

The third significant point relates to the first two in that it considers the general effect of deconstruction on the way in which we do aesthetics. Degenaar points out that the process of understanding is always both dynamic and provisional, situated in the context of shifting sets of relationships, and that the individual who reads, writes or re-writes is herself a sign, involved in the process of signification, and thus she herself as sign is being situated differently all the time. Thus the writer of a thesis is enabled

> ... to look at a work of art as a text that has to be interpreted in a historical context, which itself is a text, by a reader who himself [sic] has to be considered as a text.
>
> Degenaar, 1988:67.

In his consideration of social criticism, Degenaar enumerates a number of myths which can be exposed by the social critic who is concerned with the variety of mediations through which the individual approaches the meaning of signs. Of these myths, the most relevant to the writer of a thesis are the following:

> 3.2 The myth of the presence of meaning. Meaning is a unit of intelligibility which does not reside in a timeless world of essences to which the mind has immediate access. Meaning is a function of differentiations which have social and historical dimensions.
>
> 3.3 The myth of the autonomy of the work of art. Since the work of art functions in the contexts of society and history, it should not be approached as if it is a selfcontained unit.
>
> 3.4 The myth of the innocent interpreter. This myth assumes a free-floating critical intelligence which directly confronts an unmediated artifact. However, 'a whole world of mediating presuppositions of an economic, aesthetic and political order intervenes' between man and the work of art and shapes his response accordingly (Hawkes, 1978:154).
>
> 3.5 The myth of the objective critical position. Whatever critical position one takes up there is always an ideological dimension to it. In a weak sense it entails that values and interests colour one's interpretation. In a strong sense the ideology of interpretation means that one's critical position is determined by the position one takes up with regard to the struggle between domination and liberation.
>
> 3.6 The myth of the autonomy of a culture. Social Criticism does not deny the role that culture plays in understanding but it views culture itself as a problematic concept. Turning the horizon of culture into the only arbiter of meaning entails a conservative approach to the meaning of a work of art .... What is needed is a critical approach to the assumptions of a culture.
>
> Degenaar, 1988:72-73,
> (my underlining)

In the study that follows, I attempt to look at the fiction of Patrick White as works of art that have 'to be interpreted in a historical context, which is itself a text' and to situate myself, their reader, as myself a text or construction of signs, within a dynamic set of shifting relationships. The study that follows is thus an unprivileged, contingent and necessarily self-contradictory discourse.

As reader-(re)writer-text, I can be neither innocent, objective nor autonomous. In reading the texts of White, I am conscious that each 'contains within itself the possibility of an infinite set of structures' (Culler, cited in Degenaar, 1988:74). Nevertheless, I have selected a particular critical approach (or it has selected me). This approach, in terms of both my own historical context and the socio-historical context within which these texts were produced, offers 'to re-read culture so as to amplify and strategically position the marginalised voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed and excluded' (Lentricchia, cited in Degenaar, 1988:76). The theoretical positions of Lacan and Kristeva are not regarded as 'absolute' or 'universal' but as working constructs within a particular socio-historical context which I have found helpful in the task of reading and re-writing these texts.

The fictions of Patrick White are consequently presented in this study as strategies of opposition, which seize

> ... the opportunity to overturn hierarchies, to expose power-relations, to unmask prejudices based on the privileging of race, class, sex, culture and ethnicity, to emphasise issues that have been marginalised, to challenge canonisation and to become 'the voice of the silent cause of history'.
>
> Degenaar, 1988:75.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MYTH(S) OF STRUCTURE AND THE STRUCTURE(S) OF MYTH

A study purporting to examine mythical structures must necessarily, at the outset, indicate how myth and mythicity are to be understood in this context. Eric Gould, in his examination of mythical intentions in modern literature, points out that even in the restricted field of myth-and-literature studies, myth has become so encyclopaedic a term as to mean everything or nothing: 'a synthesis of values which uniquely manages to mean most things to most men' (1981:5). This polyvalency is a characteristic of myth which, far from being injurious, testifies to the role that myths continue to play in the lives of human beings: they are essential elements in the interpretation processes both of individuals and of societies. The reason for the success of myth as an act of interpretation is to be found in the nature of consciousness and language which create myth out of necessity and lack.

Gould initiates his discussion of the essential in myth by relating myth to the nature of language, for not only is myth chiefly inscribed in language but it also functions like language. The inadequacy of language, its failure to close the ontological gap between event and meaning, must affect myth, for 'since myth is language, it is a response to the conditions of language itself' (Gould, 1981:39). Those conditions, however, imply not only the ceaseless play of language but also the need to exploit language in the attempt to overcome not-knowing and to escape non-meaning. Thus, Gould points out, the dialectic of language performance, metaphor and metonymy, is integrally related to the oppositional tendency of language: its polysemy emphasising open endedness and plurality while the absent or hidden signifier (always already in place wherever one signifier takes the place of another) has a metonymic relationship to the signifying chain, pressing and undercutting that polysemy in its

need for 'the aphoristic, the limited, and the tautologous' (Gould, 1981:54). Myth is brought into being by the action of this dialectic, being a form of discourse that aspires to the status of tautology, of being most accurate; but, since myth itself operates within the same dialectical interrelationship as all language, it necessarily does so by operating 'as metaphor actively trying to give itself the status of metonymy' (Gould, 1981:55). Thus myth purports to do what as language it is incapable of doing; it sets itself up as a discourse which intends to interpret the nature of experience, 'whether its object is social compromise, the supernatural, questions covering the self and its place in the world, or those issues we think of as ultimate, unanswerable and metaphysical' (Gould, 1981:34). However, by its very nature as language, and more especially as metaphor, myth can only bring into being a further intent-to-interpret, which will be enacted not only through the shared references but also through the absent meanings which are suggested by the metaphorical nature of the discourse. Thus, while myth offers itself as an attempt to centre meaning, its true function is as part of the ongoing and unending process of making acts of interpretation.

> There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, inactualisable, and non-existent in the first place. Everything begins with structure, configuration or relationship.
>
> Derrida, cited in Gould, 1981: 36.

The privileged nature of the discourse of myth, which is often described as its 'universal' character, arises out of this intent-to-interpret, which is inherent in the discourse. Myth offers us, as Bal (1987) points out, a pseudo-stability, an illusion that we can escape from language and history. Thus, 'the basic message of myths in this thought is: what I think

(phantasies, wishfully distorted) is the truth because it has always been so. The authority of age becomes the historical projection of the unwillingness to assume the historicality of the "I"s wishes' (Bal, 1987:66).

Myth, viewed in this way, readily becomes the tool of conservatism, operating to preserve the essential or Great Myth of origins and order 'out there'. Eliot's comment on 'the mythical method' as 'a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' (1923:269), is probably the best known example of this view of myth in contemporary literature. Such an approach, Rahv points out, is occasioned by the fear of history and freedom, of change and making choices: 'the craze for myth is the fear of history' (Rahv, cited in Bal, 1987:59).

The power that myth has to suggest that it pre-dates language and history and represents an absolute and stable signified makes it a highly persuasive servant of ideologies. The anonymity of myth, its seemingly extra-historical, unidentifiable origins, appear to guarantee its 'purity', objectivity, and impartiality. Thus, Barthes, examining the myths that sustain French bourgeois morality, finds that 'the very end of myths is to immobilise the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions' (1972:155). Degenaar examines political myth related to past, present and future events, and concludes that 'we have to do with examples of make-believe in which the participants are concerned with "practical truth" in the sense that they are convinced that they are given a role to play in a narrative which makes their lives meaningful' (Degenaar, 1983:63).

It is this effect of myth upon participants that indicates the source of myth's persuasive power. Gould, in fact, sees myth as

'the history of our inability to authenticate our knowledge of Being, and yet ... at the same time a history of our attempts to understand that inability (1981:10). It is these two conditions that characterise the human subject, constituted as subject by the process of increasing separation, starting from the Cartesian separation of the subject from the objective world and driven forward by an unrequited desire to regain that undifferentiated state of being which the subject, as such, never experienced in the first place. Our first knowledge is of loss, and our every subsequent effort strives to alter our history, to be both differentiated, knowing subject and undifferentiated, unknowable Being. We are always, as Gould points out, faced with the gap, the incarnation of absence and loss, 'into which we insert all our attempts at knowing - ... a Heideggerian moment of projecting into Nothing' (1981:83).

Richard Campbell, in his discussion of the character of Australian religion, adverts to Heidegger's analysis of human being in which 'we simply find ourselves "thrown" into a world which yields no ultimate reasons for being'. Campbell comments on the Heideggerian attempt to overcome nihilism by projecting out into nothingness from an Australian perspective:

> ... the tranquillised self-assurance which Heidegger takes to characterise inauthentic Being-at-Home is highly manifest in contemporary Australia. Unlike people in other countries, we know in our hearts that the rhetoric of public life is largely phoney, even as we continue to invoke it. Our overwhelmingly suburban life-style, it seems to me, has to be explained in terms of an obsession to gather material possessions into the supposed security of one's own home as a compensating reaction to our corporate lack of natural community. Heidegger could be describing Patrick White's Sarsaparilla.
>
> Campbell, 1977:186.
> (my underlining)

Myth offers us an explanation of that definitive and yet enigmatic sense of loss: 'why that Nothing-more always seems

like something-more' (Gould, 1981:10). It is through myth that the subject aspires to get rid of time, space, and its own split nature (Bal, 1987:61). This broadly existential function of myth is not unrelated to its ideological role, which amounts to a similar suspension of history on a socio-political and moral level. Ideology, in this study, is considered in the following terms:

> ... not a set of deliberate distortions imposed upon us from above, but a complex and contradictory system of representations (discourse, images, myths) through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live. Ideology is a system of representations through which we experience ourselves as well, for the work of ideology is also to construct coherent subjects: "the individual thus lives his [or her] subject-ion to social structures as a consistent subject-ivity, an imaginary wholeness" (Coward and Ellis, 1977:71).
>
> Newton and Rosenfelt, 1985:XIX.
> (first underlining mine)

Thus myth serves ideology, and legitimates it by appearing to legitimate the subject in his/her ideologically fixed position, which is perceived as 'universal', 'true' and 'natural'. In this way, myth underwrites the dominant system of signification, into which the subject is inserted upon entry into the symbolic order. As Barthes points out, such myth is a kind of depoliticised speech, which by its 'natural' appearance, tends to escape critical enquiry.

> In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organises a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.
>
> Barthes, 1972:143.

Since myths can attain the status of 'reality', it follows that our perceptions of what we term 'reality' are likely, to a greater or lesser degree, to include mythical items, which have presented themselves as part of our 'reality'. Our reality constructs are frequently more 'mythical' than 'real'. (Where the traditional view of language and reality presupposes that the view of reality in language is largely identical with reality itself, the view first formulated by Nietzsche and inherent in post-structuralism asserts that language (including both art and myth) constitutes our reality, a view according to which referentiality collapses.) For this to be the case, however, those mythical items must not be recognised as mythical, for if they were, they would cease, in contemporary culture, to be 'true' (and would become subject to critical enquiry). By the same token, ideologies are able to dispense with inconvenient and/or inappropriate reality items by labelling these 'mythical', and thus 'not true' and 'not real'. In both cases, critical enquiry is avoided: what is 'true' need not be examined for what is there to dis-cover; what is 'mythical' need not be examined since it is obviously 'not true and thus 'not real'. Thus myth is kept alive by concealing its presence in the constructs of 'reality', and by displacing onto its stated presence, in other constructs, those elements of reality which are inimical to the dominant ideology. Perversely, we believe fervently in such myth as long as we do not identify its nature.

In other cases, the opposite seems true. Certain myths, and in particular, certain mythical figures, or archetypes, are recognised as mythical, and are considered 'true' precisely because they are mythical. Such mythical figures appear to embody universal truths of a-historical origin, and the older the archetype appears to be, the greater the 'truth' and the more 'universal' its application. The crux of the matter would appear to lie in the question of anonymity. Myths which have an identifiable origin must inevitably be traced to a human agency.

Once another human subject is postulated as the source and origin of the myth, it ceases to have that interpretive power to evade time, space and the self. No other subject can offer the extra-subjective position. Consequently, while the 'anonymous' archetypes are considered mythical, they are nonetheless accepted as expressing something 'real' and trans-historical about human beings. Jung's collective unconscious postulates an origin for archetypes in the 'primitive wonder world' of the unconscious. The unconscious is deemed to be in possession of unattainable, translinguistic fact, which quite arbitrarily determines our conscious lives, and which the primordial images of the archetypes objectify but do not interpret. As Gould points out, this means ' we are in their grip, whether we like it or not, and yet we never really know what we are in the grip of' (1981:21). Thus, there appear to be two alternative autonomous positions for archetypes: either they exist because they were brought into being by something mysterious 'out there', or they exist because they were brought into being by something mysterious 'in here'. They may, however, be dependent, for origin as well as for continued existence, on the nature of the subject and of language and the relationship of both to desire and lack. Thus, while a Jungian perspective seems to imply that archetypes exist because we crave the 'essential', such a perspective denies that this essential need could be related to the structure of the self or to language, neither of which is regarded as able to exert any influence over archetypes. The constitution of the subject, however, like the structure of language, is founded upon a sense of having lost the essential. The work of Lacan, in providing a radically different way of situating language, ideology and the subject, necessitates an understanding of the role of the unconscious in the problematics of the subject and language. Lacan postulates that 'desire results from the process by which the subject is produced in a system of finished positions, that is, signification, in order to master dependence on an unpredictable source of satisfaction' (Coward and Ellis, 1977:120). This postulation involves

> ... a notion of the "splitting" or separation of the subject: first from its sense of continuum with the mother's body; then with the illusory identity and totality of the ideal ego of the mirror stage; and finally a separation by which the subject finds itself a place in symbolisation. It is this construction which creates the subject and the unconscious, and involves imaginary and symbolic relations.
>
> Coward and Ellis, 1977:100.
> (my underlining)

The price for producing a subject within symbolic relations, that is to say, a subject capable of finding 'his signifying place within the laws of culture' (Coward and Ellis, 1977:117), is the separation or 'splitting' of conscious and unconscious. The conscious subject acquires positionality in accordance with the constraints imposed by the socio-political (including, of course, the familial) dynamics inherent in the ideological formations of a specific symbolic order, and his/her desire will develop according to the limitations imposed by these constraints. However, this structuration is not absolute. Those signifiers which have of necessity been repressed in the construction of the subject persist, but are refused entry into conscious language. They can, however, be fairly easily invoked by means of their metonymic relationship with the signifiers in conscious language. Thus in dream, jokes, puns, slips of the tongue, and, I suggest, in the 'spontaneous' appearance of archetypes, those repressed representations erupt into the logical discourse of consciousness.

> Here there appears to be an intentionality, but it is in a strange relation to time and logical thought. The subject feels surprised by what appears in these discontinuities in logical speech; they are both more and less than he was expecting.
>
> Coward and Ellis, 1977:107.
> (my underlining.)

If archetypes offer us images of 'things that mean something by themselves', then they are responding very directly to needs

created by the constraints and limitations of language and consciousness. We experience archetypes as potent and meaningful because while they seem to be coming from some mysterious origin 'out there', they nevertheless seem to be remarkably familiar 'in here'. They convince us, in fact, because that is what they are for. 'We are not possessed by archetypes, but our fate is <u>transacted</u> in them' (Gould, 1981:68).

If we are possessed in any way by myth, then it is by unrecognised myth. Such myth cannot be said to stimulate an intent-to-interpret, since it is not recognised as mythical; instead, we become victims of such myth, allowing it to interpret us. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a body of myth exists which manifests an intent-to-interpret exactly this confusion of myth and reality. O'Flaherty cites myths of varied provenance, including contemporary Western items, which destabilise our common sense view of reality, suggesting 'that the boundary between myth and reality is highly mobile: though it may appear to be firm and permanent, it is ultimately arbitrary and elusive' (1980a:98). The story of the Chinese philosopher, Chuang Tsu, is brief enough to illustrate this principle:

> Once upon a time Chuang Tsu dreamed that he was a butterfly, a butterfly fluttering about enjoying itself. It did not know that it was Chuang Tsu. Suddenly he awoke with a start and he was Chuang Tsu again. But he did not know whether he was Chuang Tsu who had dreamed that he was a butterfly, or whether he was a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Tsu.
>
> Cited in O'Flaherty, 1980a:99.

Since myths are language and respond to the conditions of language, it follows that their surface coherence masks an unstable and arbitrary nature. There is no stable 'truth' behind the myth, since, as Derrida points out, there is actually Nothing behind it at all. It is an exemplary form of an intent-

to-interpret, but in its intent-to-interpret, it must not only fail but also contradict itself outright. As discourse, it is split in itself; 'its meaning is perpetually open and universal only because once the absence of a final meaning is recognised, the gap itself demands interpretation which, in turn, must go on and on, for language is nothing if it is not a system of open meaning' (Gould, 1981:6).

Myth is consequently always in process, always reaching for the unattainable and always failing to grasp it. Its fascination for us lies in 'the ancient desire to make comprehensible that which is not in a shared language' (Gould, 1981:32), a desire that myth by its very nature both promises to fulfil and inevitably frustrates. We cannot, through myth, escape from language and history, yet myth continues to offer us the illusion of such freedom.

Since the attraction of myth is the promise that it holds out, it follows that myths need not be communally experienced, nor need they follow any sort of prescribed mythic pattern. The individual, in search of a subject-position granting the maximum degree of significance and/or stability, may not always find accommodation within the matrix of concealed and overt myths which constitute so large a part of our cultural experience. The subject can, and often does, construct a personal myth, ascribing to items of personal experience a significance that may be wholly inaccessible to others. By projecting onto these events, the subject can create a personal, and private, sense of meaningfulness, which may be wholly at odds with the identity of that subject, prescribed by the dominant system of signification. Such personal mythic narratives are also perpetually in process, since they are created out of selected items of lived experience and in their turn affect the way in which those and other items are experienced. The myth is made out of lived experience, and re-makes lived experience in its own image and likeness. This is really no more than an

extension of the way in which meaning is generally produced out of lived experience. The 'outside' conditions of sensory evidence are never unmediated, but are received through the inherited conventions of language and ideology. The 'inside', in that it is conscious, is never free of language, nor, in that it is also unconscious, free of desire. Consequently, the subject is always living within myth, but does not always attempt to shape that myth. Where s/he does elect to do so, the process, as O'Flaherty points out, is essentially one of <u>bricolage</u> since 'the mythmaker, like the French handyman of that name, works with the materials he is given, and must ingeniously construct any new item from the fragments of the old' (1980a:115). We are never free of the old myths, but we may select, re-combine, condense, displace and substitute fragments of them in order to drive forward our own narrative project. While it is true that too great a discrepancy between the individual mythic life and the dominant system of signification results in the breakdown of communication we know as psychosis, it is equally true that an individual who is neither being lived by a myth nor living a myth is too deprived of the possibility of meaningfulness to survive at all.

The writer who is conscious of the complex roles myths play in human affairs is not, therefore, likely to employ myth in fiction as a simple means by which to give form and meaning to his material, on the basis that a recognised myth is always 'truer' and more significant than 'the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' (Eliot, 1923:269). Indeed, one of his interests might well be to interrogate that view of myth, and uncover the ideology that it sustains. He is unlikely to seek to identify any myth as an absolute, enshrining truth, but will rather approach all myths as structures offering to interpret human experience in a number of divergent and contradictory ways. His interest in myth will necessarily engage him in the problematics of language, identity and history, all of which affect, and are affected by, mythical structures.

In the case of Patrick White, all four elements: language, identity, history, and myth, have additional, and complex, dimensions, arising from his position as an Australian writer. Diana Brydon (1984) points out that colonial or post-colonial texts can never speak with the same voices as the enabling models they have inherited. Some of these texts, she suggests, question those inherited structures despite the author's intention, while others deliberately marginalise themselves, radically decentring the institutionalised structures in favour of other assumptions. Mainstream common sense criticism, which, as Brydon recalls, was inherently ideological, in that 'it conflated English and universal to enforce England's perspective on the rest of the English-speaking world as the only "truth"' (1984:386), exemplifies the institutionalised Anglocentric myth from which the colonial text must escape. White is one of the colonial writers whom Brydon cites as having been read according to traditional critical methods as 'intelligible (if faulty)', but whose writing takes on greater interest when subjected to post-structuralist criticism, with its renewed attention to contexts, language, and the production of meaning.

The colonial writer will produce meaning out of the material conditions of his own time and place, and it is these conditions that, in their turn, have produced his history, his language, his identity and his myths. To the extent that a history, language, system of identification and matrix of myths have been imposed upon him by the Eurocentric imperialist ideology which introduced him into his new material conditions, he is linked to the imperialist system of signification, and through it to Western conceptualisation in general. At the same time, those new material conditions have set up another process of interpretation which cannot be a mere repetition of the 'parent' ideology. This is so, not only because no repetition can ever exactly reproduce that which by its very nature is unstable, but also because the colonial conditions themselves work aggressively against the construct of duplication.

Merely by having an identifiable origin, by being 'fathered', as it were, the colonialist system acknowledges its domination by a human agency. The father, however, who is also the Law, is found fallible and human from the outset. The sensory data presented by the Other topography are with difficulty translated into the mythical, and real, schemata of the imperialist language. The presence of indigenous people presents the problem of an Other, possibly coherent, system of signification which, even while it is being denied, dispersed and devalued, continues, by its mere presence, to destabilise radically the imperialist ideology. Language, history, identity and myth must now accommodate that which was not there before. The 'colonial cringe' is simply one way of acknowledging the exclusion and difference upon which the colonial experience is founded, a way which emphasises exclusion and views difference as the equivalent of inferiority.

Robert Kroetsch's contention that the 'child has to be orphaned, in a sense, to be able to recover the world' (cited in Brydon, 1984:394) indicates the inevitable struggle of colonial fiction to free itself from the controlling orthodoxy. This implies, moreover, not only liberation from the Eurocentric ideology but also an examination of the colonial ideology which has developed in response to it. Flemming Brahms points out, for example, that, in the settler colonies, the archetypal experience of their early histories, 'the ideal of the object transformed into subject', still appears, despite those colonies having been absorbed into the modern system of industrial capitalism, as a persistent myth (1982:238). Such myths, of course, enable people to conceal their socio-political stance from themselves; Morgan notes that as the Australian ideal of egalitarianism receded, the myth of 'mateship' flourished in its stead, as a personalised version of political life - 'formerly Australia was to be an egalitarian society; now we would all behave in the same way, as a substitute for the original aim' (1983:136). Rowse, considering the relationship of a predominantly suburban

homogeneity to Australian ideology, observes that 'there has been a tendency to idealise people's apparent ability to escape the nemeses of the world "outside" suburbia: the world of work, industrial conflict, politics and collective action' (1978:4). As early as 1928, the divisions which constitute a class society could be reductively described: 'There are no classes in Australia except in the economic sense' (W.K. Hancock, cited in Rowse, 1978:12). The social division of labour, between workers and owners and between men and women, could remain unquestioned, through 'the separatism of the "private" world of consumption and sexual relations from the larger social processes, in work and in politics, in which this privacy is ultimately articulated' (Rowse, 1978:11).

Thus, the initial response to the sense of exclusion and difference forced upon one by early colonial experience (and particularly in the Australian context of convict origins) can give rise to a schizoid view of the New World experience. On the one hand, it is infantilised and inferior, in perpetual tutelage; on the other, it offers the hope of transforming oneself from victim of circumstances to master of one's own destiny. In both positions, the Other, indigenous people, are useful objects: if the settler is inferior to the Father, he will impose himself as Father on the Other, rendering the Other impotent in his turn; being master of one's own destiny implies ignoring, or destroying, the destiny of the Other, who must become perpetual victim. The Eurocentric model has merely been adapted.

Degenaar examines the legitimating effects of myths on the structures of power and notes that political myths function by giving past events 'a special meaning and significance for the present and thereby reinforcing the authority of those who are wielding power in a particular community' (Tudor, cited in Degenaar, 1983:61). Degenaar cites myths of foundation, such as the Roman Foundation myth and the American Myth of the Founding

Fathers, as exemplifying this sort of mythical legitimation of power. No such event has been mythologised in Australia - indeed the settlement origin of convictism renders this difficult. Degenaar postulates two other forms of political myth, however: myths where a basic paradigm, not based on an historical event, legitimises political behaviour, and eschatological myths. The first type is exemplified by the myth of the chosen people, based on the Hebrew myth, and this always has a religious background. The eschatological myth is 'the story of a group destined to be involved in a cataclysmic transformation of the world' (Tudor, cited in Degenaar, 1983:62). It is obvious that the early naming of Australia, moving from 'hell upon earth' to 'the country with a future', and 'the workingman's paradise', points clearly to a utopian/ eschatological bias. As Morgan (1983:130) observes, the question of the first century of settlement was 'what sort of country is Australia, and what is it going to be like in the future?' whereas the question asked in the second century was 'What is it like to be an Australian?' or 'What is the Australian national character going to be like?'

> In the first instance the country as a whole was the decisive factor; its unique virtues (independence, novelty, prodigality, and so on) would mould the inhabitants into a new nation. But the process became reversed: now Australians would develop these virtues within themselves, and this would eventually, by aggregation, produce a desirable nation as a whole.
>
> Morgan, 1983:130.

It is significant that the 'wilderness' experience, as Brahms terms it, 'a space or a condition in which traditional concepts and assumptions will no longer support man in his interpretation of the universe' (1982:225), is here considered essentially therapeutic. The land itself, in a quasi-religious sense, will be responsible for shaping new men, and new categories of differentiation. G.A. Wilkes (1977) cites a study, The Australians: A social sketch (1893), in which Francis Adams

codifies the views of earlier observers. Here, the mythical change in men as a result of the wilderness experience is quite explicit:

> These are free men and free women, free boys and girls, every one of them, and will not take the whip from anything born.
>
> I have known little communities in the Australian bush, which, so far as social manner went, realised for me much, so much, of what I desired in a democracy.
>
> The ideal in thought and word and action once was made flesh and dwelt among us, and who shall call it an impossible dream for such a miracle to happen again.
>
> Adams, cited in Wilkes, 1977:318-319.

The power of the Bush to evoke the best in the man exiled from his legitimate Home is also evoked by A.A. Phillips (1958), who sees the Australian democratic tradition as 'essentially a bush-product'.

> In the bush, the Common Man had at last decisively proved himself... on the frontiers of the New Countries the Common Man could beat the gentleman.... He was no longer the under-fed, pallid, uncertain product of the slums or of a forelock-tugging tenantry, accustomed by centuries-old habit to assume his own inferiority. Successful life in the bush depended upon the individual's cunning of hand and stoutness of heart. Here at last he had proved himself a man - and he was pretty sure he was the better man.
>
> Phillips, cited in Wilkes, 1977:319.

The final statement in this extract reveals the extent to which this mythical model still contained a response to the imperialist ideology. There is the familiar Western emphasis on the male individualist, realising his potential outside society, and an element of aggression towards Others in general, and particularly towards 'the gentleman'.

The decline in the egalitarian ideal and the rise of the myth of

'mateship', already alluded to, resulted in a curious myth of homogeneity, in which individualism became as suspect as any form of 'superiority'. Richard Coe, in his discussion of Australian autobiographies of childhood and adolescence, makes reference to Hal Porter's The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony (1963), in which Porter describes his father's careful alignment with homogeneous suburban culture:

> Brought up middle class he chooses to become lower middle class, that class whose contribution to ethics is self-respect. The Australian form of self-respect, however rough-and-ready, heart-of-gold, come-and-take-pot-luck-with-us, and matily extrovert is, essentially, genteel, ingrowing, self-pitying, vanilla-ice-cream hearted, its central fear a fear of the intellect.
>
> Porter, cited in Coe, 1981:151.

Coe, in fact, seems to present the socio-psychological conformity of contemporary Australia in terms of a secondary 'wilderness' experience. Brahms indicates that this experience

> ... will often have to do with a sense of being caught in the vacuum between two 'damaged' value systems: an indigenous one that has been eroded through the penetration of a colonising force, and a Eurocentric one that is revealed as being inadequate in a radically different social and natural environment.
>
> Brahms, 1982:225.

Coe, reflecting on what he terms the myth of Australian non-culture, as documented in the autobiographies he examines, reviews the situation thus:

> The significant myth of the Australian Childhood consists in doubting whether the country in which the child-self grew up possesses a culture at all, not merely in an élitist, but in any sense whatsoever, whether that of Carlyle and Oscar Wilde, or that of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mao Tse-Tung. If there is a 'high' culture, it is felt to be imported and artificial; if there is a truly native culture - that of the Aborigines - it is not only so remote and alien as to be virtually incomprehensible, but it is

> threatened with almost immediate extinction. If there was an aggressive Australian nationalist tradition - the 'Anzac Tradition' - it was called into question by the harsh realities of World War II, undermined beyond recall by the massive immigration which followed, and finally rendered ludicrous by the draft-dodging adventures which accompanied the Vietnam involvement. The pioneer 'digger' culture is generally recognised for what it now is - a tourist attraction ... without substance in reality. And the urban or semi-urban, or plainly sub-urban context in which ninety per cent of all Australians live fails to recognise itself as a culture at all. Australia, in the opinion of all too many Australians, is an enormous void surrounded by suburbia.
>
> Coe, 1981:130-131.

The most significant point Coe makes is that the suburban world of ninety per cent of all Australians 'fails to recognise itself as a culture at all'. Rowse, however, indicates that such writers as Craig McGregor (1966) and Hugh Stretton (1976) make out a case for suburbia as a cultural system, a case which, as Rowse points out, is inherently ambivalent. He traces the concealed ideology which reinforces the view of Australia as 'an ensemble of discrete individual house-holders, ignoring the less visible but more important relationships which connect individuals (in ways of which they may not be aware), relationships that make up social classes and political forces' (Rowse, 1978:4). When Richard White examines images of Australian identity in Inventing Australia, he makes the telling point that ideas (or myths) about national identity should not be examined so much to determine whether they are true or false, factual or mythical, but rather in order to establish 'what their function is, whose creation they are and whose interests they serve' (1981:viii, my underlining). In answer to White's query, Rowse postulates that the interests served by the suburban cultural dynamic are those of patriarchal capitalism, and that proponents such as McGregor and Stretton fail to recognise that their defence of suburbia is couched 'in the same individualist and apolitical terms as has [sic] been recommended more brazenly in

the acquisitive consumerist society which each of them would claim to criticise' (Rowse, 1978:12). Stretton openly approves the separation of the 'private' world from the world of work and politics; McGregor sees suburban quiescence as a form of freedom:

> The man who becomes absorbed in his home is much less likely to become involved in public issues such as conscription or Vietnam or free enterprise, in the whole fabric of democratic activity. I think this is probably true but once again it has to be kept in perspective. There are some advantages in such a disengagement: the man who lives in a bung in Padstow is much freer, much less oppressed by community pressures and conformism, than Dublin terrace-dwellers or Naples proletarians ... . The Australian suburbanite is probably freer of the stifling pressure of social authoritarianism than any other city dweller in history.
>
> McGregor cited in Rowse, 1978:10.

It is plain that Australian suburbia constitutes a powerful myth, in Barthes' terms. It is inherently ideological, since it serves patriarchal capitalism, but it is very clearly a kind of 'depoliticised' speech, which by its 'natural' appearance, tends to escape critical enquiry. The glaring contradictions in McGregor's defence of suburbia are smoothed over: 'what is immediately visible' is a world which looks like the world of equality as long as one does not ask why personal, domestic 'independence' and 'freedom' are ineluctably allied to political apathy.

The refusal to recognise this as a culture at all is a necessary denial in terms of the dominant ideology. Visser (1985) makes reference to the distinction drawn between 'the personal and the class individual' by Marx and Engels. Autonomous individuality is experienced, the writers assert, as an inevitable concomitant of the division of labour:

> ... within the division of labour social relationships take on an independent existence, there appears a division within the life of each individual, insofar as it is personal and insofar as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it.
>
> Cited in Visser, 1985:17.

This division is markedly present in the suburban social dynamic already described, but it is masked in a very particular way. Since there is a powerful drive to avoid any identification with bourgeois social practices, the suburban myth suggests its alienation from such practices by concealing its complicity with autonomous individuality under the cloak of a mythical 'working-class' homogeneity. Every man, at least, is free to regard himself as outside society and history, as long as he conforms to a mythically a-cultural set of behaviours. In this instance, a specific ideology, that is to say, a specific network of social practices, operates not only to close off and conceal the contradictions of the individual human subject but also to produce and fix the individual in a particular relation to representation within the specific social process. In the subject-positions situated in the mythical non-culture of suburban social practice, it is necessary that the subject perceive himself or herself as free, homogeneous and responsible for his/her actions, thus far stereotypical of the 'free' subject of bourgeois ideology. It is also necessary, however, for these subject-positions to appear to differ substantially from those positions already ideologically distinguished in the Eurocentric model as inherently bourgeois. The comments, made by Stretton and cited by Rowse (1978:10), on the 'freedom' of Australian suburban householders, which Stretton himself sees as essentially allied to the dissociation of the personal from the political, are nevertheless explicitly contrasted with the subject-positions of the Eurocentric model. McGregor sees the Australian 'in his bung at Padstow' as being other than the Neopolitan proletarian, but cannot afford to acknowledge the most significant difference: his petit-bourgeois Australian is not a true member of the proletariat at all (Rowse, 1978:10).

The 'autonomous' individual, in his suburban subject-position, perceives himself as autonomous in the sense that he regards himself as outside society and outside history. He is nonetheless bound to conceal this stance by observing a set of a-cultural behaviours which ensure that he conforms to a specific depoliticised illusion of freedom (by means of which patriarchal capitalism is reinforced) through a paradoxical display stance of neutralised, inert 'working-class' homogeneity.

The apparent insistence on a lack of subjectivity and its concomitant, interiority, in this set of behaviours is of considerable ideological importance. Interiority, an idea-historical construct of mythical nature, is an aspect of the Western individualism to which Marx and Engels refer in the quotation cited above, a construct which conceals its ideological base by appearing to be 'universal', 'true', and 'natural'. Its ideological value lies in the enhanced value of the subject's 'private' consciousness, placing the subject in the position of a 'whole', homogeneous subject in relation to meaning: 'one who thinks himself/herself to be the point of origin of ideas and actions' (Coward and Ellis, 1977:77).

Thus, the authors perceive the consistent subject in the following terms:

> The consistent subject is the place to which the representations of ideology are directed: Duty, Morality and Law all depend on this category of subject for their functioning, and all contribute as institutions to its production. The individual thus lives his subject-ion to social structures as a consistent subject-ivity, an imaginary wholeness. Ideologies set in place the individual as though he were this subject: the individual produces himself in this imaginary wholeness, this imaginary reflection of himself as the author of his actions.
>
> Coward and Ellis, 1977:76.

In terms of capitalist ideology, such a consistent subjectivity functions as a closure and structural limit: 'the imaginary identity of ideology closes off the movement of contradictions, calling upon the subject as consistent. ... [It] produces the individual in a relation to representation within the social process in which he is situated, as an identity (a point of self-reference) rather than as a process' (Coward and Ellis, 1977:77, my underlining). Nevertheless, as Coward and Ellis pertinently observe, Marx's claim that no ideology is ever general should alert us to the specifics of every socio-historical context. Within the Australian context, a specific organisation of reality articulates with a specific set of fixed relations of representation: in order to be 'Australian' the social totality must be represented as 'other' than its European parent. This 'otherness' is valorised as a mythical class-freedom and egalitarianism of specifically Australian origin. On the other hand, the dominant capitalist ideology requires the subject to be produced in a fixed set of relations to the social practice of wage labour. Consequently, this contradiction demands concealment, a concealment which establishes itself as a negative homogeneity. The subject-position of autonomous individualism, and its concomitant, interiority, becomes a uniform display stance, an outward display of autonomy, rigorously subjected to a strictly homogeneous practice, dominated by inertia.

Thus, to exclude interiority from the social dynamic is effectively counter-revolutionary, for

> ... if subjectivity is inseparable from society, it is equally inseparable from agency, and hence from praxis: intending, desiring, believing, striving - what sort of agency is conceivable in the absence of these? And after all, what Marx wrote was, that social being determines consciousness, not that social being excludes consciousness.
>
> Visser, 1985:16.

Clearly, the suburban myth of a non-culture emerges from a double bind: an overtly bourgeois cultural pattern cannot be established since it will inevitably point to its origins; a genuinely proletarian culture is equally impossible since this cannot be separated from a collectivist commitment. Coe indicates the quandary into which the apolitical Australian writer is frequently plunged:

> Culturally, the most predictable reaction in an Australian intellectual who, under post-1939 conditions, had fought his way up from Australian suburban non-culture to the high culture of the English tradition, only to reject the latter as effete and non-Australian, would be to resort to an Australian proletarian culture - if such a thing existed. But it doesn't. Nor, in any proper Marxist sense, is there an Australian proletariat, save in the most rudimentary form.
>
> Coe, 1981:157.

Paradoxically, an element which has been consistently present throughout the period of settlement is both deeply recognised and at the same time denied. While Coe describes Australia as 'an enormous void surrounded by suburbia', he also acknowledges that this void is the site of powerful mythical, and mystical, attraction. Campbell poses the sort of question demanded by Richard White, in this regard:

> Perhaps we need to ask ourselves more deeply why it is that the Outback still figures so forcefully in our imagery, even though we flee from its untameable emptiness into the seeming security of suburbia.
>
> Campbell, 1977:187.

The non-culture, in fact, employs the Outback as a powerful cultural element; it forms part of a persistent dialectic between the 'real' Australia of the Bush and the Outback, and 'the cultural desert of mindless ugliness which constitutes urban, or rather sub-urban, Australia' (Coe, 1981:134). Coe traces the consciousness of this dialectic through the

autobiographies of childhood recorded by writers who published texts between 1910 and 1976. In his view, the bush experience, however vestigial, of the writer-as-child frequently 'has the force of an inner religious vision, to which he responds with quasi-mystic fervour, apprehending his self, his identity, in relation to a totality greater than anything human' (Coe, 1981:138).

The extracts cited earlier from Adams and Phillips indicate what the earliest expectations of the Bush were: it would be responsible for shaping the new men of the eschatological myth. The shift from the shaping influence of the Bush to autonomous responsibility for utopia is also documented by Morgan. After the socialist ferment of the decade, 1910-1920, however, the myths of pioneer culture were foregrounded to conceal the ideological basis for the separatism of personal and political life. These myths, as Coe indicates, did not survive the socio-political upheavals post-1939. On the other hand, the myth of the Outback continues to express 'a totality greater than anything human', in response to which the individual apprehends his 'true' identity.

Rowse, in fact, indicates the extent to which even Vance Palmer's hopes for an imminent Australian socialism in the earlier part of the century were connected to 'a flowering of the best ethos of the Bush' (1978:6), and comments that Palmer ascribed 'Australia's Transformation' not to the defeat of working class militancy but to the dominance of suburban materialism over the Bush ethic. Michael Cotter (1977) points out the extent to which Vance Palmer and Meanjin figured in the development of this Australian romanticism, a romanticism which continues to obscure and defuse social criticism. The quasi-religious attraction of the Bush, to which Coe draws our attention, is clearly a part of this romanticism. The individual who fails to find complete satisfaction in his life as a discrete, individual, suburban dweller is directed outwards

to find his individual 'recognition' outside society, in a mystical union with the 'real' Australia. Thus the land continues its mythical role as the shaper of new men, but the new man now has an individual, mystical destiny entirely separate from his social self.

Coe demonstrates that the vision of Paradise is considered both real and inaccessible once childhood has passed, and that the Australian artist generally attempts to negotiate a position for himself within the Limbo of suburbia from which 'Paradise and Limbo have, eventually at least, to be accepted as the two inseparable constituents of the same reality' (1981:139). He views the myth of the Australian Childhood as unique in that it takes this dialectical form, and points out that there is a powerful connection between this dialectic and the pervasive concern of Australian artists with the question of an authentic Australian culture.

It is clear that the myth of suburbia and the myth of the Bush arise from the same ideological source: both offer to interpret human experience as essentially depoliticised, and the dialectic between them is demonstrably contrived to deflect attention away from the material conditions of time and place. There are, however, fundamental ambiguities which are only exacerbated by concentration upon this dialectic:

> ... ambiguity about authority, which is reviled and yet conformed to; ambiguity about the land, which is shamelessly exploited and yet cannot be domesticated; ambiguity about ourself, as a people oriented towards the future yet clinging obsessively to old, familiar forms of thought and social action.
>
> Campbell, 1977:187.

A highly significant ambiguity, to which Campbell does not refer, is related to the construct of the land as empty space or void. This effectively conceals the colonial origins of white Australia, and 'the consciousness of usurpation which, is, after

all, a sore at the heart of our relationship with this land and a deep unacknowledged influence on what is vaguely known as the Australian character' (Wright, 1975:149). In order for the land to function as mystical mother of a new race, it is necessary to empty it of traces of those whose dispossession and 'dispersal' (a telling early Australian euphemism for murder) followed hard upon the 'utopian' response to the New World. J.M. Coetzee documents a similar white South African response:

> In all the poetry commemorating meetings with the silence and emptiness of Africa - it must finally be said - it is hard not to read a certain historical will to see as silent and empty a land that has been, if not full of human figures, not empty of them either; that is arid and infertile, perhaps, but not inhospitable to human life, and certainly not uninhabited.
>
> Coetzee, 1988:177.

On the one hand, the empty Bush has maintained a mythical significance in literature; on the other, as Cotter points out, 'concern with the undermining and ignoring of Aboriginal culture and an exploration of the origins and causes of white guilt have emerged as themes in Australian literature' (1977:582). The three novels Cotter examines are treated as exempla of texts interrogating colonialism itself, and were all published post-1960. All three demonstrate 'a concern with cultural transformations at individual as well as group levels'. Coe (1981) recognises that Australian social patterns have been in transition since the 1960s but makes no mention of altered awareness of the Aboriginal as part of cultural transformation.

A related ambiguity is to be discerned in the suburban myth. Rowse points out that the individualist freedom said to be offered by suburban life is male-oriented, in that it does not take into account the exploitation of the unpaid labour of women 'taught to think of this as their duty' (Rowse, 1978:11). (He indicates that the connections between the exploitation of labour at work and in the home have now become the concern of Australian Marxist feminists.)

This male orientation may be considered a significant characteristic of Australian myth. Morgan's discussion of the 'typical' Australian personality deals exclusively in male stereotypes. In the latter part of the last century the bush ranger and boundary rider were depicted as 'solitary, withdrawn, quiescent ... perhaps uncommunicative and unsociable' in their periods of isolation; in company, they are filled with 'feverish energy and gregariousness. Mateship, which developed retro-actively, foregrounded manliness and fraternal loyalties and affection; the 'Wild Colonial Boy', the later 'larrikin' and the 'ocker' are all exclusively male display behaviour stances (Morgan, 1983: 131). One might be forgiven for assuming that the 'typical' Australian is a white male. Where women do appear in the suburban dynamic, they are depicted as part of the corruption of the innocent Bush-nurtured male (Hancock, 1928, cited in Rowse, 1978:6) through the empty rituals of social status, to which Horne (1972:23) asserts women are inevitably drawn. Their legitimacy, such as it is, is based solely upon their role in reproduction and in the institutions of home and family.

While Coe makes no mention of the aggressively male character of Australian myth, or of the effect upon it of the social changes post-1960, George Petelin, in examining the role of Australian figurative painters in myth criticism and alternative mythical structuration, notes that, from the late 50s, some Australian painters were confronting the issues of the Aborigine - 'cast as the mystical "other", exotic and inscrutable' - and of the woman. He cites as an example of a new social interpretation a painting by Noel Counihan, Family Swan Hill (1960).

> Counihan's family consists of three women and two children. Moreover, the startlingly fair child who stares accusingly out of the picture is held by a dark girl with Mediterranean features, while behind them, only her eyes visible above the blond child's head, is an unmistakably Aboriginal girl. Australia is thus posited as a pluralist urban society in which the family is likely to be far from conventional.
>
> Petelin, 1984:548.

Petelin's guarded parallels between the works of the period 1942-1962, and the contemporary work which is issuing from a similar wave of figurative painting, are illuminating. In terms of the socio-political contexts of both periods, he concedes that there are some significant parallels: 'Australian artists again seem to be responding to military escalation, nuclear threat, accelerating social change, inequality and social invasion' (Petelin, 1984:544). At the same time, he perceives new anxieties, a new sense of a secondary colonisation by transnational capitalism, in terms of which 'Australian' fears, hopes and desires seem to lose relevance and 'the hope of a proletarian ascendancy in traditional terms' recedes (Petelin, 1984:549). While he asserts the importance of 'art's revolutionary role in challenging the dominant myths' of a society, he implies that in the contemporary situation his society is fast becoming the victim of the myths of a new imperialist ideology.

It has been necessary to sketch, however briefly, the dominant Australian mythical constructs and their relationship to constructs of identity and history, since these are the specifics within which the work of White is produced. The texts considered in this study were published between 1948 and 1986; I omit his two earliest novels, Happy Valley (1939) and The Living and the Dead (1941) as well as The Vivisector (1970). The early works do not relate significantly to the objects of this study, and the The Vivisector is a more conventional treatment of the myth of the artist than that conveyed pervasively in the texts under consideration.

It is interesting to note that Brian Kiernan, in an examination of White's autobiographical text, Flaws in the Glass (1981), attempts to insert White into the pattern postulated for the Australian artist by Richard Coe. This pattern offers the writer certain options in negotiating a position for himself in the context of Australian non-culture. 'The options open to him

as a writer are to retreat imaginatively into the past of the pioneers, to assimilate with the established cultures of the old world, or to attempt to create a new culture out of the ubiquitous "non-culture"' (Kiernan, 1983:169). (Kiernan asserts that White has made use of all three options.) From this one might infer that work produced in terms of the first two options (if these are provisionally accepted as relevant to White) would represent attempts to escape from the impasse of his material conditions, a regression into other time and other space. Only the third option would then constitute an 'authentic' Australian writing.

Even if one were to set aside the notion of the past as myth and consider it, as Kiernan appears to do, as history, White's situation of certain texts in the past need not be considered as a fugue from the present. Belsey comments on two relevant meanings of history:

> ... the present-as-process, the process of which the present is a part, in which we exist at a specific moment that is understood to be both the product and the location of certain determinations. This meaning of history is important, and Marxist, but there is another important and Marxist meaning of history which needs emphasis, and this is history-as-the-past, the past which we produce from the present in order to show the present not only as its product but also as its difference, the past from which the present is differentiated.
>
> Belsey, 1984:138.

Belsey's concern is with literary texts, but her comments on these, and their histories, also hold true for myth.

> The history of the reception of literary texts [or myths] shows how the present appropriates the text [myth] for itself. We need to study this history. But there are other histories to which both literary texts [myths] and their readings may give us access, enabling us to reproduce the past from the present, to identify its discontinuity with the present.
>
> Belsey, 1984:138.

Thus, to re-turn to the past, in terms of either history or myth, need not be viewed as evasive but rather as constructive, or re-constructive. In Voss, The Tree of Man and A Fringe of Leaves, White both reads and re-writes the myths of Australian tradition. He enters into a dialogic relationship with these mythic narratives, in which his text offers to fill vacant spaces, enter gaps, and give speech to silence. In this sense, White is responding to the very nature of myth, in that he sets in motion a further intent-to-interpret, freeing the myths of tradition from the immobilisation to which ideology has subjected them. The content of his alternative mythic narratives identifies the ideological source of the traditional myths; the form of these narratives insistently reminds the reader of their lack of anonymity, and consequently, of their openness to critical enquiry. By working within myth, White acknowledges its value as discourse; by openly revealing the status of his narrative as 'his' myth, he paradoxically denies his mastery of it, offering it to the reader for further acts of interpretation. In this way, myth is restored as process, and thus as a part of history, while it is denied status as the 'true' and the 'real'.

The option of assimilating 'with the established cultures of the old world' is not an option, for, in a very real sense, those cultures have always already been present. As Richard White, in tracing the progression of constructs purporting to encapsulate the essentially 'Australian' identity, points out:

> The national identity is not 'Born of the lean loins of the country itself', as one ardent nationalist put it, but is part of the 'cultural baggage' which Europeans have brought with them, and with which we continue to encumber ourselves.
>
> White, 1981:ix.

Mannoni makes a similar general point:

> ... the personality of the colonial is made up, not of characteristics acquired during and through the experience of the colonies, but of traits, very often in the nature of a complex, already existent in a latent and repressed form in the European's psyche, traits which the colonial experience has simply brought to the surface and made manifest.
>
> Mannoni, 1956:97.

Perhaps what the option really implies is a denial of 'Australianness', an attempt to excise the colonial experience. In Patrick White's case, there is no such denial; his discourse reveals the complex ambivalences of the Australian experience, but fails to hold up 'not-Australia' as less equivocal and ambivalent. Moreover, as I intend to demonstrate in my readings of the novels, his concern with the present-as-process and with history-as-the-past extends beyond the geographical boundaries of Australia to those factors which have shaped, and continue to shape, Western consciousness and culture generally.

The final, 'Australian', option embraces the other two. In his reading and rewriting of myths of Australian and European provenance, White relates them to his own social context, and thus to the contemporary myth of non-culture. His representation of the ideological basis of that non-culture is grounded in the specifics of that ideology, and of these, the most significant is the problematic of identity.

Coward and Ellis, in their analysis of Althusser's formulations regarding ideology and the subject, point out that his work fails 'to present the subject as traversed and worked by social contradiction; as having an unconscious which is concomitant with his consciousness' (1977:75). Althusser's failure to accept that the subject is, in itself, a subject in process (corresponding to the process of society and nature) makes it impossible, they contend, to account for the heterogeneous and contradictory nature of the subject. It is proposed that

psychoanalytic practice, which examines subjective processes and their construction in language, could provide 'a theory of the processes by which the structural limits of a society are established and transgressed'.

> This would involve a precise notion of the status of language, in articulation with, but not subsumed to, ideology. It would also involve an elaboration of the place of the unconscious, the site of interaction between psychic representations and a contradictory outside, produced in the process of the construction of a language-using subject.
>
> Coward and Ellis, 1977:78.

These authors contend that the work of Lacan provides such a foundation for a materialist theory of the subject in the social process, 'a subject constructed as always already included by those social processes, but never simply reducible to being a support' (Coward and Ellis, 1977:93). Julia Kristeva, commenting on Lacan's re-reading of Freud which emphasises the mobility of the subject in process, asserts that Lacan introduces 'the missing area in human sciences, that of the process of meaning in language and ideology, <u>the process of the "I" in history, an area which would operate in the same space as dialectical materialism itself</u>' (cited in Coward and Ellis, 1977:93, my underlining). Thus Kristeva's own work moves towards a materialist theory of signification 'which would locate the sign as a stage in the dialectical process which would be <u>the process of the subject itself</u>' (Coward and Ellis, 1977:135).

While Jameson correctly warns against ahistorical assumptions that 'the constituted subject, the unconscious, Oedipus complex, desire, and the like - all theorised from modern or bourgeois materials - remain constant through history' (1977:42), he does not, on that account, exclude the construction of a 'psycho-analytic' subject from his Marxian model. Provided that the psychoanalytic model is dialectically modified according to the

structural position assigned to it in a specific mode of production, Jameson asserts that it may validly contribute to the Marxian hermeneutic. Thus, in terms of a relationship with the past, even the immediate past of the capitalist mode of production, such matters as language, desire, and the quest for identity, remain privileged objects of study, but as part of a specific social totality.

(Jameson's view of history itself is congruent with the view of myth already put forward, in that he presents history as 'an absent cause, as that which can never know full representation'.

> History is not in any sense itself a text or master text or master narrative, but [that] it is inaccessible to us except in textual or narrative form, or, in other words, [that] we approach it only by way of some prior textualisation or narrative (re)construction.
>
> Jameson, 1979:42.)

As a post-colonial society, Australia embraces more than a Western model, and thus the question of identity, if it is to be approached psychoanalytically, demands a more flexible instrument than classical Freudianism. Jameson, in reviewing the need for a more flexible psychoanalytic instrument, remarks:

> The methodological recourse to ... sociologically different contexts ... has the merit of freeing the psychoanalytic model from its dependency on the classical Western family, with its ideology of individualism and its categories of the subject and (in matters of literary representation) of the character. It suggests in turn the need for a model which is not locked into the classical opposition between the individual and the collective, but is rather able to think these continuities in a radically different way. Such is indeed the promise of Lacan's conception of the three orders (Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real) ... .
>
> Jameson, 1977:348-349.
> (my underlining)

The work of Julia Kristeva in the field of Lacanian theory extends the psychoanalytic model to include feminist discourse, a vital element in the examination of social constructs marked by extremes of sexual, as well as racial, differentiation. Kristeva's approach is also congruent with Jameson's, in that she shares a commitment to the Utopian impulse. Her feminism, moreover, is not 'a place of truth' and is thus equally congruent with Jameson's view of Marxism:

> ... its subjects are not centered in some possession of dogma, but are rather very precisely historically decentered: only the Utopian future is a place of truth in this sense, and the privilege of contemporary life and of the present lies not in its possession, but at best in the rigorous judgment it may be felt to pass on us.
>
> Jameson, 1979:71.

The Utopian impulse is a powerful element in White's writing. His concerns with the present-as-process, and with the past, are inherently social and collective, and his texts constantly suggest a future in which manichean divisions may cease to signify. The fixed oppositions, Self/Other, Man/Woman, are radically called into question, and a <u>process</u> of differentiation foregrounded in their stead. White does not formulate a new theory of the subject but it is unlikely that he would quarrel with E.P. Thompson's view of what such a socialised self could be:

> Men and women ... return as subjects within this term, not as autonomous subjects, 'free individuals', but as persons experiencing their determinate productive situations and relationships, as needs and interests and as antagonisms, and then 'handling' this experience within their <u>consciousness</u> and their <u>culture</u> ... in the most complex ... ways, and then (often but not always through the ensuing structures of class) acting upon their determinate situations in their turn.
>
> Cited in Visser, 1985:18.

I have been concerned thus far with an exposition of how myth is to be understood in the context of this study. To this I have added a particular view of history, relating it both to myth and to a particular psychoanalytic discourse, which embraces not only the general interrogation of the subject but also the particular problems of female discourse. In so doing, I have made it clear that my own critical discourse reflects an intent-to-interpret which is neither innocent nor value-free. Inherent in that position is the acceptance of the provisionality of this discourse, which is perhaps validated only by its exemplarily mythical function as interpretation-as/in-process.

My critical procedure will be to examine White's texts in terms of their interrogation of existing mythical structures, and their substitution of alternative mythical structures, which both interrogate and illuminate a particular socio-historical context. To some extent this procedure may be regarded as based upon reflection theory, in that I attempt to identify and analyse the status of White's oeuvre as social action. However, the extent to which works are found to reflect, and to reflect upon, the social conditions of their production ought not, as Hayden White (1980) warns, to obscure the importance of the kind of social action these works call for. If the predictable effects on the reader are substitutes for political action designed to change the social situation, then the works must be viewed as supportive, not subversive, of the ideology they purport to oppose.

> ... the consumers of this genre are permitted to feel morally superior to other members of their class by virtue of that 'understanding' they have of a social phenomenon that is to be deplored, but this understanding can be discharged into general feelings of melancholy produced by a conviction that 'what is to be done' cannot be clearly seen.
>
> Hayden White, 1980:369.

While it is true that White's novels appear to privilege interiority, a phenomenon that has earned him the title, 'self-conscious aristocrat' (Brahms, 1982:222) I have already indicated that in the particular socio-historical context of these novels, the exclusion of interiority from the social dynamic represents an important element in the process of depoliticisation. Moreover, as I have argued, concentration upon the nature of the subject, its formation and deformation, in terms of the theories of Lacan, and particularly their development by Kristeva, permits the resolution of an ambiguity of classical Marxism:

> ... the ambiguity of showing the place of the subjective moment in the transformation of society when subjective actions are initially posited as simply mirroring the objective processes of history.
>
> Coward and Ellis, 1977:8.

If the subject, who experiences his/her determinate productive situations and relationships, as needs and interests and antagonisms, is postulated as '"handling" this experience within [their] <u>consciousness</u> and [their] <u>culture</u>' (Thompson, cited in Visser, 1985:18), s/he must possess that degree of interiority which permits the perception of the complex relationships between consciousness, culture and modes of production and reproduction. Consequently, White's deconstruction of the 'Australian' identity, in its various phases of development towards post-colonial nationalism, is allied to a (re)construction of identity, in personal, sexual and socio-political terms.

(It is interesting in this regard to note Simon During's comments on post-colonial nationalism, as viewed by both Jameson and Lyotard:

> Post-colonial nationalism articulates itself in the 'narrative-mythic' which constructs an immutable cultural origin ... and it projects a 'home' in which difference is suspended; its greatest modern exemplar is Nazism.
>
> During, 1987:41.)

There would appear to be two areas of difficulty for a contemporary writer of oppositional tendencies, and, particularly, a writer within the post-colonial context. The first of these relates to the paradox within which the writer must function: working from within the structures he desires to subvert, he must create sufficient critical distance between that work and those structures to prevent the work from being absorbed by the very system it opposes. The second problem relates to the status of his work. Hayden White points out the dangerous tendency of the artist 'to fetishise his own product as being itself the universal sign and incarnation of value in a given social system' (1980:378). There is a basic contradiction, as White observes, in the writer who 'while experiencing his own alienation as an effect of his commodification, [seeks] to deny the reality of that condition by fetishising his own activity as the highest kind of human labor' (White, 1980:379).

The first problem, in Patrick White's case, is only partially solved by his adoption of mythical structures. These, it is true, have the advantage of at least pointing in the right direction: 'the ancient desire to make comprehensible that which is not in a shared language' (Gould, 1981:32), for this would appear to offer a way of presenting the unpresentable, a problem relating to feminist discourse as much as to post-colonial discourse. The inherent difficulty for both is to negotiate a spatial position from which each, categorised in Western representation as the Other, may legitimately speak. Neither wishes to speak with the voice of the imperialist patriarchy, since, in that case, they would cease to speak at all. On the other hand, since their only position within discourse has been as Other, they are faced with the paradox that only silence would constitute their 'true' representation. This is, in fact, the paradox of myth, which would attempt, in language, to make comprehensible what is not in language. As a discursive project, a mythic narrative is thus destined to fail. As I have already indicated, however, a mythic narrative which pointedly

refers to its author (as I shall demonstrate White's texts do) can turn its 'contamination' to good account. Its mythic form refers very directly to its intent-to-interpret, and to present the unpresentable; its lack of mythic authority, in having been overtly 'authored', makes it quite clear that the use of myth represents a crisis of representation.

In Chapter Two, I shall present a reading of The Aunt's Story and The Twyborn Affair as mythic narratives in which the unpresentable is figured in the ambivalent form of the androgyne. This figure, presented with a female, as well as a male, orientation, directly aligns the traditional sexual identification, man/woman, with the general system of exclusive binary oppositions - presence/absence, true/false, same/other, identity/difference. The androgyne, moreover, clearly highlights two problems. Firstly, while anatomical difference has come to figure sexual difference, this is inconsistent with any post-Freudian view of the sexual drives:

> ... anatomical difference comes to figure sexual difference, that is, it becomes the sole representative of what that difference is allowed to be. It thus covers over the complexity of the child's early sexual life with a crude opposition in which that very complexity is refused or repressed. The phallus thus indicates the reduction of difference to an instance of visible perception, a seeming value.
>
> Rose, 1982:42.

Secondly, if the child acquires language, subjectivity and a gendered identity in the same movement into the symbolic order, the androgyne becomes both unthinkable and unspeakable in symbolic terms. Even silence cannot truly express it, since it is not only the Other. As I shall demonstrate in my readings of these texts, White further illustrates the problem through the divergencies of female and male androgynes. Theodora Goodman, as female androgyne, is finally forced to escape both language and history in a complex act of displacement. E, the male

androgyne of The Twyborn Affair, has language, even though language cannot truly speak him/her. Equally, E can effect a relationship with history, even if on grotesque terms. The male orientation is sufficient to posit a transgressive identity within the Law; the female orientation places the androgyne in the position of the Homeric Nobody.

What is most significant about these texts, which I discuss as texts framing other texts, is that they achieve a measure of equivalence though the contrasting, but similar androgyne figures. If, as White implies, the reduction of difference to an instance of visible perception, a seeming value, represses the general complexity of human sexuality, then the problem ceases to be an exclusively female one. Male privilege within the patriarchal Law is not achieved without cost. White, in fact, is concerned not only with how women are affected/effected by language but also with the extent to which men also are reduced/elevated by it. The self is constituted in language, which is always Other, and is so constituted by its splitting from its own Other, the unconscious, so that we are all ultimately faced with the same loss:

> ... the loss of being that comes from re-presenting oneself in language as a meaning, correlative with the formation of the unconscious and the onset of desire, the Oedipeanisation of the subject, and the acquisition of a place in the cultural order through the recognition of the Name of the Father ... .
>
> Fineman, 1981:47.

In examining the question of identity as determined by post-colonial nationalism, White also challenges the concepts of an 'immutable cultural origin' and a "home" in which difference is suspended' (During:41). He attempts, through language, and through myth in language, to subvert these apparently immutable structures. Kristeva's insistence on the subversive in the signifying practices of what she terms the semiotic mode makes it clear that such subversion can be a matter of textuality:

> The thetic - that crucial place on the basis of which the human being constitutes himself as signifying and/ or social - is the very place textual experience aims towards. In this sense, textual experience represents one of the most daring explorations the subject can allow himself, one that delves into his constitutive process. But at the same time and as a result, textual experience reaches the very foundation of the social - that which is exploited by sociality but which elaborates and can go beyond it, either destroying or transforming it.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:117.
> (my underlining)

Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic modes of signification postulates the uneasy co-existence of both these modalities in every signifying practice. The symbolic mode is linked to a positionality which locates the subject in relation to meaning so that s/he finds a signifying place in the laws of culture. The semiotic modality, however, is an equally essential part of signifying practice even though it is multiple, heterogeneous and contradictory. Coward and Ellis observe that the genotext, which Kristeva postulates as containing the semiotic process as well as the advent of the symbolic (which is centred in the phenotext),

> ... puts the identity of meaning, the speaking subject, and therefore transcendency into crisis because it refers to unconscious processes, to the drives and to the socio-historical constraints in which these processes are structured.
>
> Coward and Ellis, 1977:148.

A text which is dominated by the semiotic modality 'functions through, despite of and in addition to signification'; its obviously heterogeneous set of processes 'discomforts and unsettles the reader's historical, cultural and psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language' (Coward and Ellis, 1977:149).

The authors consider self-reflexive texts as exempla of this signifying practice:

> Characteristic are those twentieth-century texts which minutely examine their own matter: language, systems of signification and the subject implicated in this signification. ... literature becomes auto-analysis, an implicit research into the rules of its own construction, exposing its components and laws. In opening onto this process of construction, and in fragmenting the unity of the subject, these texts are no longer instruments of communication, but signifying practices which show the subject understanding and organising the real.
>
> It is for this reason that Kristeva always insists on the correspondence of these texts and revolutionary practice, since both rely on the destruction of fixed, unified, constant subjectivity knotted into the sign, governed by the thetic (social) requirements.
>
> Coward and Ellis, 1977:149-150.

Thus while multiple socio-political constraints may lock the signifying process into a fixed structure or into a matrix of structures, Kristeva proposes that the genotext, consisting of the semiotic processes plus the advent of the symbolic, is that part of the signifying process which is capable of unknotting those constraints. Within language itself, the possibility of transformation is inscribed, making language the potential site of plural, heterogeneous and contradictory processes of signification. Kristeva points out, in addition, that all signifying practices are generated in this way, and adds the following note:

> From a similar perspective, Edgar Morin writes: '<u>We can think of magic, mythologies, and ideologies both as mixed systems</u>, making affectivity rational and rationality affective, <u>and as outcome of combining (a) fundamental drives, (b) the chancy play of fantasy, and (c) logico-constructive systems</u>. (To our mind, the theory of myth must be based on triunic syncretism rather than unilateral logic.)
>
> Kristeva, 1986:135.
> (my underlining)

In his review of recurrent problems in criticism of White's work, Alan Lawson (1979) refers to the problem of the 'gap' in White's texts. The 'gap' which is commonly perceived by readers is variously, and significantly, defined. William Walsh remarks:

> It is somewhere between imaginative power, and authenticity and crispness of detail that Patrick White's work is imperfect ... . The failure is not in the generating concept nor in the worked-out detail - neither in the idea nor in the vocabulary, that is - but somewhere between in what one might call the syntactical structure.
>
> Cited in Lawson, 1979:285.

Margaret Walters speaks of 'a general failure to distinguish between White's intention and achievement'; Dorothy Green of a conflict between his analytical ability and his dramatic gift (cited in Lawson, 1979:285). The most commonly distinguished 'failure', Lawson indicates, is that White

> ... cannot always enact what his rhetoric seems to insist, that 'too often what sounds profound turns out to be an effect of sonorous tone rather than intellectual substance' ... .
>
> Lawson, 1979:287-288.
> (my underlining)

Adrian Mitchell identifies the gap as opening between meaning and language:

> ... so that we play a game of linguistic and narrative detection, hoping to find his meaning in the crevices and arcs between the words, or perhaps behind them - for White as well as his characters insists [sic] that you can understand what the words are about without under- standing the words themselves. To ask the reader to accept that is to ask quite a lot; more perhaps, than a novelist ought to ask.
>
> Mitchell, 1978:12.

In what appears to be one of the few attempts to consider White's fiction in the light of Lacanian theory, Veronica Brady comments on White's discursive project:

> ... his attempt at the reconstruction of reality which involves the expression of what 'you do not know, but know', an experience which is neither symbolic nor imaginary but something in between, an experience foreclosed to analytic experience, to the rational language and ordering of the culture he lives in which still relies on the promises of the Enlightenment. ... the strain of this attempt is most evident in the language, in the melodramatic pressures upon it in the lexical and syntactical distortions and violations as well as in the concreteness of description ... and anthropomorphism ....
>
> Brady, 1983:233.

It is clear that critics adopting traditional stances towards White's fiction are generally left with the 'gap' to be explained - a gap which seems to have been responsible for much of the 'intelligible (if faulty)' opinion, to which Brydon (1984:386) alludes. In Chapter Four, I discuss the notion of 'fault', in Kristeva's sense of 'ambivalence', and would add here only the sense of 'fault' as fissure or schism. For in the gap, fissure or schism, which is also transgression, we may observe the division of the subject, and of the text, and those transgressive movements in the subject, and in the text, which attempt to re-write those meanings already made present and legitimate, meanings which are also themselves the causes of absence and repression.

The problem, raised by Hayden White, of the artist's fetishistic view of his own work 'as the highest kind of human labor' (1980:378) has yet to be addressed. I have already indicated that White, by indicating his authorship of the mythic narratives, immediately renounces authority. This strategy reduces his status as truth-teller to one-who-intends-to-interpret and, as my readings will demonstrate, this non-authoritative interpretative stance is supported by a variety of

rhetorical strategies which both reduce the value of his own work to work-in-process and insist that the further process, the work of production of meaning, be generated by the reader. While the artist frequently appears to be privileged in White's texts, it is not a privilege accorded him in terms of his labour per se but in terms of the purpose towards which he labours. The artist is privileged to the extent that he is a dissident, and an exile, for whom the task, as Kristeva sees it, is this:

> We must attack the very premises of this rationality and this society, as well as the notion of a complete historical cycle, and dismantle them patiently and meticulously, starting with language and working right up to culture and institutions. This ruthless and irreverent dismantling of the workings of discourse, thought, and existence, is therefore the work of a dissident.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:299.

In Chapter Six, I shall demonstrate the ruthless and irreverent dismantling of the artist and person, Patrick White, by Patrick White. Memoirs of Many in One also discloses White's awareness of the dangers of being subsumed by the system. Many critics have commented on his self-generated myth of rejection by his own society; few have recognised in this a ploy by means of which a writer might hope to maintain some critical distance. In Memoirs, it is evident, however, that the dangers of commodification and fetishism may only increase with time. It may well be White's fate to end as the Grand Old Man of Aust. Lit.

****

The following abbreviations are used in the rest of the text:

AS	-	The Aunt's Story
TA	-	The Twyborn Affair
TM	-	The Tree of Man
RC	-	Riders in the Chariot
SM	-	The Solid Mandala
ES	-	The Eye of the Storm
FL	-	A Fringe of Leaves
FG	-	Flaws in the Glass
Memoirs	-	Memoirs of Many in One

References to the above narrative texts are by abbreviation and page number only.

CHAPTER 2

FRAMING TEXTS:

The Aunt's Story and The Twyborn Affair

PART 1

To select The Aunt's Story and The Twyborn Affair in combination as first objects of study in an examination of White's fictive structures may appear indecorous, yet this awkward pairing can be defended both by employing the criteria of 'sound common sense' and by permitting the free play of more speculative and subversive modes of thinking.

The Aunt's Story, published in 1946, is generally acknowledged as White's first major novel. The Twyborn Affair, published thirty-three years later in 1979, may well be the last. (Memoirs of Many in One (1986) will be treated as autobiography of Other Self with the autobiography, Flaws in the Glass.) The similarity in structure of AS and TA was noted immediately by Leonie Kramer (1980:67), who observed not only their common tripartite structure but also the possibility that the first section of The Twyborn Affair might be a comic commentary on the 'Jardin Exotique' section of The Aunt's Story.

Structural similarity, however, extends much further than this. The protagonist in each is an androgynous figure: Theodora Goodman, a 'bloke in skirts' (AS:67), and Eddie Twyborn, 'pseudo-man-cum-crypto-woman' (TA:261). Each is engaged upon a quest which requires a translocation from Australia, the place of birth, to the world 'right side up'. These geographical movements are accompanied by journeys through 'the country of the mind' during which the protagonists undergo complex experiences so disparate as to constitute a number of quite distinct 'lives'.

Not surprisingly, neither protagonist maintains an enduring relationship or association with any other person. The focus of each novel is rigorously limited to the single, and singular, figure; those Others who revolve about the central consciousness form an essential periphery: their very lack of significance in the terms dictated by the novel constitutes an ironic inversion of the value they set upon themselves, a value which the protagonists struggle to accommodate.

The family to which each protagonist belongs is presented as the primary area of dissonance: the personality recognised, almost dictated, by the family unit is rejected as a grotesque mask by both Theodora and Eddie, and both must in turn separate themselves from their families in order to establish a more congruent image of Self. It is significant that these separations are specifically treated as contingent measures only, and the return to the family is of structural importance in the concluding sections of each novel. In neither case, however, is such a return, signalling the fulfilment of the quest, permitted full resolution.

The quest itself has in fact two objects: to establish a more congruent image of Self and also to accommodate that view of reality held by others, and most specifically by the family of origin. Since the protagonists' view of what constitutes reality (of which the centre is inevitably Self) has always conflicted with the views of others, the demand is essentially for the impossible reconciliation of opposites.

Neither novel, however, admits the overtly spiritual or religious dimension which the centrality of the <u>coincidentia oppositorum</u> would seem to invite. (The concept was initially proposed by Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) to demonstrate that

only the mind of God, being omniscient, was capable of maintaining the contradiction of good and evil as co-existent without experiencing it as contradiction. The androgyne figure, as Lodge (1977:43) points out, is one of the most powerful emblems of contradiction, 'defying the most fundamental binary system of all'.) The texts are rigorously secular in exposition, which may well account for the many psychologically-oriented interpretations they have received. To view them so narrowly, however, would be to ignore White's genuine religious bias and his enduring interest in the human capacity to experience more than he or she can categorise.

The criteria of common sense, if applied to either novel, could provide a coherent but reductionist exegesis. The Aunt's Story may be described as 'nothing but' the account of love and sex in a staid spinster (Beston, 1971:22-27); The Twyborn Affair may be viewed as no more than the relation of 'the inner and outer life of an individual, for whom reality is essentially dependent on subjective habits of thought and perception' (Macainsh, 1983: 146). Indeed, Wendy O'Flaherty's working definition of common sense: '"common" in that it is agreed upon by most sane people, and "sense" in that it is rationally apprehended by sight, touch, and so forth' (1980(a):94) alludes most agreeably to a central issue in each novel: the diagnosis of Theodora by most sane people as mad in AS, and Eddie Twyborn's disconcerting habit of perceiving himself as either male or female or both in TA.

Eddie's perceptions of his sexual identity at any particular point, moreover, are shared by most others encountered during the course of the novel, and the force and significance of this perceptual unreliability is demonstrated by the deliberate deception of the reader in Part 1. The sexual identity of Eudoxia Vatatzes is not revealed until the conclusion of the first section. Despite the use of first-person narrative and the diary form, which would appear to ensure the authenticity of the

character, Eudoxia's inner life yields no clearer information as to her sex than do the intimate glimpses of her life with Angelos which the reader shares with the voyeuse, Joanie Golson.

Once the identification has been made by the dying Angelos, and the reader must discover this by 'overhearing' the comment (TA: 107), hindsight acknowledges the liberally supplied clues in the preceding pages. Nevertheless, the initial perception of Eudoxia as 'this charming young woman (daughter, ward, wife, mistress - whatever)' (TA:12) has persisted up to this point, despite the equivocal nature of Monsieur Pelletier's swimmer and the constant allusions to her bony knees, lean thighs and flat chest. Leonie Kramer (1980:66-67) rightly considers the novel to be less an enigma than 'a puzzle with clues supplied'. However, in directing her attention to the writer as 'unorthodox stage magician who, by drawing attention to his skills as illusionist, establishes the reality of those skills temporarily concealed' (Kramer, 1980:67), she fails to observe that the magician's illusion succeeds only because of the notorious inaccuracy of human perception, to which, nonetheless, the average human being responds as if it reflected both the 'true' and the 'real'.

The fact that we tend to behave as if we think we know what reality is has always been a rich source of tragic as well as comic possibility. It is as fundamental to King Lear as it is to Twelfth Night. However, the tragic or comic character of most Elizabethan or Jacobean drama is perceived by the audience to be clearly in error (whereas the audience equally clearly thinks it is not), and the evolution of the drama necessarily involves the enlightenment of the character so that his view of reality becomes, in consequence, much the same as that of others in the cast, and, of course, of the audience.

Such situations presuppose that the view of reality held by the majority is more or less in line with some sort of 'objective'

reality, and it is frequently legitimated by an overarching religious or social system that both underwrites it and offers validating explanations of experiences that are commonly considered 'unreal'. The appearance of ghosts, for example, may be validated as supernatural visitations of either heavenly or diabolical provenance; equally, they may be interpreted as phenomena conjured up by an overwrought conscience or a hypertrophied liver. Obviously, the 'reality' of the supernatural visitor is not the equivalent of the 'normal' reality, but it can nonetheless be accommodated in any system which admits 'reality' on different levels.

White, however, has made the problem (what is on this side of the boundary line of reality and what is on the other?) his theme. It is a problem, moreover, which both thematically and structurally is denied anything other than a paradoxical solution. The two principal characters are not to be led to enlightenment, recognition of their faulty perceptions and a reconciliation with the prevailing social or religious views. Their androgynous natures, indeed, make it quite clear that White is presenting not persons who have fallen into error but persons who by their very nature may be defined as error. (Eddie, on his abortive expiatory return to Australia, 'a fate that can never be renounced', attempts to aid exorcism by confession: 'I'm a kind of mistake trying to correct itself' (_TA_:123).

The androgyne, as Carolyn Bliss points out, has a traditional function 'as a means of recalling a prelapsarian unity and of entering a realm in which all dualities are encompassed' (1986: 47). In the _Symposium_ (189E-191E), Plato makes Aristophanes the author of 'a complex myth of the primeval androgyne' (O'Flaherty, 1980(b):294) which, as O'Flaherty indicates, depicts androgyny as a state of origin from which man was expelled for conspiring against the gods. She also notes, following Eliade, that creation myths, in describing the chaos

that precedes all differentiation, represent the desire to merge back into chaos as the 'goal of human existence'.

> In ritual, too, androgyny is 'a symbolic restoration of "Chaos"', this return to the homogeneous takes the form of a supreme regeneration, a prodigious increase in power.
>
> O'Flaherty, 1980(b):294.

Lacan also makes frequent reference to this Platonic myth in situating the founding sense of loss or lack which predates the constitution of the subject. The notion of an original/foetal androgynous whole is central to his argument (Lacan, 1979: 196-197, 205). Since Bliss is concerned with tracing what she perceives as White's positing of an androgynous ideal which develops lineally from The Aunt's Story to The Twyborn Affair, this description satisfies her need, paralleling as it does the Jungian integration of the individual to which White seems to allude in FG (FG:155).

Viewed thus, however, the androgyne would appear to represent not the problem but the solution. Ought one to presume that the reader is to discover that the problem is hers alone and that Eddie is not 'a mistake' but an unrecognised correction? This would appear to be an oversimplification of White's essentially non-didactic process.

Were one to admit the negative connotations of the traditional symbolism, one would find a complexity and contradictoriness more relevant to the White androgyne. O'Flaherty notes the inherent danger: 'Ritual androgyny is a source of power but it also opens up the possibility of great loss' (1980(b):331). The nature of the loss is made specific by Mircea Eliade:

> Every attempt to transcend the opposites carries with it a certain danger. This is why the ideas of a coincidentia oppositorum always arouse ambivalent feelings: on the one side, man is haunted by the desire to escape from his particular situation and regain a

> transpersonal mode of life: on the other, he is paralysed by the fear of losing his 'identity' and 'forgetting' himself.
>
> Cited in O'Flaherty, 1980(b):332.

Thus the sexual ambivalence to which White refers (FG:154) must be seen not only as that which 'refreshes and strengthens even in Australia' but also as that which may alienate man not merely from his society but even from the very self he wishes to empower. In TA, sexual life, as Noel Macainsh (1983:44) has pointed out, may function on the level of personal myth and follow the pattern of a mythic drama.

Some of the contingent problems arising out of androgyny in Hindu myths which are cited by O'Flaherty are also suggestive: '(1) "A man can be a woman, but this makes it difficult if not impossible, for him to be with a woman". (2) "If God is a man who is a woman, how is the worshiper [sic] to be his consort?"' (1980(b):332). In the psychosexual terms of the first problem, the androgyne, being both, can be satisfied with neither, unable to shift from Eadith Trist's reflection:

> Perhaps she was fated never to enter the lives of others, except vicariously. To enter, or to be entered: that surely was the question in most lives.
>
> TA:328/329.

Stripped of its theological implications, the second problem suggests the secular paradox of having escaped from Self (thus losing identity) but failing to gain the hierogamous sense of union with Other, since the Other has been, and remains, consubstantial with Self. In this sense, the explicit sexual reference is both a 'ribald double-entendre' (Bliss, 1986:182) and a meaningful, mythic statement. (This strategy of using the

'lower', possibly indecorous, level of significance to undercut while it actually endorses the 'higher' is one of the White strategies by means of which the potential of double or multiple consciousness is evoked. His failure to preserve decorum is both deliberate and provocative.)

In terms of the principal characters in these two novels, the problematic nature of multiple consciousness is a central issue. While Theodora Goodman does not herself exploit the ambivalence of the sexual metaphor within which White has placed her, (and which dominates TA), it is nonetheless part of the dissonance with which she is associated in the minds of others, most particularly in the 'Meroë' section of the novel. Perhaps because the androgynous figure is female, the problem is presented more in terms of the contemporaneity of 'skeleton and spawn' (AS:285). Theodora is open to a 'double' interpretation of things and of language, which is chiefly evidenced by the potentiality of a word or thing to be both itself and its opposite. In female terms, this is imaged in pregnancy: that which is Self but also not-Self within the body, and the dichotomy between that which must be held within the body to sustain life and that which must be split off and thrust out of the body to 'begin' life. Thus Being and Not-Being are presented as conterminous states in the overarching image of Meroë, both 'Our Place', 'something as unequivocal as the hills' (AS:20) and the legendary landscape, 'a dead place, in the black country of Ethiopia' (AS:23). Indeed, the boundary between them is ill-defined - Theodora's senses inform her that the one has entered and is present in the other; the unequivocal hills equivocate: 'the hills around Meroë had conspired with the name, to darken or to split deeper open their black rock, or to frown with a fiercer, Ethiopian intensity' (AS:20); 'So that from what she saw and sensed, the legendary landscape became a fact, and she could not break loose from an expanding terror' (AS:24).

Only if she succeeds in establishing permanent boundaries,

mapped by the application of fixed rules, according to which forms can be treated as if they were immutable things in themselves, does Theodora believe that she will experience the freedom of unequivocal lucidity. The execrable pun on 'consumption' and 'consummation' (TA:291) must be unravelled; it is the riddle, 'a question to which it is postulated that there will be no answer' (Lèvi-Strauss, 1963:22), that constitutes the structural basis of the characterization of Theodora and of Eddie Twyborn. And it is the paradoxical attempt to make things fit, 'all the details of the classic jigsaw waiting for him to put them together, more alarmingly, to fit himself, the missing piece, into a semblance of real life' (TA:127), while at the same time resolutely refusing the consolatory illusion of 'protection by convention or personality' (AS:277), that provides the narrative thrust for both novels.

Hena Maes-Jelinek (1984), examining the approach of the Guyanan novelist, Wilson Harris, to cross-cultural experience and art, opposes Harris's use of myth to that endorsed by T.S. Eliot, for whom myth is 'simply a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' (Eliot, cited in Maes-Jelinek:166). To this conservative view of myth in fiction the critic also relates Eliot's limiting and restricting epigraph to Notes towards the Definition of culture:

> 'an item from The Oxford English Dictionary: "Definition: 1. The setting of bounds; limitation (rare) - 1483"'
>
> Eliot, cited in Maes-Jelinek, 1984:166.
> (my underlining)

Maes-Jelinek points out that Harris, working always from his cultural base in Caribbean historical experience, regards cultural boundaries and limiting definitions as suspect absolutes, which he seeks to transform and revise. Myth, for Harris, is a 'medium of transformation' with 'a capacity for the

conversion of deprivations and humiliations that may plague a culture and lead to violence and despair' (Harris, cited in Maes-Jelinek, 1984:169). Harris's novel, The Angel at the Gate, in Maes-Jelinek's view, is a narrative in which absolute situations and images are converted and altered through the mediation of myth: 'character and myth and the metaphors through which they are presented destabilize our accepted version of reality' (Maes-Jelinek, 1984:169).

The Twyborn Affair is examined by Maes-Jelinek in the same article as a novel in which 'both the protagonist's experience and the novelist's art are an expression of what Harris calls "alteration of boundaries"' (Maes-Jelinek, 1984:170). The major reservation is made, however, that unlike The Angel at the Gate, TA does not altogether create '"a subtle, therapeutic no-man's land or accent upon cross-cultural human space ...."'(Harris, cited in Maes-Jelinek, 1984:170). Eddie's questioning of his own reality and his often acute sense of self-disgust make it difficult for Maes-Jelinek to see the androgyne motif in TA as a redeeming 'medium of transformation'.

The problem would appear to hinge on a misunderstanding or too narrow a reading of the androgyne, and of myth in general, as 'medium of transformation' in the novel. If the androgynous protagonists in AS and TA are seen as both positive and negative figures, the critic's difficulties with Eddie's lack of 'reality' and the suffering it causes him must surely diminish. However, unless the function of myth in general is reviewed, any alteration in the potential of the androgyne will be of limited usefulness.

Although Maes-Jelinek rejects Eliot's view of myth as a stabilizing and controlling device in favour of Harris's view of myth as a destabilizing agent of commonly accepted 'reality', the assumption is made that what myth does is to correct by altering the boundaries; in other words, myth simply redraws the

cognitive map. Were this true of all myth or uses of myth, there would seem to be little reason for disagreement with Eliot: the destabilizing agent would be no more than the controlling device viewed backwards. The end result would be the same: an ordered view of a world with fixed meanings.

That such a pragmatic view is legitimate is indisputable, and the parallels with myths of social charter are obvious. Not all myths, however, can or ought to tell us what to do, nor (having forced upon us a reassessment of our view of reality) do they necessarily show us what is 'true' and what is 'real'. The purpose of some myths, as Lèvi-Strauss has pointed out (cited in O'Flaherty, 1980(a):103), is not to provide solutions but to allow us to go on living with an insoluble paradox. One such paradox is surely that while we tend to behave as if only the empirical confines of time and space confer 'reality' values on our experiences, those experiences themselves contain extrusions of a wholly contradictory nature. Dreams, whether underpinned by Jungian, neurophysiological or mystical interpretations, are always experienced as if they were real. The commonplace experience of deja vu, which so closely relates to Charles H. Long's definition of myth: 'Myth is the attempt to experience again what we never experienced in the first place' (cited in O'Flaherty, 1980(a):119); the perceptual unreliability illuminated by Ernst Gombrich (1973); the selective nature of human memory (which will record what the individual regards as valuable and discard other experiences, either because they have been 'not real enough' or are possibly 'too real'); even our responses to Act V of King Lear or Picasso's Guernica indicate to us that these empirical arbiters of reality are unreliable.

White, in my view, has employed the myth of the androgyne in AS and TA not to offer a more reliable version of reality but to invite the reader to experience more fully that interiorised quest whereby the nature of consciousness and of cultural structures is explored. Since, as Bliss points out, 'the world

as portrayed by White is beyond his or anyone's power to analyse, catalogue, order or control' (1986:197), the quest will not succeed in ordering or controlling consciousness or culture. Its mythical quality, like the positive and negative aspects coexistent in the androgyne, is a 'medium of transformation' only in the sense that it persuades us to accept the unacceptable: it 'sets out to dramatize the fact that the boundary between myth and reality is highly mobile: though it may appear to be firm and permanent, it is ultimately arbitrary and elusive' (O'Flaherty, 1980(a):98).

As O'Flaherty further observes, 'Myth is now our secular, personal theology; we have nothing left to build our myth with but our own lives' (1980(a):114). Richard Campbell, in considering the character of white Australian religion, suggests that the white Australian consciousness is typically confined to the present, producing a pragmatic materialism that is reflected in the 'moralistic this-worldliness we tend to see as the sole effective content of the church's preaching' (1977:184). This lack of a generally accepted metaphysical or idealistic framework would preclude the individual from participating in rituals that are considered meaningful communal experiences of a transpersonal nature. Equally, the lack of legitimating myths of foundation has excluded the average white Australian from asserting a corporate identity and destiny. The individualistic ethic that remains must carry the whole burden of the 'integrity of purpose and being' (AS:259). In the absence of community, he/she must deal alone with the ambiguities that are inextricable from consciousness.

The dominant Australian themes, as Judith Wright (1961:332) has pointed out, have been exile, guilt and hope, for certainly Australian culture was founded upon the experience of 'not being at home'. Both Heidegger and Freud seize upon the possibilities in the word 'unheimlich' which, while denoting the uncanny, literally means 'unhome-like'. Jackson sums up Freud's explication:

> As Freud points out, there are two levels of meaning to the German term for the uncanny, das Unheimlich. ... Das Heimlich, the un-negated version, is ambivalent. On the first level of meaning, it signifies that which is homely, familiar, friendly, cheerful, comfortable, intimate. It gives a sense of being 'at home' in the world, and its negation therefore summons up the unfamiliar, uncomfortable, strange, alien. It produces a feeling of estrangement, of being not 'at home' in the world. ... A second level of meaning begins to explain the uncanny's disturbing powers. Das Heimlich also means that which is concealed from others: all that is hidden, secreted, obscured. Its negation, das Unheimlich, then functions to dis-cover, reveal, expose areas normally kept out of sight. The uncanny combines these two semantic levels: its signification lies precisely in this dualism. It uncovers what is hidden and, by doing so, effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar.
>
> Jackson, 1981:65.

For Heidegger (cited in Campbell, 1977:186), 'being not-at-home' is the human experience of finding oneself arbitrarily placed in a world which will not yield ultimate meaning, an experience from which we attempt vainly to escape by investing our social constructs with 'absolute' meaning. For Freud, making use of Schelling's dictionary definition, 'unheimlich' is the name for 'everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light' (cited in Macneil, 1986:140). The uncanny represents the unwished-for experience, an involuntary eruption of repressed material into ordinary life. 'The quintessential uncanny experience for man has been life in his first home, the womb, where he was both himself but not himself, both a whole and a part, inside his mother's body without being there sexually' (Macneil, 1986:140). This equivocal experience, in Freud's view, now typifies all uncanny experience, the familiar 'heimisch' quality of the first home being both represented and at the same time subverted by the addition of the prefix 'un'.

Thus it is possible to see the paradoxical dilemma of these White protagonists: their cultural background denies them the

means by which they can express or alleviate their sense of being more than just stuff-behaving-in-time, while, at the same time, that very 'unheimlich' quality of their experience (according to both Freud and Heidegger's explications) derives from the Australian cultural matrix enclosing exile, guilt and hope. The Australian androgyne figure is thus mythical also in that it reveals 'an already existing reality, one that was masked and unconsciously denied' (O'Flaherty, 1980(a):102). The secular Western sense of arbitrary existence in a world without absolutes is exacerbated by the historical origins of Australia, origins which emphasise the two possibilities of the 'unheimlich': it marks one off as not being 'native' to one's place and it also marks off the existence of hidden or repressed guilt (in this instance, the repressed guilt of being 'exiled' from one's first home because of transgression). The Australian androgyne expresses the sense of not-being-at-home as well as embodying the forbidden/repressed desires whose existence is culturally denied. The androgyne, indeed, represents, figurally, the repressed unconscious. Though conventional Australians may find it abhorrent, perhaps the equivocal androgyne is the most appropriate metaphor for the ambiguous white Australian conscious/unconscious self. White's comic powers have been recognised for some time; his inversion of the Australian male and female stereotypes, the Decent Bloke and the Good Sort, and their parodic reappearance in Theodora Goodman and the baroque brothel-keeper, Eadith Trist, demonstrate his bold and therapeutic use of comic technique.

CHAPTER 2

PART 2

The Aunt's Story

'But old Mrs Goodman did die at last.' The opening sentence of AS has already received critical attention. Thelma Herring (1965: 6) sees it as creating a sense of continuity by plunging the reader into the flux of events; Carolyn Bliss (1986:37) regards it as a thematic marker of what she sees as the focus of the first section: a series of deaths, or diminutions of self, suffered by Theodora. Both give it stylistic and thematic importance. Curiously, Paul M. St Pierre (1978:99) in his consideration of White's stylistic devices for creating internal or fictional time and their relationship to an ontological system does not comment on the contradictory nature of this 'beginning'.

If one were to examine the beginnings and endings of the three sections of this novel in order to establish the kind of fictional (internal) time White establishes, the opening sentence of the novel could gain further structural significance. The 'Meroë' section certainly begins 'in the middle' and disjunctively. The fictional time past has been experienced as 'long': the withheld first half of the statement would have to be something like: 'It seemed as if the old woman would never die ...'. The fictional or internal time of the novel is thus established at the same time as someone's interior time; events and the subjective experience of them are disjunctive from the first. Equally, what happened or was experienced before the event is made present (not absent) by the conjunction, so that the past (marked as internal and interior, fictional and mythic), which the reader will shortly enter, has already been signalled as still significant.

The time of Mrs Goodman's death is thus poised between a past, the end of which was contingent upon this death, and a future which can only begin once the death enters the past. (It is in fact a mythic moment.)

The 'Meroë' section concludes in the same fictional and mythic time as the first chapter. The intervening four chapters belong to Theodora's significant interior time past and, equally significantly, constitute her withheld story of Meroë. White indicates the disappearance and reappearance of fictional time by simply repeating the last sentence of Chapter One as the first sentence of Chapter Six: '"But, my darling, there is very little to tell"'. (This device becomes central to the 'Jardin Exotique' section.) One should also note that not only does Theodora withhold the story of Meroë from her 'daughter', (she cannot, of course, prevent the reader from overhearing it from the author/narrator and through free indirect discourse), she privately refuses because 'to tell the story of Meroë was to listen also to her own blood'. Thus 'telling', the outward activity, is inextricable from 'listening', the interior; as 'story' is to 'telling', so is 'blood', quickening and failing, to 'listening'. The potent disjunction is clear, and radically qualifies the external '"there is very little to tell"'.

The narrative that Theodora cannot tell is not only about Meroë, but also about Theodora herself, until the last link with the life begun on Meroë is broken with her mother's death. The Theodora of the external narrative, with whose figural consciousness the text is preoccupied, experiences her self tentatively, not merely because she is finally free to make her own decisions, but because she has lived too long with a diagrammatic identity imposed on her by others.

> ... Theodora was the spinster. She had lived with her mother, and helped her into her clothes. She came when the voice called.
>
> <u>AS</u>:11.

'This thing a spinster' is how she has viewed this depersonalised identity, - 'which at best, becomes that institution an aunt' (AS:12). As thing and institution, she has social and familial approval, but, as an 'aunt', she is perhaps unusual. In recalling the pleasure of that status, we find her describing it as 'of importance, dashing, almost rakish' (AS:13, my underlining). And the touch of children's hands, she believes, will restore 'the lost identity', by their affectionate touching, and speaking, of the unspeakable: 'Let us stroke Aunt Theo, said the boys; we shall stroke her moustache' (AS:13). Although it is not 'so very terrible' when the boys say it, 'Theo' (the masculine contraction is commonly used in her family) represents a divided consciousness, which has experienced itself as 'the victim of family approval and her upper lip' (AS:18).

It is the interior narrative that traces the process of disjunction and dislocation to which the androgyne is subjected. Out of the prelapsarian 'epoch of roselight' (AS:22) emerges a consciousness which, by its very presence, disputes the indisputable. Her mother's prediction, in her old age: 'You Theodora, will experience a double hell, because you have rejected life' (AS:121), is analeptic. Theo/Theodora has been incapable from the first of accepting the either/or subject-positions of 'man' or 'woman', offered by the symbolic order, and reflected in the child Fanny's 'play' (AS:31), and has long since fallen into the double hell of non-meaning in terms of those strict alternatives.

'Why, God, am I this?' is the cry of the divided subject - uttered by Theodora, as Theo strides across the hills to a shooting contest with Frank Parrott, wedged between Frank, 'the young bull', and the pink and white Fanny (AS:68). Theo, with the gun her father gave her, is the subject of Frank's challenge:

> I'll take you on one day ... I'll bring a gun. I'll put you through your paces.
>
> AS:68.

There is an initial 'female' response to the challenge: a careful incompetence designed to boost Frank's maleness. This cannot be maintained: in finally shooting the hawk, the androgyne asserts its power to contradict even the perceptions it has itself so carefully fostered.

At the ball, the androgyne operates in reverse. Reflected by the coy female statue, 'holding her hands in a position of ugly and unnatural modesty' (AS:72), Theodora, as female subject, is initially equally ugly and unnatural, 'the long, dark, slommacky thing in the striped dress' (AS:74). But Frank's challenge to Theo-with-the-gun is inverted: in her dance with Frank, 'something strange and wonderful ... also shameful', Theodora subjects Frank to her Other sensual power. 'Jove, Theo, you put me through my paces' (AS:76). The bull, if she could accept it, would follow her 'like a bemused calf whom she had fed at intervals with skim milk and won to her in this way' (AS:76).

In middle age, Huntly Clarkson, who collects 'unusual objects', is attracted to Theodora Goodman as to 'a strange dark flower on its long stem, but defensive, with a strange dark smell like a lily that folds its lips secretively on a fly' (AS:99, my underlining). He is unable to recognise the ambivalence which attracts him, like the underside of his 'magnificently assured' life of univocal objects and people, all of which 'fixed time in the present' (AS:102). Yet time and again he fixes this desire in language: 'I shall go ... and subject myself once more to Theodora Goodman .... I shall subject myself ... that is the word' (AS:105). 'I shall subject myself to Theodora Goodman ... but for some reason she refused [sic] to take command' (AS:115).

At the Agricultural Show, a Meroë reflection 'from which the world of Huntly Clarkson had receded', the phallic challenge of the gun repeats itself - 'something mysterious, shameful, and grotesque' (AS:119). Its upshot is predictable: Huntly 'was all acceptance, like a big grey emasculated cat, waiting to accept the saucer of milk that would or would not be given' (AS:120). It is not given; as with Frank Parrott. Theo/Theodora can neither play woman to Huntley's man, nor man to Huntley's woman. The reversal of either/or positions is not the equivalent of both/and.

The 'great monster Self' of the androgyne cannot return to the lost place of origins and of undifferentiated being. Inserted into a social text in which it can find no congruence, it can only go forward, 'speaking to myself in my own room' (AS:128), and waiting for the event with which the opening words of the text announce the conclusion of the interior narrative. Possibly, the assertion that 'I am I' (AS:13), in which syntactically Theo/Theodora is both subject and complement, may no longer have to be made. In going 'anywhere' and 'everywhere', the androgyne will be set free to seek out a non-contradictory discourse and position, where the contradictions of the interior and the exterior, the mythic and the real, the subject and the subjected, may be transformed into coherence.

Chapter Six, returned to fictional time, remains disjunctive. Theodora is with her spiritual child, Lou, but aware of the distance that separates them, which increases with each moment. The space that White introduces here is inner space: the inner 'distances that separate, even in love' (AS:132), are real enough to prevent Theodora from making the physical gesture of protective love. Thus in mythic (interior) time Theodora may truly say 'I have already gone' for she is no longer there. In fictional time, the future is about to begin: 'I shall go, said Theodora'. Moreover, although the verbal activity is external,

('said'), the omission of the punctuation of direct speech indicates that, despite the form, the activity is interior. Inevitably the questions must be asked: to whom does Theodora speak and who is it who listens?

While 'Meroë' is concluded with 'going' and 'having gone', the 'Jardin Exotique' section opens with stasis. In one sense, Theodora can be said to have arrived for she is somewhere. The place, however, is a 'no-place': the hall of the Hôtel du Midi, where Theodora sits and waits. She has already been waiting for some indefinite time 'without caring' (AS:135), and is prepared to go on waiting. The form in which she expresses this is suggestive:'I can wait here very much longer, Theodora said' (AS:135). The ambiguity of the verbal activity is again present, withholding its precise nature. The statement itself is curious: it suggests and subverts the 'normal' form of the statement by suppressing the expected 'not'; it also suggests by the dangling comparative that the second half of the statement is being withheld: 'very much longer' than she could wait in Sydney or anywhere else, for instance.

Thus, this moment is equally concerned with experiencing mythic as well as fictional time, but unlike the moment of the present in 'Meroë', it is not clearly distinguished from a past and a future which hinge upon it. We have entered as it were in the middle of Theodora's waiting (AS:135) 'for fresh acts'. The acts of other people, in the places 'to which apparently she had been' (her recognition of her experience of external space is made by the external means of checking labels on suitcases), are typified as not relevant 'now' and further qualified by 'if [they] ever had been' (AS:135).

Thus waiting is 'now' a relevant activity in itself, one which distinguishes Theodora from the 'behaving' of other people and which in its indifferent passivity draws her closer to what she considers the greater reality of tables and chairs. The active

mode of 'telling' and 'going' appears to belong to the inferior Others.

Among the items to which 'reality' reduces the Hôtel du Midi is a clock with clear anthropomorphic characteristics. It is 'prim and slow', has 'a fat, yellow familiar face' and, unlike Theodora, who does 'not belong particularly anywhere, and [which], for that reason, can rest unquestioned', it/she does belong to 'somebody's house'. It has been 'brutally' removed from its place and publicly 'exposed' (AS:135).

The clock, which records only profane, chronological time, is both like and unlike Theodora. It is familiar not only because its face is yellow but also because it is a grotesque caricature of her as a plump, prim and ultimately violated spinster. Theodora paradoxically experiences herself as more real as she releases her hold on chronological time and develops the 'superior' characteristics of wood. Her perception of the clock, introduced as part of her 'reality', is aggressive: since the clock 'experiences' only chronological time, it belongs somewhere else: its 'unheimlich' appearance in the public hall announces that, in this space of the novel, the interior and mythic life of Theodora is what is relevant to her and to the reader. Thus there is already a further disjunction: profane and mythic time are not only separated but the first is also seen as absurd, inferior and irrelevant.

It is extremely significant that the process of disjunction has begun in the narrative gap between 'Meroë' and 'Jardin Exotique'. White re-enters the narrative at the moment which has mythic significance for his protagonist. The luggage labels, the hotel brochure and the leather writing-case from the Ponte Vecchio supply sufficient banal detail from the past to frame and illuminate Theodora's experience of her 'now' waiting as a mythic event. It is not merely the writer's selection of a narrative structure; it mirrors the protagonist's method of selecting significances and structuring her own life.

This method in 'Jardin Exotique' is marked by the 'freeze' device already noted in 'Meroë'. Theodora's own life can wait, poised, while she becomes a mirror to the experience of another. Thus, Katina Pavlou's remarks to Grigg: '"There was an earthquake, do you remember? And we ran and lay on the beach."' (AS:142) slide towards Theodora, who enters the experience. This 'Greek' experience of Theodora's is not signalled in any way as being other than real, or at least as real as the effaced Grigg. The re-entry to the jardin exotique level of experience is simply signalled by the repetition of the question. Objects also may transmute and enter other space, making a simile a 'medium of transformation': the small 'ordinary' cloud on the 'Greek' level of experience is 'as simple and touching, as a handkerchief' (AS:145). The relationship as stated is between 'real' cloud and figurative handkerchief, but the handkerchief is actually dropped in the jardin exotique, where Theodora identifies it to Katina as 'your handkerchief' yet touches it as 'the body of the cloud'.

Clearly, then, both interior time and space are the areas of 'fresh acts'. The mythic stories of others are neither told nor withheld; Theodora, who 'has just arrived' (AS:153), enters and enacts these stories, from within their time and space. In the 'Meroë' section, those moments of 'the pure abstract pleasure of knowing' (AS:109), which she experienced in contact with the Man who was Given his Dinner or Moraïtis, have been selected by her as moments of recognition of the inner Theodora. It is because of them that 'existence justified itself' (AS:112). They are significant elements in the structure of her mythic life. Conversely, she has recognised herself in the figure of Jack Frost at the moment (in the Sydney kitchen) when she, too, holds counsel with a meat-knife (AS:123). But the withheld story has remained hers alone; the business of the silent narrator has been to create out of her scraps of experience a validating personal and private myth.

In 'Jardin Exotique', the static indifference of Theodora to her own story or myth reveals her disillusion with the ability of the 'gothic shell of Europe' (AS:139) to provide a goal for her quest, and her dwindling hope that the mythic story of Theodora can be brought into conjunction with the external world, thus ensuring 'permanence', 'continuity' and 'being' (AS:138). The 'fresh acts' are paradoxical: Theodora experiences 'continuity' and 'being' by entering the mythic lives of Others, so that the mythic life of Theodora loses its disjunctiveness and its particular 'unheimlich' quality, not by achieving congruence with the commonly accepted version of 'reality', but by expanding into and being narrated by the validating myths of Others. The vacuum that Theodora's waiting has created becomes filled.

'Permanence', however, remains elusive. Boundaries of time and space are now as unpredictable as behaviour (AS:150). Only clocks consistently keep another time (AS:151). This intense interpenetration of myth by reality and reality by myth destabilizes Theodora's apprehension of both, but cannot provide her with a new map or even with the compass that, as explorer of uncharted territory, Theodora feels she should have (AS:137). By experiencing many selves, she actually extends the 'unheimlich' experience: Ludmilla Sokolnikov, Katina's governess, Elsie van Tuyl's companion are all Theodora as well as themselves. Her single 'unequivocally' masculine dream reveals itself as equivocal: the swimmer is 'Epaphroditos', not the female principle but also not its opposite, the male principle; the moustache remains the sign of one who exists in addition and laterally to both principles. Outside the mythic lives of Others, the androgyne is still 'strange' and 'unexpected'; Epaphroditos is without direction 'waiting to be told' (AS:198).

What Theo/Theodora has not achieved is an accommodation of her exterior self, which is maintained by her name and by her possessions, objects in-the-world which she still clings to.

Surrounded by the dis-possessed (who in a mythical sense are also the possessed) she is recognised soon after her arrival, by the reflectors of her own position, the Demoiselles Bloch (AS:146) ('the one was two. But in reverse') as a 'crypto-something' (AS:148). Caught in their single meaning: 'we are Jewish', the Demoiselles Bloch find 'much doubt beyond the bounds of their duplicated self' (AS:147) in a world in violent transition, they know they will 'be subjected' to events in which even their precarious hold on meaning may cease to exist. The duplicated self is doubly at risk: 'It was obvious, subtract one from two and the answer would be nought' (AS:146). In defence of their position, they pursue lost objects to counteract the impermanence of a disintegrating world. The 'terrible, the terrifying possibility' is that 'without possessions one ceases to exist' (AS:147). This is a neat reversal of Theodora's position: since she is two in one she suffers from a surplus of meaning, none of which can be contained in the social formation to which her name and possessions belong. It is the 'normal', the 'familiar', that constitutes 'the violence of personality' (AS:260) from which she must finally diverge. She is neither to be consumed nor can her 'union' be consummated.

What is consumed in the concluding section of 'Jardin Exotique' is the Hôtel du Midi, and the crowd who watch 'this ritual of fire' (AS:248) are the ones who experience 'a last desperate spasm of consummation' (AS:251). For Theodora, who experiences neither, the ritual fire is reduced to the external of 'a set piece' (AS:250).

That she will 'go' from Europe is certain but her goal is not determined. It is possible that she will 'return to Abyssinia' (AS:251). The 'flat yellow face of stone' and 'the biscuit houses' clarify a projected return to Meroë, but Meroë in Abyssinia indicates the presence of both Meroës, the Australian home and the First Home (Mackenzie, 1963:293). However, while Katina's projected return, to 'recover the lost reality of childhood' is so easy that it is 'already' happening (AS:251),

Theodora's return to the world of lost origins is conjectural: following upon the doubtful 'may' of her own activity comes the proposition of doubt in the external reality of her past, 'If the biscuit houses still existed' (AS:252). The question asked by Katina, '"You will go where?"' (AS:252), invites clarification and a statement of certainty, but is deflected by the response of 'a kind of governess' or 'a kind of aunt' (AS:143).

In its conclusion, 'Jardin Exotique' evokes the Aunt Theodora and Lou configuration of the conclusion of 'Meroë' and also the Katina and Miss Theodora configuration of the opening section of 'Jardin Exotique' itself. Katina, however, has moved from '"I must go home'" (AS:142), to the resolved '"I shall go to my own country. Now I know"' (AS:251). Whether this simple circular structure can be effected by Theodora is left in doubt.

The 'Holstius' section, which consists of a single chapter, makes no use of intermediary or mediating structures. Both the contraction of the novel's spaces and the effect of this on the experience of its time suggest the urgency of climax or resolution. Time and space figure largely in the parodic lyric with which the section opens. There is also no suggestion of Theodora's consciousness in the narrative voice. It is only in the second paragraph that Theodora is discovered travelling on the train through 'whole acres of time in which the yellow corn blared as if for a judgement' (AS:255). Yet, although she is undoubtedly 'going', there is a suggestion, evident even to the stereotyped American male in the perfect shirt, that she has already gone into an inner space and will not come out.

The opposition of two themes, triumphant corn and diminished modern man, gives the parodic sketch of American myths precedence over Theodora, who is in the middle of it but not part of either theme. Not only is she separated from this time and space but she is also perceived to be so. The possibility that Theodora's destination lies here is remote.

Nevertheless, it is this very alienness that causes her both to remember that she is 'going home' (AS:256) and to see that her theme and the 'coiled themes' of living and of days, of people and landscape 'in the same integrity of purpose and being' (AS:259) are at odds. Still a discord, she acknowledges that she will never be truly reflected by a 'population of her own' (AS:256).

The final journey Theodora undertakes is paradoxically as much out of herself as it is into herself. The 'blank' house, whose windows do not reflect, 'Because there is nothing inside', can briefly become 'her' house (AS:274). In the 'space of emptiness', light disintegrates at the same time as it illuminates the 'black sonorous island' and 'the craters of the earth' (AS:275). Both Meroës and Ithaca are present in a world where there are no clocks. The impermanence of chronological time, however, is opposed not to permanence but to the impermanence of mythic time. The external world has been abandoned and in the disintegrating inner world Theodora has the impression that her story is about to end with the lucidity she has so long desired. Certainly, she has stripped herself of all the externals which appeared to guarantee her actual existence and yet seem to have impeded her in her quest.

The conclusion that Theodora has selected is constructed out of as many mythic scraps as the figure of Holstius: the elements of chair and table, the madman's folly of the Meroë hills, Frank Parrott's reassuring little fire, the clothes that have 'the familiar texture of childhood, and smelled of horses, and leather, and guns' (AS:278). Theodora seems to have come home to Ithaca, Australia and Eden.

Yet she is not permitted an absolute retreat from the outer world. Part of the answer she receives from Holstius equips her to accept (sardonically) 'the pathetic presumption of the white room' (AS:284), where, homeless and faceless under her

camouflaging hat, she will be made 'comfortable' by people who no longer expect from her the 'necessary answers' (AS:273).

In her movement back into the Other time and space of the house that is no longer hers, Theodora confirms the birth of a new, wholly mythic personality. She unravels the problem of whether Miss Pilkington is now only a figment of Mrs Johnson's mind by producing herself, yet not herself, since her dupes are convinced by the appearance of a 'real' Miss Pilkington. Her control of her life and situation is entirely hidden (and thus guaranteed) because neither exists outwardly any longer. Theodora's gracious behaviour and parodic speech in 'the code language of human intercourse' (AS:178) are a mockery of Miss Pilkington as well as of those who will continue to be deceived by her.

What she is keeping under her hat, as Holstius suggested she should do, is a face which has not taken its final shape. It is not known whether experience will finally fill it; her 'doubtful rose' is black and equivocal although it leads 'a life of its own' (AS:287). What is certain is that she no longer chooses to look outward for her reflection. The continuation of the story of Theodora is strongly implied; it is simply withheld from the reader.

Examining the beginnings and endings of the three sections of the novel as structural markers of White's time systems and their relationship to the ontological argument has yielded several insights. The uneasy co-existence of two time systems is postulated from the first and the movements of the novel are seen to constitute their perpetual dialectic. Each can be viewed as a system ruled by internal cohesiveness but capable of surviving, possibly even thriving, on its subversion by the other. By refusing the novel linear development in either time or space, White indicates his dominant interest to lie in the protagonist's struggle to accommodate her experience of Self as

part of, and thus within, two systems. His refusal to end the novel any more conclusively than it began is a clear indication of his concept of this text as mirror of the perpetual process that is the pre-occupation of his principal character.

The quest has presupposed a goal: that state of perception in which congruity, continuity and the integrity of purpose and being will cohere to form the set pattern of permanence and thus of 'being-at-home'. However, if the quest has ended, it is only because Theodora has abandoned it as based on false premises. By constructing the separate male figure of Holstius (whose name alludes to wood and who is made out of a tree (AS:279), so that he is both trustworthy and 'real'), she enables herself to engage the more general metaphysical problem as well as the ontological. Since both figures are equally Self, the Holstius construct can provide no more than 'moral support' (AS:285) in facing the consequences of understanding, but the sustained tension of the dialectic which, from being the problem must become the answer, is mirrored in the interplay of the male-female opposites. It is also significant that although Holstius is in a sense a true mirror of Theodora's Self, such as she has endlessly sought, she does not in fact recognise him to be one. What is important is the entirely inner process of reflection upon which she/he is bent.

This process may be partly unravelled by examining some of the possibilities inherent in the culminating image of the dialectic: 'the eternal complement of skeleton and spawn' (AS:285), which is held in play by the flux of 'perpetual water'. Although, as Bliss (1986:196) has pointed out, White insists on the inherent incompetence of language, nonetheless he employs its suggestive power to invite the reader-text dialectic. That he is sometimes more precise than he is credited with being can be observed in the multi-level response the skeleton and spawn image can evoke.

The death-birth antithesis is the obvious level, but there is greater semantic congruence with the basic structures than this. In terms of the equation: 'permanence equals multiplication and division', it is useful to note that 'skeleton' is singular in form and meaning whereas 'spawn' is plural in form and meaning, and, moreover, only is itself in its plurality. Thus, the one and the many are semantically present. Further, both indicate things that are held within the body. 'Skeleton' is that which is within and should remain there; its presence 'outside' indicates death. The response of 'skeleton' to water will be disintegration. 'Spawn' is that which is within but must be ejected for it is only 'outside' that spawn can be fertilized and divide into life.

Thus there are two versions of the 'inside' becoming 'outside'. In 'skeleton', rigid form becomes formless, thus relating it to the geometry of the pyramid and Theodora's early discounting of answers 'that could have been found at the back of the book' (AS:59). (One should note that geometrical problems relate to questions of fixity where, by application of rules, forms are treated as if they were immutable things in themselves.)

In 'spawn', what appears to be formless is embryonic form, and can be related to the arithmetical concept of number, present in 'multiplication and division'. (The equation $cP = Pn + \frac{P}{n}$ is worked out 'mathematically, in stones' by Theodora (AS:284). The arithmetical concept is concerned with the relationship of number which can change through the process of expansion and contraction.)

In geometrical terms, following fixed rules of form, separation of the inside from the outside results in the dissolution of all form. There is either a pyramid or no pyramid. In arithmetical terms, where process dominates, the separation of inside from outside is an essential part of process whereby, in endless repetition, one will divide and make many, in this way,

paradoxically, ensuring permanence by changing in order to stay the same.

The relationship of the image to Theodora's concept of Self is as clear as is its relationship to White's concept of Theodora. The concepts of Self and Not-Self as the centre of Being and Not-Being are held in tension with Self and Other Selves, Being and Being-by-Becoming, and both represent a valid view of experience. In White's conception of the Theodora figure, her 'outside' or 'real' life is represented geometrically: the mad Miss Pilkington is not Theodora Goodman who no longer 'exists'. Her 'inside' mythic life is arithmetical: by the movements of meeting and parting, her 'created' Other Selves, fertilised by entering into each other, all ratify Self; similarly she, by entering the lives of others, increases her potential for Being, by Becoming. Equally, the negative potential of the barren androgyne is expressed in the external loss of identity, while, at the same time, the fertile, thus powerful, androgyne is positively expressed in the inner hierogamy achieved both by entering and being entered.

CHAPTER 2

PART 3

The Twyborn Affair

In examining AS and TA as fictions framing White's other fictions it is appropriate to take note of the resonance and dissonance of their titles. Unlike the titles of the other novels (Memoirs must be considered as a necessarily hybrid form) these two titles announce that the novels are to be concerned with events.

This statement of intent is also directive: AS is to be a narrative and its protagonist is defined not by name but by functional relationship, 'this thing a spinster which, at best, becomes that institution an aunt' (AS:12). 'Story' as synonym for narrative yields the possibilities of an account of fictitious as well as of actual events, of mythic or 'real' life. It does not however direct expectation towards narrative of any particular nature. Thus AS is essentially the announcement of the neutral narrative of or by a characterless character. (In the preceding section I have attempted to demonstrate that the telling or not telling of story by protagonist or narrator is not only central to the structure of the novel, but is also a structural property of the mythmaker, Theodora Goodman.)

The failure to name the protagonist in the title is also of structural significance. The Adamic act of naming, which empowers by imposing meaningful order, may also render the namer and the named impotent by foreclosing upon meaning itself. Thus Fanny Goodman may control and escape from the meaning of Mrs Goodman's death by naming (and capitalising) the corpse as 'Dear Mother' and 'Last Glimpses' (AS:11). She herself, however, is satirised by the comic shift from her early naming of herself as

'Fanny Goodman', stitched into her embroidery into the centre of things and time (<u>AS</u>:30), to the final absurdity of 'Fanny Parrott' of 'Audley'.

<u>Meroë</u>, as has already been noted, is a name that conspires to make meaning open-ended, both splitting and intensifying it. The change of name of Meroë from Theodora's 'Our Place' to the critical 'Rack-an'-Ruin Hollow' of other farmers changes the perspective from paradise regained to paradise lost (<u>AS</u>:25). 'Theodora', 'Theo' and 'Miss Goodman' are names which the protagonist temporarily suspends in the 'Jardin Exotique' section in her quest to extend her own meaningfulness. In the final 'Holstius' section (named, significantly, for a mythic personality and not a place), the protagonist finally sheds the impotent name of Theodora Goodman (<u>AS</u>:269) to subvert meaning by acquiring the name of Miss Pilkington. By this act, the protagonist satisfies both the external world's desire for order and her own need for open-endedness: the world is satisfied by a 'real' Miss Pilkington behind whom the un-named protagonist is free to control her own inner meaning.

The title of <u>TA</u>, however, is more narrowly directive. The events of an 'affair', qualified by the definite article and the narrowing and foreclosing 'Twyborn', are not colourless but tainted with a strong inference of an invisible but almost audible society. (The essence of this colloquial usage is its judgemental, public nature; 'the Dreyfus affair', the Profumo affair' are obvious examples of the notoriety it connotes, and this does not exclude the illicit sexual activity denoted by the noun's private application.) Named by surname, the protagonist here is also identified by a functional familial relationship but is not named from within the family in terms of the familial dynamics. Rather, the identification is the public identification made by others outside the family, who name thus all those who are of this family and no other. His/her public identification appears more significant than private identity.

Thus, the identification and qualification of the title yield a restrictive view of events: they are inextricably bound to the views and norms of a society of Others in terms of which they are at best indecorous, at worst scandalous. The private interiority and withholding of AS does, in fact, give way in this novel to a deliberate and provocative flouting of the rules of restraint and even of good taste.

In the selection and placing of epigraphs there is also both resonance and dissonance. Each section of AS has an individual epigraph of direct application to the content to follow.

Part One

MEROE

> She thought of the narrowness of the limits within which a human soul may speak and be understood by its nearest of mental kin, of how soon it reaches that solitary land of the individual experience, in which no fellow footfall is ever heard.
>
> Olive Schreiner
> AS:9.

Part Two

JARDIN EXOTIQUE

> Henceforward we walk split into myriad fragments, like an insect with a hundred feet, a centipede with soft-stirring feet that drinks in the atmosphere; we walk with sensitive filaments that drink avidly of past and future, and all things melt into music and sorrow; we walk against a united world, asserting our dividedness. All things, as we walk, splitting with us into a myriad iridescent fragments. The great fragmentation of maturity.
>
> Henry Miller
> AS:133.

Part Three

HOLSTIUS

When your life is most real, to me you are mad.

Olive Schreiner
AS:253.

The epigraphs to 'Meroë' and 'Jardin Exotique' (both named by place) indicate the nature of the quest: from Schreiner, the clues are taken to sketch the limitations of human understanding and the intensely solitary nature of individual experience; the Henry Miller extract points towards splitting and intensifying experiences in a journey undertaken against a united world. The 'Holstius' section, named not for a place arrived at but a person achieved, also takes its epigraph from Schreiner, which is a summation of the final paradox in the inverse terms of the world 'outside': 'When your life is most real, to me you are mad'.

The three epigraphs selected for TA are not distributed over the three sections but appear together, as if the relationship among them is significant, and equally, as if each is to be read for significance in terms of all three sections.

> What else should our lives be but a series of beginnings, of painful settings out into the unknown, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet become.
>
> David Malouf

> My suspicion is that in Heaven the Blessed are of the opinion that the advantages of the locale have been overrated by theologians who were never actually there. Perhaps even in Hell the damned are not always satisfied.
>
> Jorge Luis Borges

Sometimes you'll see someone with nothing on but a bandaid.

Diane Arbus
TA:6.

Read as an inter-related sequence, the epigraphs yield a similar (yet devalued) pattern to those of AS: the first much-cited extract seems to define the nature of the quest reductively - nothing-but 'a series of beginnings, of painful settings out into the unknown'; the second concerns possible endings or Final Arrivals, whose conventional absolute value is instantly subverted; the third, while referring directly to the conclusion of the novel, is neither a literal description of the dying protagonist nor an obvious summation of the scene or theme. Whereas the 'Holstius' epigraph points to the known oppositions of 'inside' and 'outside', the quotation from Diane Arbus resolutely restricts itself to a wholly external public view. 'Someone' can be seen grotesquely, not merely naked but, more offensively, 'wearing' an item not designed for modesty, ornamentation, nor for the wellbeing of the body; that which, by its presence, conceals as it proclaims some minor injury. In this sense, the fate of the protagonist might seem to be merely demystified yet the grotesque nature of the image forbids a wholly reductive interpretation.

Perhaps the most significant dissonance lies in the use of epigraphs in the treatment of the quest motif. In AS the epigraphs signpost the journey so that the discrete sections can be seen as developmental and incremental (the structure of the sections is consonant with this view). In effect the quest, and the novel, are permitted a conventional movement forward even though 'beginning' and 'ending' are avoided. Whatever interpretation is made of the conclusion, it is evident that something significant has happened. The events of the novel are events in process. In TA, however, although there is strict

chronological movement forward, there is a total avoidance of a sense of development from section to section; the events of each section are viewed as discrete by the protagonist as much as by the novelist and his/her fixed intention is to keep them so. The unexpected reappearances of Eudoxia Vatatzes in Eddie Twyborn and of Eddie Twyborn in Eadith Trist are moments of nightmare. The supporting cast of each drama is almost entirely disparate; the appearance of the single figure that plays a role in each, Joanie Golson, signals a violent reaction and desire for flight in Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadith. The collection of epigraphs seems to underwrite this denial of incremental value: the quest is 'a series of beginnings'; its possible endings are discredited and the hero/heroine's fate is depicted as enigmatic and equivocal.

The beginnings and endings of the three sections corroborate the value of Others in this novel. Unlike AS where the protagonist's interior experience springs immediately to prominence (even in the 'Holstius' section the precedence of the American myths is so placed as to frame the dislocation of Theodora), the beginnings of TA present the protagonist through the eyes of Others.

In the opening chapter of the first section, Joanie Golson journeys furtively to her vantage point outside 'Crimson Cottage' from which she, greedy voyeuse, admires and yearns after the beautiful young woman 'at home' with her elderly companion. In this 'landscape and time' (TA:14), Joanie Golson, comically presented, is nonetheless a minor quest figure and it is clear that the unknown woman represents a promise of a richer experience of life than Golson's Emporium and Sewell's Sweatfree Felt Hats can offer, a promise that Joanie's brief lesbian adventure with Eadie Twyborn has half fulfilled and half frustrated.

The second section opens with the experience of an unnamed male person journeying away from a past containing both war and 'the stench of death' and 'the Mediterranean scents ... of thyme, pine, carnation and rose' (TA:115). Despite the familiarity of these last items, the reader cannot make a definite identification until the Others name the person as Eddie Twyborn. He is discussed and examined as a 'possibly regrettable, while desirable young man' and the comically presented Margs and Angie, embedded in a text redolent of 'the smell of sperm' and 'synthetic perfumes', also distinguish this aloof figure from the men they know and the men they will marry. The face and the eyes of Eddie Twyborn are again perceived as holding out a promise of something qualitatively different. The girls are 'fascinated, not to say awed' but although they interpret the source of this as his 'purity', the text subverts their interpretation (TA:117).

In the opening of the final section, the occupants of Ninety-One Beckwith Street are preoccupied with 'the goings-on at Eighty-Four' (TA:267-270). The Ladies Maud Bellasis and Kitty Binns, suffering from age and reduced circumstances, are faced with the less respectable connotations of 'house' in the dwelling opposite, yet despite their initial conventional resistance they end by more than condoning the 'deplorable trafficking'. The house opposite dominates their fading humdrum lives and although the text initiates doubt with a conjectural 'Perhaps', there is at first an inference and later a clear indication that the house run by Mrs Trist opens a life in the imagination which neither has lived and now never can. 'Preposterous, monstrous, but delicious', the brothel offers the freedom to those outside to break taboo and enter vicariously the experiences of male voluptuaries.

The Mrs Trist whom the narrative voice directs the reader to observe, before she disappears into Eighty-Four, is the figure whom the Bellasis sisters, the 'extras stationed at a window'

(TA:270), watch as an actor in real life (the discordance is deliberate). The narrator, however, points up the discordance: while Mrs Trist 'at the hour between the false dawn and the real, the moment when past and future converge, ... was as much herself as a human being can afford to be' (TA:271), she is nonetheless conscious of herself as her own creation. In broad comic terms, the self-conscious text of Eadith Trist is both 'high' and 'low': it is 'poetic', 'baroque', 'veiled', and 'romantic'; it is also 'the novelette she enjoyed living', a grotesque in the making of which 'in the more normal perspectives of life she could not lay it on too thick' (TA:271).

There is, of course, an important difference in the last section. As in the first two, the protagonist is accepted as being the role that is played, and is also the stimulus for aspirations, dreams and longings for experiences of an Other sexual nature. However, whereas the women in the first two sections fantasise experiencing this unknown directly through the body of Eudoxia/Eddie and are of an age to encompass such experiences, the old girls of the final section are restricted to voyeurism. They regard Mrs Trist as the exotic provider of fantasies of a socio-sexual nature, not least titillating because of the actual patronage of the brothel by their kinsman, Gravenor. (The incest motif is significant throughout this section.)

The elusive promise the protagonist is perceived as embodying in these beginnings is held in tension by all three concluding sections. In each, the protagonist's absence and/or loss is central to the text. Joan Golson's letter to Eadie Twyborn, written but not sent, is markedly non-realistic; it represents, in fact, that 'poetry of rebellion' (TA:109) which Eadie once evoked and Eudoxia had seemed to incarnate. Setting aside its value as plot device, the letter significantly celebrates the absence and loss of Eudoxia. Eadie Twyborn's letter to Marcia

Lushington, which closes the second section, refers doubly to the absence and loss of Eddie Twyborn: the writer confirms the loss of a son for the second time 'to life' and directs the letter to a woman whose son (possibly by Eddie Twyborn) only lived long enough for his life to seem 'assured' before being lost in death. Finally, in the third section, Eadie Twyborn continues to wait for her daughter Eadith, dreaming of a projected idyll in the Sydney garden, without knowing that she has already been told of her final loss of both son and daughter (TA:378).

Thus TA differs markedly from AS in the presentation of the androgynous protagonist. Theodora, who 'has always led her own life' (AS:257), has generally had her own perceptions of her distasteful incongruity endorsed by Others (it is only in 'Jardin Exotique', the world of mixed forms, that she avoids this completely), and her split perception of the world 'outside' is integral to her perception of herself. The protagonist of TA is acceptable, even desirable, wherever he/she elects to be and in whatever role he/she chooses to play. Moreover, although he/she both enters and is entered (in sexual activity as well in the first two sections) and has such a powerful effect upon the lives of others that the absence and loss motif dominates the end of each section, he/she remains unconvinced of his/her reality and ability to be meaningfully present. Albeit ironically, Theodora is able, in the conclusion of the novel, to assert: 'Actually I do exist' (AS:287); E never achieves such resolution.

Harpham views our perceptions of the boundaries of 'inside' and 'outside', 'present' and 'absent' in these terms:

> From the longest view, all things are fragments of "Being", the world is one, and there is no absolute outside at all: all boundaries are but geometrical metaphors, convenient fictions.
>
> Harpham, 1982:106.
> (my underlining)

E is, in fact, a writer of fiction struggling to acquire the validity of myth. Leonie Kramer rightly points out the existence of a subtext, 'the problem and mystery of family relationships ... [which] ... is not permitted to establish itself at the centre' (1980:67). For this critic, the submerged subject is the 'real' subject and White is reproached for refusing to inscribe it. Were he to have done so one assumes that the novel would be 'full' instead of 'empty', the reader wiser instead of more disturbed. (The punning title of Kramer's article, 'Pseudoxica Endemica', indicates both her familiarity with Colie's investigation of paradox (1976) and her curiously resolute refusal to accept the very paradox to which her pun draws our attention.) This is a familiar argument: the novel, like myth, may destabilize commonly accepted views of 'reality' provided that it merely alters boundaries, leaving us with the convenient fiction of a cognitive map. However, if TA is a novel founded upon the riddle, 'a question to which it is postulated that there will be no answer' (Lèvi-Strauss, 1963:22), it may legitimately refuse to answer its own questions.

Three things could profitably be examined at this point: the extremely social nature of the novel, the androgyne protagonist and the struggles of the protagonist to escape from fiction into myth.

Events, matters to which the title has directed us, are normally regarded as changes in the qualities or relations of things, and no matter how caused, demand an interpretation. E, in whatever guise, is presented as an event in the lives of Others and given a particular interpretation by them; the loss or absence of E is an equally significant interpreted event. The nature of the interpretation in each case is, of course, mythical: E as event represents the hidden, the forbidden, the denied, the taboo. In the lives of Others, the event of E, to a greater or lesser degree, is a valuable item of bricolage. In fact, in these

life-texts E has the status of Jack Frost or Moraïtis in the story of Theodora.

However, E's own status is radically different from that of Theodora. E is, in fact, the writer of convenient fictions, altering the boundaries of his/her reality in an effort to control and order his/her world. The elusive promise of the geometric metaphor, however, cannot be fulfilled: 'Eudoxia Vatazes' is a wholly successful fiction for others (for which White obtains the reader's endorsement), yet its discreteness remains permeable. There are constant extrusions of the past: dreams, waking dreams, a game of tennis, an Australian face staring from a passing car. The futility of the fiction is made conscious: 'The fact that I sit here writing as I do, and rereading what I have written' (TA:67) is cited as evidence of the failure of 'Eudoxia' to become autonomous, the bondage of the text to the writer. Paradoxically, it is the power of Angelos' own mythic life into which Eudoxia is sometimes drawn that comes closest to bringing about a sense of 'real', that is to say 'mythic', existence:

> How can A., by looking at me from beneath those horny eyelids, convince me that we are wearing the purple, standing on the steps at Blachernae or Nicaea? more - that I am no longer a fiction but a real human being ...
>
> TA:106.

For the rest, writer and text co-exist uneasily. The diarist E can resist neither parody nor caricature; the dogmatic and mannered aphorisms (parodies of the saintly Anna Vatatzes?) occur with almost the same frequency as the self-conscious optatives; the assertions so vehemently made are often flagrant contradictions of other vehement assertions. Since the text refuses to liberate itself the writer drags it relentlessly towards the grotesque, simultaneously invoking meaning and discrediting it.

E's consciousness of the grotesque as object of desire and revulsion relates to Others as much as to Self, and its origins, both public and private, reflect Harpham's observation that 'the sense of the grotesque arises with the perception that something is illegitimately in something else' (1982:11). Being in something illegitimately, moreover, is essentially an 'unheimlich' experience to which a moral scheme has been attached. Thus to the arbitrary nature of 'being-not-at-home' in Heidegger's explication is added the quality of being-not-justifiable in moral terms, while the primal sense of guilt, inherent in Freud's references to the repression of the unwished-for experience, is also related to an external social system.

The androgyne figure has already been suggested as a metaphor for the ambiguous white Australian consciousness. The public origins of E's consciousness of the grotesque are initially signalled by the title of the novel in which the particular his-story of the unnamed E is subsumed under the familial classification and the acts and events are named in accordance with a societal value judgement. Thus E apparently represents something which is illegitimately in the Twyborn family and, by extension, in Australian society. That E also represents the forbidden, secretly desired taboo object is a necessary corollary. (Both positive and negative aspects of the androgyne are brought into play.) E as heretic (Riemer, 1980:12-29) calls into question the pragmatic materialism of a pseudo-community and reveals the repressed memories of exile, longing and guilt that lie behind it.

The private origins of E's consciousness of the grotesque are to be found where the public view demands that they should not be - within the Twyborn family. E's recurrent dream is linked with childhood memories of that-which-should-not-have-come-to-light (TA:28-30, 32). The dream of the giant emu (White emphasises the Australian 'otherness' of many birds in the novel)

epresents the child in the apparent safety of being-at-home but being threatened from outside by hostile natural forces which deny the legitimacy of boundaries of 'outside' and 'inside'. The emu threatens to enter the child E's space and fill it and him.

Allied to the recurrence of this dream is the memory of a significant experience. The child, before falling asleep and dreaming of the giant emu, is confronted by his mother who, far from uncovering his secret guilt at sucking a forbidden sweet, is 'so excited it did not even occur to her that she was the one who might be caught out' (TA:32). Mrs Judge Twyborn has dressed up as a man (partly in her husband's clothing) and even wears a corked moustache on her upper lip. Moreover, the mother, who has illegitimately taken to herself the defining characteristics of the father, has compounded the wrong by also taking a 'wife': Joanie Golson, who glugged and panted, her charmeuse melons parting and rejoining, parting and rejoining' (TA:32). This 'wife' blurs the status of the child's mother and father figures, and it is with her (because of her?) that the mother/ father leaves, abandoning the child in a space destabilized by an 'unheimlich' experience.

Later, he wakes from his dream in a wet bed (his regression to an infant state) to find himself being attended to by his father/mother figure (the Beak), who appropriates the mother's 'darling' and retains his own moustache. The child E enters into a conspiracy of denial of 'wrong' events with the father, for which he appears to be rewarded by an uncharacteristic kiss on the mouth. 'Drawn up into the drooping moustache, as though inside some great brooding loving spider' (TA:30), E experiences an intense desire to bind the father/mother figure to him.

The potency of this repressed material, which demands its repression, is demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, the sequence in which the diarist E recalls the material separates the

timulus for the recurrence of the nightmare, Joanie Golson's Visitation, as much as possible from the narrative of the dream. The core dream, a 'very real one' (TA:28), is recorded first, in dramatic present tense. Next, the diarist records the unusual, 'more disturbing' (TA:28), additional dream material relating to the father, which represents an actual event. Nothing else is recorded until a series of waking dreams involving the additional father-material occurs throughout the day, forcing E finally to add what are disguised as 'details' (TA:32) but are, in truth, the causes and meaning of the nightmare itself and also the cause of its particular recurrence on the night of Joanie Golson's Visitation.

Secondly, E's avoidance of Joanie Golson from 'the night of the moustache' indicates the intense need to displace onto her those emotions which have most improperly entered and threatened the space of being-at-home. The reappearance of Joanie outside 'Crimson Cottage' threatens Eudoxia's precarious existence while at the same time it invites a return to lost origins.

If this is indeed the submerged subject of the novel, E's life can be viewed as a series of attempts at substituting alternative texts, at the centre of each of which is the repressed my-theme. The prevalence of the grotesque in each section, however, and most specifically in E's point of view, indicates the futility of the repression. Each alternative text marks E's simultaneous estrangement from and fidelity to the place, people and events of origin.

'Dressing up' is an inextricable element in the repressed my-theme which paradoxically reappears as a significant element in each of E's texts. In Eudoxia Vatazes, clothes are a vice; her birthday presents from her lover, the spangled fan and the pomegranate shawl, are devices selected by him to adorn a compliant Byzantine empress and an Australian hetaira. In the second section, Eddie views both hetaira and hero in terms of a

wearisome dressing up (TA:118). Nonetheless he subsequently acquires the wardrobe of a jackeroo, only to be seduced out of it by Eudoxia's longing for the paint and fur of Marcia Lushington (TA:246). (In this section E is conscious that dressing up is a disguise which, to his/her consternation, is both more and less convincing to others than to the disguising Self.) Mrs Eadith Trist, an actor-manager, extends dressing up beyond her own baroque person to the characters and set of her whore-house theatre. The last 'current version of Eddie Twyborn' (TA:375) is so hasty an improvisation that it combines Eadith's make-up with Eddie's tonsure and cheap suit, creating 'a character from a carnival or looney bin' (TA:377). Eddie's dying request for a bandaid not only affects the quality of his final scene but also reflects the Diane Arbus epigraph, superimposing upon the text the image of 'someone' naked except for the absurd bandaid.

Except for this superimposed image, the naked E is not presented in the final section other than in dream. In each of the first two sections, however, an event involving the naked E is of structural importance.

The incident in the first section, like a number of others, is treated from two perspectives. While one perspective is, as usual, that of the diarist, E, the other is that of the peripheral Monsieur Pelletier, and it is from his perspective that the incident is first viewed. M. Pelletier, an involuntary voyeur, experiences the unknown, unidentifiable, anonymous obsessed swimmer as an event all his own, 'his incident a wordless poem' (TA:62).

The familiar use of E as an item of bricolage, however, has an added dimension in this case. It is in response not only to his own private life that Pelletier appropriates the swimmer but also to the public world of Europe, 1914.

> Whether the swimmer were the young wife of the crazy Greek, or some unknown woman or youth, neither physical passion, nor even a burst of lust, could enter into a relationship which presented itself as a tremulous abstraction, and which must remain remote from his actual life. In one sense disgusting, his regrettable act of masturbation seemed to express a common malaise, his own and that of the swimmer headed for the open sea, as well as world despair gathering in the sea-damp newspapers.
>
> TA:64.

Here the viewer does not recognise E and finally does not wish to do so. The distant figure, male or female, of 'white marble, or perhaps 'ivory overlaid with gold leaf' or 'dirty grey in keeping with the tonal landscape' (TA:62), is used as focus for the Romantic anguish of a mute poète maudit, embedded in the chlorotic newspaper-seller, all 'grey stubble, mauve gums, and a few prongs of decalcified teeth' (TA:62).

In the second incident, at 'Bogong', Don Prowse insists that he has 'recognised' Eddie Twyborn as 'a fuckin queen', 'the day you jumped in - into the river - and started flashing yer tail at us' (TA:248). Whatever Eddie's own half-formed intentions are, he becomes Don's 'opponent' and 'victim' (TA:248). In the sexual assault, Prowse expresses his rage

> ... at all that had ever offended him in life, at the same time exposing all that he had never confessed, unless in the snapshot album.
>
> TA:248.

The final recognition, however, is not of Eddie but of everything that fails to be accommodated in the magic-lantern projection of Don Prowse, the Brute Male.

Despite their carefully distinct registers, the episode involving M. Pelletier (parodically Romantic European) and the 'Bogong' episode (couched in a 'sparse but serviceable' (TA:250)

vocabulary - reminiscent of the she-ancient, Mrs Corkill) share a deliberately comic perspective. Don Prowse, the 'orange brute' (TA:258), as grotesque as Pelletier, is reduced to a 'passive yet quaking carcase' (TA:259). Each episode subsides into banality: Pelletier forgetting the swimmer in order to remember his morning coffee and Prowse staggering off to his own room like any other drunk station manager. In each case, the shift in relevance is marked semantically: Pelletier's coffee is boiling over 'in a series of expostulatory ejaculations' (TA:65); Prowse cries out, '"Oh Jesus! Oh fuck!"' (TA:259) as he blunders his way out of Eddie's room. E, experienced directly as sexual event, continues to represent the hidden, the forbidden, the denied and the taboo, but in grossly indecorous encounters that are as much farce as they are epiphany.

It is to the view of human sexuality as farce that Eadith Trist adheres, and it is responsible not only for her eschewal of further sexual activity but also for the style of her direction of the Beckwith Street brothel-theatre. Conceived as theatre (TA:281), the brothel permits E to withdraw to conscious marginality as Others, clients and girls alike, act and re-enact

> ... [the] secret hopes and frustrations struggling to escape through the brutality, the thrust and recoil, the acts of self-immolation, the vicious spinsterly refinements which shape the depravity of men - her own included.
>
> TA:288.

E, as voyeur/se experiences the pleasures of marginality, of looking safely without being looked at, of being the 'outsider' looking in. 'She would have liked to believe' (TA:288) is the conjectural disclaimer to the notion that E does, in fact, consider that lust may finally consume 'infection'.

Almost conventionally, E draws justification for her view from the mirror image of the external world, in which 'Wardrobes' is

as much a whore-house as Eighty-Four Beckwith Street, and as much 'a work of art' (TA:325, 282). Eadith Trist's theatre is theatre of the grotesque: Ada's 'conventual habit if it hadn't been for a cameo of nymphs and satyrs ... at her throat' (TA:283); Bridie's 'long, trailing romantic skirts' (TA:290) which, raised, reveal a club foot in a surgical boot; the whole troupe is both 'her ranks of mimulus and leopard lilies and pale orchids on resilient stems' (TA:284) and 'a platoon of whores',

> ... in their comfy gowns and sleazy kimonos picking their teeth with their nails, scratching breast, armpit, or crotch in the practical manner a girl's anatomy demands.
>
> TA:285.

However, Mrs Trist herself is equally the subject of typically E aphorisms of ambivalence:

> An artist must guard against the tendency to sentimental indulgence, an abbess resist threats to a vocational ideal. The inspired bawd has in her a little of each.
>
> TA:283.

Equally like E's is the narrative voice which follows these mannered phrases with a gross caricature of Mrs Trist 'giving way to her inner nature' in '"Madam's boodwah"' (TA:283).

Not infrequently, the reader herself is manipulated into the voyeur's position, viewing behind the scenes what, according to the director of the piece, would diminish carnal desire. Here, for instance, narrative voice directs attention to the 'art' of the bawd, with heavily Romantic neo-Impressionist overtones:

> ... their nipples and the soles of their feet emblazoned with rose and gold, a suggestion of ashen mauve adrift in the cleft between breasts and thighs.
>
> TA:284.

This modulates into modernist plasticity:

> ... the rosy spiral of a navel at the apex of an embossed belly, or elephant creases in upturned buttocks, or the sculptured ebony fetish from the hills above Freetown ... .
>
> TA:284.

Necessary to the hypothesis, however, is the failure of decorum. This is initially effected by the dissonance of 'Madam' in conjunction with 'the roly-poly of girls', a dissonance emphasised by Madam's fully clothed figure among so much 'tender flesh' and 'youthful skin' (TA:284). The earlier impressionism of light and colour interplay, moreover, becomes overtly allied to almost pornographic detail:

> ... Elsie the ex-teacher was reclining, sharp pink nipples tantalizing in the light sifted through beige net, trickles of light settling in moist, prickling crotch.
>
> TA:285.

What the narrative voice achieves is the privileging of the reader by admitting her to a view of the grotesque art of Mrs Trist which includes the artist herself as a compositional figure. It is in this way that the dominance of novel-as-text over Eadith Trist-as-text emerges. The subject-positions of voyeur/se and theatrical director, selected by Eadith Trist, have been deliberately chosen. Both are 'offstage', unseen, and, in this sense, marginal positions: attention is directed to the actors and deflected from the director to whose I/eye the actors are in fact subjected. The style of direction, grotesque farce, subjects the performers to an ideology of distortion which arrests them in the repetitive activity of social and sexual transgression 'which is self-consuming, attacking nothing but the human ... a kind of profanation without an object'

(Jackson, 1981:79). Eadith Trist is thus constructing a text to reverse the positions of E as Eddie and Eudoxia, a text which elaborates itself as ambivalent in relation to those other texts (Kristeva, 1986:57). From being the object of desire, she will become the objectifier of desire, ostensibly decentring E while, in fact, and for the first time, occupying the I/eye position.

In the operation of the mise-en-abyme, however, the fiction of Eadith Trist itself become relativised by the enabling text, which discloses a director/voyeur, I/eye, who has framed (in both senses) E as Eadith Trist in the same ambivalence as disabled E as Eddie and E as Eudoxia. The potency of Eadith Trist's position is a subjective illusion: in the novel-as-text, E the director is disclosed as directed. The identity of the 'management above or below Gravenor and his exalted friends', by which 'she had been engaged to direct' (TA:281) a play, is revealed. In 'the perspectives opening through beckoning mirrors' (TA:281), Eadith herself has been engaged to give a virtuoso performance.

In his review of TA (1979), Andrew Motion remarks on the potent element of farce in the final section and the close correlation between the grotesque strategies of the protagonist and those of the writer. He finds the implied devaluation of the preceding sections 'debilitating' and notes that the novel is consequently deprived of White's 'characteristic strengths'. Certainly, the movement of the androgyne into the world of farce could seem to strip it of all mythical significance. As in AS, however, where the movement of the novel embodies the same structural properties as Theodora Goodman, in TA the rejection of centrality and meaningfulness in the text is a comment upon the structural properties of the androgyne and of the androgynous text occupying a particular spatio-temporal location.

The intensely private interiority of AS, together with its emphasis on the withholding of 'story', represents a particular

mode of being for the androgyne, in which withdrawal and apparent obliteration dominate. The heavy reliance of TA, in its structure as well as in the 'characterisation' of the protagonist, on projection into the lives of Others and an engagement with exteriority, points to another interpretation. In the final section of TA, where E attempts to escape the role of the androgyne as perpetual promise and absence by constructing a text in which Others must play the leading roles under his/her direction, the coherence obtained can only be sustained within the encapsulated world of farce. The androgyne cannot resolve its 'otherness', but it can attempt to alleviate the situation by creating a world (or text) in which that which is regarded as the 'real' (Harpham's (1982:126) 'moral idea' or 'perfect original') co-exists with a grotesque parody of itself. The representation and the original are fused into one so that it is impossible not to recall the original, nor to recall it without ambiguity. Foucault, in considering the function of transgressive literature, links literature of transgression, and in particular, sexual transgression, to 'the place where the sacred used to play ... a form of thinking in which an interrogation of limits replaces a search for totality, and in which a movement of transgression replaces a movement of contradictions' (cited in Jackson, 1981:79). In the final section of TA, the androgyne is presented in terms of its failure to escape the secular and the contemporary: it seeks, instead of the idealistic union with an impossible Other, to reject all limits imposed on the human by subjecting Others to the violent, but ultimately meaningless, breaking of taboos. The direct intervention of the androgyne in the world of events necessitates a general reduction in values. This does not exclude the androgyne who, by insisting on the centrality of Others (perceived reductively) and the marginality of Self, does not escape his/her location within the same text.

Farce, by severing the bonds between reality and artifice, openly announces itself to be operating without motive or

cause. Its course is seemingly determined by the whim of the writer and its conventions insist upon the fictionality of its situations and characters. In grotesque farce, such as the final section of TA, this fictionality is nonetheless perceived to be closely akin to, if not grounded in, aspects of an accepted reality. In the complex structure of TA, the first two sections persuasively present E as an entity struggling to achieve coherence; the power of the final section derives from the belief that E does exist but that coherence for E can only mean coherence within a one-dimensional fictional and farcical world.

It is the events of the real as opposed to the phoney war that alter the dimensions of Eadith Trist's world. That war might perhaps be the solution is a proposition originally announced by Eudoxia Vatatzes (TA:105), and it is World War I that grants young Eddie Twyborn the opportunity to represent 'despair running in the right direction' (TA:120). The events of Dunkirk introduce a new cathartic element into the Trist theatre of Beckwith Street: the survivors of defeat, 'intent on avoiding any accusation of heroism, let alone experience of transcendence' (TA:366), find in lust an epiphany uncontaminated by the coexistence of farce. (In the story told to young Eddie Twyborn in World War I, the Australian captain's sexual symbolism of the giant white cocky powerfully evokes the complementary inverse symbol of E's predatory emu.) For these Others, however unwilling, the events of 'a world of fragmentation and despair' (TA:369), make even the perversities of vice, as M. Pelletier recognised, the instruments of some form of regeneration. Within such external experiences, the paradoxical events of personal mythic experience may be generated. In this sense, sexuality must be read on the other level of meaning suggested by Foucault: 'it is linked to the death of God and to that ontological void which that death left at the limits of our thought' (cited in Jackson, 1981:79).

It is in this sense that the brothel becomes too serious a world for E. Regeneration for the androgyne can only be an internal process; any attempt to externalise it will result in mere substitution. Despite the fact that E recognises that there is a 'phoenix inside her which in the nature of things would never experience re-birth' (TA:360), he/she is driven to act in accordance with the times. The power of the 'unheimlich' my-theme to dictate significance is clear in what Eadith has desired, achieves, and abandons. To the letter from Gravenor, indicating his acceptance of E, no reply or response is recorded; the reconciliation of Eadie Twyborn with her daughter Eadith does not produce the projected idyll. Instead, E makes a final appearance as Eddie, a scapegoat in search of sacrifice.

The essential difference in the treatment of the androgyne in AS and TA is directional. Theodora Goodman, whose experience is private, interior and untrammelled by guilt, may withdraw from a quest that has become irrelevant. E, on the other hand, over whose my-theme guilt, sexual shame and fear dominate, is bound to continue an unending quest for public, external absolution. Where the structure of AS determines the ironic closure of Theodora Goodman's story, enclosing yet another beginning within a fictitious ending, the structure of TA determines a more bitter irony: E is finally no more than an absent and promised event, a value for Others which has been reflected in each discrete section. If E fails to gain congruence, it can only be ascribed to the additional scapegoat role: where the androgyne carries the burden of the hidden guilt of Others, he/she will inevitably run in the wrong direction.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NATIVE HEIR:
The Tree of Man and Voss

The examination of AS and TA has indicated White's overarching interest in the problematics of consciousness. In his use of the mythical figures of male and female androgyne, he interrogates the cultural constructs and constraints which deny ambivalence by repressing doubt and desire. The 'homelessness' which is created, not only by the Australian experience, but by the secularisation of Western culture generally, demonstrates, in his view, the inadequacy of materialistic and pragmatic solutions to the human dilemma. He privileges myth and myth-making, not as a solution, but as a dissident activity which permits us to extend ourselves beyond the restrictive identities imposed upon us by ideology. At the same time, such solitary myth-makers as the protagonists of these two novels are demonstrably at risk: in the absence of a community which validates such a system of signification, one is forced, as O'Flaherty points out, to live the myth against the group:

> ... surrendering to disturbing and totally personal emotions that often threaten one's existence as a social creature or one's common sense as the creature of realism and materialism.
>
> O'Flaherty, 1980(a):113.

In turning to White's two novels of established Australian myth, TM and Voss, I intend to demonstrate his awareness of the power of restrictive, collective myth to dictate significance to a community. The power of ideology to establish identity is linked not only to the enabling force of language but also to the (non)language of myth, but myth of a different nature and design. The androgyne figure remains a key motif in that it represents the open-ended, non-exclusive alternatives to a

restrictive patriarchal ideology. Such an ideology, in White's view, supports its 'realism' by employing myths of social charter

> ... by which the present life, fates, and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as indications as to how to perform them.
>
> Malinowski, cited in O'Flaherty, 1980(a):102.

The heroic myths of the Pioneer and the Explorer serve to legitimate ideological orthodoxies. Democracy and egalitarianism, as cornerstones of 20th Century Australian society, are legitimated, as Morgan (1983:135) points out, by investing the myth of mateship with a mythical history:

> ... an attempt was made to retroject this mateship veneer back into earlier Australian history, and to link it up with the silent, and more admirable characters of nineteenth century outback fact and fiction.
>
> Morgan, 1983:135.

Such myths are essentially myths of denial and repression: in their intensely masculine, imperialist form, they dictate a view of reality and of congruent behaviour which excludes all forms of forbidden/desired experience as 'Not Possible or Not Important or, finally, Not Real' (O'Flaherty, 1980(a):120). The fact that such a view of reality is in itself mythical is obscured by the very nature of such myths. With their emphasis on their legitimacy and 'truth', they conceal their origins as readily as they conceal the possibility of other legitimacies and other 'truths'. The effect on the individual, bound to such an identification of self and society, may well be to create 'the "withheld self", an extraordinary revelation of people without any vital lifeline to their deeper selves' (Conway, cited in Morgan, 1983:136).

In response to the exhibition Aspects of Australian Figurative Painting 1942-1962: Dreams, Fears and Desires, mounted as part of the 1984 Sydney Biennale, George Petelin (1984) foregrounds the role played by Australian painters, in the later years of the Second World War and the years immediately after it, in challenging dominant Australian myths. Citing the myth of mateship as valorising restrictive views of sex, race and nationality, he points to the radically different views of women, blacks and aliens forced upon Australians by the social upheavals of that war. These, he observes, created a crisis in mythical thinking, which a number of artists registered in works which exposed the anxieties and contradictions previously concealed by myth. White, in TM and Voss, written during that period, also responds to the historical/mythical situation; moreover, his response includes the privileging of the artist (painter as well as writer) as mythmaker. The artist (including the writer of TM and Voss) must not only interrogate the dominant myths but must also offer alternative mythical structures. These, in opposition to myths that offer maps of reality, offer only a transforming change of perspective, allowing us, as Lévi-Strauss points out, to state the problems for which myth itself can never be an answer (cited in O'Flaherty, 1980(a):104).

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> Writing, which had meant the practice of an art by a polished mind in civilised surroundings, became a struggle to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words.
>
> ...
>
> I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people.
>
> Patrick White

> Il faudroit, pour ce que'j'ai à dire, inventer un language aussi nouveau que mon projet: car quel ton, quel style prendre pour débrouiller ce chaos immense de sentiments si divers, si contradictoires, souvent si vils et quelquefois si sublimes....
>
> Jean-Jacques Rousseau

> To learn how to speak
> With the voices of the land,
> To parse the speech in its rivers,
> To catch in the inarticulate grunt,
> Stammer, call, cry, babble, tongues knot
> A sense of the stoneness of these stones
> From which all words are cut.
>
> Jeremy Cronin

The Tree of Man

The Tree of Man, published in 1956, was the first of White's novels to be written in and of Australia after his decisive return 'home' in 1947. During his long absence, described by him as 'exile', he had maintained a relationship with an ideal or idealised Australia, and this country of his own making 'was always, I realise, a landscape without figures' (White, 1981:49).

TM, as the work of the returned exile, addresses two related problems: the need to populate his country and the need to adjust a Eurocentric approach to language to both country and

populace. At the same time, White interrogates one of the potent male myths of Australian beginnings: in this myth, the pioneering figure of the Bushman lives a life of hardship which nonetheless

> ... provides access to natural beauties; even more importantly it provides access to the realities of a physical labour which is directly and perceptibly life-sustaining. The life sustained is characterised as down-to-earth, real, productive of behaviour and social values which are manly and fraternal (mateship).
>
> Strauss, 1984:274.

A pioneering novel is a conventional celebration of colonial origins and TM can be defined as such. The topoi of such works - virgin soil, natural disasters, the challenge to a simple mythic individual to tame and possess the land by hard labour and endurance - are all present, and the particularly Australian forms, trial by drought, flood and fire, are given due prominence. Nonetheless, the landscape and figures of TM are only marginal to the great central commonplaces of Australian literary myth: the Bush and the City. The dualistic opposition between these two, as Jennifer Strauss points out, is 'traditionally credited with shaping as well as reflecting Australian awareness of geographical, historical and social dimensions' (1984:274). G.A. Wilkes, however, in 'The Australian Legend: Some Notes towards Redefinition' (1977), traces and interrogates the development of the Australian stereotype - 'the one powerful and unique national type yet produced in Australia ... that of the Bushman' (Francis Adams, cited in Wilkes, 1977:318). In his critical examination of the democratic and egalitarian virtues purported to be the products of the life of the bush, and, in particular, the life of the pastoral nomads of the nineteenth century, he identifies the actual hierarchical and discriminatory structure of life on the great pastoral stations, and demonstrates that the bushmen themselves practised similar discrimination towards the small freeholders, the selectors or cockatoos.

The 'cockie', whose selection ranged from no more than forty to one hundred and fifty acres of land, holds an unenviable place in the Australian legend. Unlike the 'true' frontiersman, he came to the land late, (in increasing numbers after the goldrushes of the late 19th Century) and, as Wilkes demonstrates, was resented both by the squatters or great landowners and by the station hands of his own class. The 'mateship' of the bush did not extend to the 'cockie', who was characterised as a petty capitalist, an exploiter of casual labour and the epitome of everything small and mean. It is precisely this marginal group that White chooses to represent in his pioneering novel.

Geographically, too, the dualistic opposition of the commonplaces has been blurred. The bush which Stan clears and which becomes 'Parkers' is virgin land, but land well within the coastal fringe and within easy reach of settlements. While lonely, it can hardly be described as isolated. Its absorption into the city within a single generation demonstrates the fragility of its pastoral nature. It is, in fact, marginal to both Bush and City.

Thus, White has inserted his narrative into the space between the culturally legitimated dualities of Bush and City, a space whose absence he may now make present and for whose silence he may provide speech. In this way the narrative of TM parallels the author's own needs: to fill what he regards both as his own landscape without figures and as the cultural desert of the Great Australian Emptiness (White, 1958:39), and to appropriate a language consonant with the presence of that filled space. Consequently, the novelist is 'pioneering' too, and the activities within his narrative reflect the activities of the author/narrator.

His 'pioneering' discourse should thus be colonial in at least three dimensions: it should establish a new centre of permanence

which will be self-referential; it should reconstitute or substitute a value-conferring ideology; finally, it should constitute itself, by transforming the culturally inherited collective formulae of writing into first-level citations of this permanence and this ideology. An examination of the opening chapter of TM yields traces of these patterns of discourse:

> A cart drove between the two big stringybarks and stopped. These were the dominant trees in that part of the bush, rising above the involved scrub with the simplicity of true grandeur. So the cart stopped, grazing the hairy side of a tree, and the horse, shaggy and stolid as the tree, sighed and took root.
>
> TM:9.

In the opening paragraph, indeed, in the opening sentence, a problematic nexus is established between non-specific human activity and a specific place. 'A' cart is inserted between 'the' two dominant trees of a specific part of 'the' bush and stops there. The logical connective 'so' appears to indicate either that the cart stopped at this point because it was between two 'dominant' trees or because the trees possessed simple and 'true' grandeur as opposed to the 'false' and complex. The logic of the first alternative indicates value conferred on 'power over'; the logic of the second marks value conferred on the traditional pastoral equation: simplicity equals truth. What follows upon the primary connective is a string of associative connectives. The cart 'grazing' the tree is, by virtue of the polysemy, both cart and horse; the 'hairy side' of the tree bonds tree and horse in metaphor; the horse reflects back to the tree in simile, projects forward to the marginal man in 'sighed', and is finally dominated by tree in the action of 'taking root'. Is the human sigh a response to vegetable domination? Is the complex set of relationships set up among cart, horse, tree and peripheral man a sign of 'simplicity' and thus of 'truth'?

Stan Parker, who is in search of 'permanence', does not appear to have chosen this place in which to 'stay put'.

> But he knew also there was nothing to be done. He knew that where his cart had stopped, he would stop. There was nothing to be done. He would make the best of this cell in which he had been locked. How much of will, how much of fate, entered into this it was difficult to say. Or perhaps fate is will. Anyway, Stan Parker was pretty stubborn.
>
> TM:13.

Here the permanence of the nexus is acknowledged. At the same time, it is expressed negatively: 'there was nothing to be done' is repeated; he must 'make the best' of it; he has been 'locked' into the place as into a 'cell'. Why this is inevitable is 'difficult to say' and precisely at this point in the text - another difficulty arises. The preceding sentences are clearly free indirect discourse and the final sentence of the paragraph is clearly authorial. Moreover, it is marked by the dismissive 'anyway', as a throwaway comment on the 'fate' and 'will' speculations. The two sentences containing these speculations, however, could belong to the point of view of either narrator or protagonist or both. To cloud identification still further, the register shift brings the final sentence closer to the 'frosty, bloody hole' register of Stan Parker than to that of the narrator, who clearly 'owns' it.

Is the difficulty in 'saying' not only that of the inarticulate protagonist but also that of the inarticulate narrator? What is the difficulty? Does the protagonist/narrator not know the answer to the question or is the appropriate language lacking in which an answer could be made? The dismissive 'anyway' refuses conceptual or linguistic speculation in favour of the sort of down-to-earth pragmatism definitive of the Bushman stereotype.

For the moment, White privileges the non-interpretative stance. Stan Parker's early history is shared out between authorial narrative and Stan's memories. Stan recalls his parents, his images of their separate God-figures, the sea and a whore's face at a window. However, not only does he refuse to interpret these images but he is seen to shy away from the authorial interpreter, as if he, like the reader, has access to the sound of the narrative voice:

> He was no interpreter. He shifted beside his fire at the suggestion that he might have been. He was nothing much. He was a man.
>
> TM:12.
> (my underlining)

Clearly, the relationship between character and narrator/author is unorthodox.

The young Stan Parker is intent upon the purposefulness of the present time and of substances. He fills the 'white silence' of the bush with the sounds of axe and hammer as he clears his land and builds his matchstick house (TM:16). These things reassure him of his own solid presence. As if in terms of an unspoken agreement, the narrative voice no longer 'reads' Stan Parker's history and restricts itself to the present and to observation of the activities of 'the man' and his dog. Thus, when Stan takes a wife, she is introduced into the silence and the space just as the other necessities of life, 'flour, and a bottle of painkiller, and pickled meat, and kerosene' (TM:17), have been - through the responses of the nameless dog.

The dog is to remain nameless, despite Amy's conviction that he should be named - 'Your Dog' defines him as what he is: Stan's possession. But, in time, Amy is to name her own dog, her cow - Julia, and Jewel the calf, whose birth precedes that of her own long awaited children: Ray and Thelma. Ray she names because

'it fitted itself to her mouth, and to the little perfect boy, lying in the gold of the morning' (TM:114); the girl she calls Thelma, once again a word 'filling her mouth ... like a satin sweetie, except that the word had about it something richer, rarer, less attainable' (TM:124). With the coming of the woman, there appears to be a 'solution to the mystery of silence' (TM:29).

What in fact results is a text filled, in the main, with the mediations of the narrator, through whom the points of view of husband and wife may be made accessible. Amy's appetite for language, imaged in the oral satisfactions of her naming of the children, is thwarted by her husband's inability to speak himself. Their private language is the 'language of flesh' (TM:29), and for young Stan the 'most significant, most secret detail' of his private and secret existence is his wife (TM:34). This he does not seek to translate into words and Amy, who would like to, is both diffident and ashamed of her need. Nevertheless, this secret shared existence distinguishes Stan from the other men he meets in pubs. To the comic, stereotyped heroics of pioneering he responds with an enigmatic silence:

> Their cows had full udders. Such hams, bacon and pork had not been known from other pigs. Tried in drought, flood and fire, the heroic muscles of these men had performed prodigious feats. They had caught fish and killed snakes. They had hurled bullocks into heaps. They had bitten the ears off angry horses. They had eaten and drunk, lost and won more than other men.
>
> TM:34.

It is not these parodic words of the pioneering myth that stir Stan Parker. Named Stanley by his mother both because it was 'a respectable sort of name' and because 'she remembered also the explorer' (TM:10) he is aroused by the mention of the 'Gold Coast of Africa' by the 'man walking to Wullunya' (TM:37-42). In this episode, Stan briefly recognises the nature of his repressed desire. The permanence he seeks in projecting

outwards onto the 'chaos' of his new world is partly experienced as an unwilled 'fate', into which he has been involuntarily locked, because it mis-represents the permanence he truly seeks - and fears to acknowledge. What he desires is to explore an uncharted territory, to find and interpret himself. The pioneering structures into which the narrative of Stan Parker appeared to have been inserted are thus invalidated: despite appearances, this narrative, while remaining static on the littoral, will constitute a journey into the interior.

In his state of 'being elsewhere', Stan's inherited language, the language of the Old Testament and Shakespeare, read in his boyhood, is inadequate: it cannot express his 'otherness'. Without language, he cannot enter his own consciousness, there to formulate a discourse of permanence, legitimated by a value - conferring ideology. (The explorer is also imaged here as that other Australian treasure-hunter, the gold-miner, for Stan knows that he has in him 'great words of love and beauty, below the surface, if they could be found' (TM:39).) For the time being, however, the other language of flesh can sometimes express the poetry and adventure of new territory for both husband and wife:

> They flowed together in the darkness. The coasts of tenderness opened to admit their craft. Sleep swam out to meet them, from under the trees.
>
> TM:41.

Yet, as Stan tautens the wire fences enclosing him in his space, he begins to listen to the Other sounds around him, not his own sounds but the sounds that had always been in the silence: 'the thick and endless murmurs, from which a theme will threaten to burst, the one theme, and continue to threaten' (TM:42).

His domestication of his space does not appear to legitimate him, nor does his purely personal life with his wife hold more than consolation. He is bound to silence for he cannot speak or

write himself, and, equally, he is aware of the uncolonised world as speaking itself - but in a language he has not mastered. While the external events follow the predictable course of the pioneering novel, their significance, which the protagonist can never articulate, is hidden and personal. The relationship between consciousness, language, and the land dominates the text by its absence. In contrast with conventional pastoral, Stan's labour does not make the landscape speak, nor does he himself become authenticated by a mythical marriage to the earth he husbands.

In the presence of such an absence, the text can only mark those occasions on which Stan confronts his lack of a system of signification. Within two of the great set-pieces of the pioneering myth, trial by flood and trial by fire, he encounters significant experiences, which are emptied out by silence. In the Wullunya floods, the sight of a corpse, an old man who had died upside down in a tree, becomes one more of those 'things he had never told, and forgotten' (TM:73): things which interrogate the permanence of substance which he tries to make his first article of faith. The significance of the Glastonbury fire is not his 'heroic' act of rescuing a woman from a burning house but the sensual invitation to enter into an irrational, possibly fatal experience. 'All that he had never done, all that he had never seen, appeared to be contained in this house, and it was opening to him' (TM:176). In the person of Madeleine, to whom he breaks his way through the centre of the house, the potent irrationality of sexual desire presents itself but cannot become encoded. Revisiting the ruins of Glastonbury as a middle-aged man, Stan can conceptualise the performance of the sexual act with this woman, but the repressed significance of their encounter is lost.

> Whole rooms of his mind, in which each separate detail had been stored, seemed to have gone, like those rooms of the top and most significant storey, through which he had run, matching himself against the bravura of the fire, to find her, as he had not expected in his youth and diffidence, awake.
>
> TM:217.

The woman, Amy, who, as his wife, is technically present, reflects, in her far greater capacity to admit the irrational and inchoate, the effect of Stan's silence both upon himself and upon her. The spaces in Stan's text are filled by Amy's narrative. Whereas Stan's experience of his naked sexuality with Madeleine is repressed and lost, Amy's youthful awareness of Madeleine's lover, Tom Armstrong, results in her conception of the Parker son. When, in later life, both husband and wife are aware of the presence of silence between them and the need to rupture it, it is Amy who accepts the alternative of transgression, in her sordid sexual contacts with a commercial traveller. Rather than accept that silence reveals nothing she prefers silence to conceal the ambiguities of guilt and pleasure. (Her adultery is significantly prefigured by her visit to the O'Dowds, the intensely verbal and transgressive Irish. Her sharp consciousness of O'Dowd's desire for her as a sexual being (TM:291-292), fissured as it is with disgust and fear, puts new language into her mouth. The word 'Shickered' (TM:294-295) is, as she recognises, 'not her word' but, despite its 'brutal and contagious ugliness', it opposes a more solid presence to the silence, or 'great sadness' that has invaded the Parker house.)

In terms of the pastoral (pioneering) paradigm, Stan Parker is, at this time, the embodiment of success. In his community, he is a respected and reliable man; a life-time of labour has earned him an 'inseparable' bond with the district itself: 'he had become a place name' (TM:295). As a pillar of his community, he is to be seen at church, 'a broad and upright man' (TM:295). Since he continues to refuse interpretation, this

task falls to the narrator: to state the form of Stan's denial of doubt, for he will express himself only by 'acts of the body', and to reveal the pressure of doubt and desire upon Stan's silence.

Perversely, Stan offers to end this silence only after Amy has 'her own corpse, that she could not share' (TM:307). In the symbolic language of his dream (TM:308), he learns what the act of dis-covering her adultery will only confirm: Amy no longer desires to know what he has enclosed within himself:

> I shall show, he said, pulling till the sweat came. But still not. No, she said, Stan, Stan it has gone bad in there, it has been in there all these years.
>
> TM:308.

In his despairing acceptance of 'lost goodness' (TM:315), Stan once more confronts a parodic version of the pioneering myth, by means of which other men seek to authenticate their lives. In the Sydney pub, men, 'in recitation', 'were convinced by the jerky pageantry of all they had done', and are anxious for him 'to assume their size, to tell them something from his own heroic life' (TM:323). As a young man, sustained by epiphanous moments 'of true knowledge' in which all things appeared to be interrelated (TM:186), he had longed to communicate with other men. Now, what he has to communicate is the grotesque reversal of those epiphanous moments: a truth in which the absence of God, the loss of his wife and the non-relatedness of all things obscenely elevates emptiness to meaning. For such meaning, silence is appropriate.

The journal, which Amy once hoped her son would fill with the words she is greedy for, and which Stan has appropriated, remains empty. His exploration of the interior remains unrecorded: 'any words that came to him were the stiff words of a half-forgotten literature that had no relationship with himself' (TM:297). At one time, he would physically distance

himself from his own enclosed and domestic space, invested with his own habits disguised as meaning, pressing 'beyond the safe limits on reckless blind expeditions of discovery, and doubt, and adoration' (TM:220). In the untamed landscape, where 'there seemed no reason why human beings should go', Stan would read at least the comforting presence of signs, however unintelligible:

> Black sticks pointed on the sandy soil, in which struggled bushes of stiff, dark needles, and greater trees, of which the bark came away in leaves of blank paper.
>
> TM:220.

Once he has accepted meaning as the equivalent of the absence of signs, he no longer regrets that the landscape uses symbols that 'would not be read' (TM:222). During the long period of dissolution, from his critical discovery of emptiness until his last illness and encounter with death, he takes pleasure in a kind of illiteracy: it pleases him that he cannot write himself nor read the world around him. Ironically, it is Hamlet, one of 'the plays of Shakespeare that he had read lying on his stomach as a boy' (TM:297), which, in its alien language, speaks his past and his future.

In their separated readings of the play (TM:400-406), Amy and Stan find their pasts recorded. Madeleine, who represented promise to them both, is recognised by both as a form of 'poetry'. Both recognise that 'poetry is not words' but significance. In the play-within-the-play is encapsulated the critical repressed event of both their lives: Stan recalls 'that little play in which he himself had been poisoned'; Amy recalls the silent waiting that had poisoned her life until, like the Player Queen, she had 'acted'. It is Stan, however, who recognises that the 'big play' must be going somewhere. Pushed by Hamlet, 'who had played the Second Ghost, the ghost of memory' to acknowledge not only what had once filled him but also his many years of emptiness and absence, he cannot ignore

the certainty of the presence of death, 'which is also the present, all else has been past and future, stories and anticipation, by comparison' (TM:405).

Stan Parker's renewed desire for meaning is not connected to the land, which he no longer owns, nor to his wife and children, all of whom are essentially lost to him. He wishes only for an answer to his question: 'What is intended of me and for me' (TM:407), so that before the ultimate absence of his death he may feel his presence legitimated. In the account of the Parkers' attendance at church, however, Stan's search for an answer in absolute terms is not privileged. Prominence is given instead to Thelma Forsdyke, whose mis-readings of her parents' lives, 'transparent and lovely in that early light' (TM:414), are set against an elaboration of Amy Parker's lifelong struggle with her love and hatred of her husband. Stan Parker, despite the misconceptions of his wife and daughter, cannot pray, although 'he would have prayed, if he had known how' (TM:415). There is an 'absence of evidence that he would receive more', although he has hoped for God; the conjectural elements which follow upon his luminous smile of hope refuse to validate the promise of future enlightenment (TM:416).

The final chapters of the novel marginalise Stan Parker in favour of Amy. He plays no part in the final visit, and rejection, of Ray Parker, and appears merely as 'an old man' in the final contact with Madeleine. While Amy consciously recognises the dissolution of 'the lovely effigy of Madeleine that had been hers' (TM:431), no amount of prodding will reveal to her whether Stan has recognised the old woman as the source of 'that burning house, of tremulous harps and hair' (TM:434). The narrator comments only that Stan is no longer capable of believing in such memories. Stan's visit to Sydney after Ray's murder is an old man's ineffectual desire to find some help for himself, and brings only a greater specificity to his thematic question: 'What else are we intended to do if we have failed in this?' (TM:446).

Amy, on the other hand, is engaged in the conclusion of the two sets of lives that have neighboured theirs: the lives of the O'Dowds and of Bub and Doll Quigley. In the death of Mrs O'Dowd, and the dissolution of her husband, the failure of permanence is confirmed. Doll Quigley's murder of her brother, out of a blinding logic of compassion, dissolves her into a composite and tortured figure of both Bub and Doll. The purpose of 'the twin knives turning in Doll Quigley and Mrs O'Dowd' (TM:466) is beyond Amy's comprehension and, ironically, she places her faith once more in her silent husband, 'who would stand up at the last moment perhaps, and say something. Stan will know, she said (TM:466).

The fates of the saintly Doll, turned killer, and the carnal Mrs O'Dowd, dying with wry courage, are too similar to encourage moral judgments and discrimination. Amy, to the moral indignation of at least one male critic (Mackenzie, 1966: 409-410), can accommodate her own transgressions in the enigmatic pattern she vaguely distinguishes in these conclusions. Where reward and punishment seem indistinguishable, Amy is content to recognise her own unfulfilled desires, and dispassionately regret that she did not fill her emptiness with more transgression.

The conclusion of Stan's own narrative, the account of his death, is, however, not dominated by Amy. Instead, an elaborate account is given of the peripheral affairs of Thelma Forsdyke, whose carefully structured existence is ruptured by the announcement of her father's death. The first significance given to Stan's final absence is a social and satirical one. By the coincidence of Thelma's first dinner at Government House with her father's burial day, Thelma's anguished conflict is given satirical prominence over Stan's ending. Stan is obscured by the consequences of his inconvenient funeral:

> Perhaps funerals in the country, little funerals of simple insignificant people that trail through the yellow grass in hired cars and a variety of dreadful clothes, are over quickly ... .
>
> TM:471.

Inversions of Thelma's perceptions are again the vehicle by which an alternative 'truth' is proffered by authorial comment. 'Parker's' is accorded a 'natural' splendour:

> ... this house, which in spite of the immense event that had taken place, was open to birds and leaves on all sides, and to the picking and fossicking of gathering sunlight ... .
>
> TM:472.

Framed in this way, the narrative of Stan's death is accorded a value that appears to be pastoral in nature. Thelma, representative of the false values of City life, is unable to read the significance of an event whose value eclipses and collapses her into a 'nonentity' (TM:472).

The construction of the section relating to Stan's death (TM:472-478) insists upon the cyclical form: all other, later elements are excluded, and Stan, Amy, and Stan's dog are once more contained within the original space of the text. Authorial comment insists on the placement, and directs attention to a clearly symbolic patterning of the space and landscape. In the return to the opening chapters of the novel, however, when permanence was seen to be young Stan's goal, it is 'perfectly obvious' that a lifetime of effort within the pioneering ethos has not achieved its aims. The 'large triumphal scheme' is not of the pioneer's making: his farm has gone, his children have given themselves to 'other' values, the virgin bush itself has been filled by 'the crescent of purple villas'. The 'design', to which attention is directed, validates neither Stan's life sentence nor the pastoral equation, incorporating as it does 'all that was visible and material' (both 'natural' and

suburban). Nor is Stan's final epiphany accorded unequivocal validity. Since it arises out of his visual perception of his place in the scheme of things, the fact that his perceptions are conjecturally reflected is an essential component of the conclusion:

> His eyes had been reduced to a rudimentary shape, <u>through which was observed, you felt, a version of objects that was possibly true</u>.
>
> <u>TM</u>:474.
> (my underlining)

The young evangelist, whose visit provokes Stan's final, and enigmatic credo, must be read as the alter ego of the man walking from Wullunya. Although both are associated with conventional faith, and with literature pertaining to it, neither is presented as a figural embodiment of Christian life. The comic stranger from Wullunya merely sells Bibles; the evangelist's fervour is associated with his own orgasmic pleasure in confessing his sinful past. The first, however, and not by design, awakes Stan to the true nature of his desire; the second provokes the statement that records the culminating discovery of Stan's long, exploratory journey.

What the precise nature of that discovery is remains deliberately enigmatic and provocative, and I do not propose to offer an interpretation. Its enigmatic and provocative qualities, in themselves, reflect upon those criteria of pioneering discourse which have been the concerns of the protagonist as much as the novelist. In terms of the establishment of a new and self-referential centre of permanence, it is clear only that the pioneering version of permanence is discredited in favour of an 'other' non-pastoral version. The statement affirms a value-conferring ideology, but its precise nature is withheld and it does not extend beyond the protagonist. Moreover, since it is made just before death, its truth-value can in no way be tested. Finally, in its enigmatic

and provocative form, it interrogates but does not (cannot) decisively transform the culturally inherited formulae of language.

In extending the text beyond the death of the protagonist, the author/narrator continues to return attention to the opening chapters of the novel. The final chapter stresses the place, the trees and the Parker grandson, and establishes a specific and neutral relationship among them. The trees which have remained are those 'that have survived the axe' only because they stand on land 'that nobody wants to use' (TM:479). There is no longer a question of dominance. The Parker grandson, who comes down into the bush, has no intention of remaining there; it is only an alternative place to be while his grandparents' house is concentrated upon death. His activities there are without concrete and established aims: he 'is mooning', 'making little heaps of sticks in various patterns', 'writing in the sand....'

This is the literate Parker grandson, to whom the blank journal has been passed (TM:386), and in favour of whom the author/narrator writes himself out of the text. Made fully present, as Stan was made peripheral in the opening paragraphs, to the spaces of text and land, the boy is not concerned with achieving permanence or constituting an ideology. These things appear to be already constituted in him and in that sense 'natural'. Unconscious of the pioneering myth, and far from needing to take root (TM:9), the boy-tree is 'putting out shoots of green thought' (TM:480). His question is not his grandfather's question. 'What is intended of me and for me' (TM:407) has become the simpler, self-referential 'What would he do?' (TM:479). To this there is an immediate, self- generated response: 'He would write a poem....' Language appears to be accessible to him, and derives from multiple sources: 'Long words wired for the occasion, marble words of dictionaries, paper words in rat traps....' In such language, it appears possible to write all he has read of the landscape and figures to which he is unconscious heir (TM:480).

Such writing is deferred, extending the novel beyond its own pages, and beyond the writer of TM. The placement of the final chapter, and the relationship of landscape and figure indicate that the writer has viewed his own novel as a text opening out into other, more 'natural' texts. While his treatment of the pioneering myth has been both provocative and polemical, his own pioneering discourse insists on the validity of its discoveries as a basis upon which a more 'natural' discourse may be created. His text has not failed to people a landscape, nor to postulate an Australian society in which there is a place for the self. If he has failed to find a 'natural' language to speak landscape and people, he has provided a figure in the landscape, whose goal is not merely to perceive his world, but to express 'all life' and 'all people' (TM:479) - 'to enter the landscape via the eye in order to live its existence from inside it' (Coetzee, 1988:173).

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Voss

If TM is a novel occupied by marginality, Voss appears to confront central issues. The central commonplace of Bush and City, with its dualistic opposition, is even accorded structural prominence - the central section of the book consists of chapters sited alternately in Sydney and the outback. The marginal group of the cockatoo is replaced by the power structures of an emergent capitalist class and the explorer figure of heroic/mythic proportions. Where the space of TM is small, enclosed and ultimately unstable in nature, the geographical spaces of Voss extend beyond maps. Geographical space itself, moreover, ceases to exercise its power to create boundaries, and operates side by side with a system denying the restrictions of both space and time. Where in TM the fate of an insignificant man and woman offers a paradigm of the colonial

struggle to speak oneself and one's world in a new, natural language, Voss offers an 'interior' language already present, which not only speaks itself and those natural to it but also speaks some, at least, of those who have been deposited upon 'the sour colonial soil' (Voss: 445).

White has selected an historical period for the novel which falls within the first period of voluntary white settlement. By both its space and time the novel may be regarded as

> ... an exploration and a representation of a world at the boundaries of "civilisation", a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology.
>
> JanMohamed, 1986:83.

In JanMohamed's terms, this places the novel within the field of colonialist discourse where the text is dominated by

> ... the central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework and colonialist literary representation: the manichean allegory - a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object.
>
> JanMohamed, 1986:82.

Earlier critics in particular have regarded such dualities as White's special interest, allying them solely to Western metaphysics and in no way to colonial discourse. (Allan Lawson, in his review essay on recurrent problems in White criticism (1979), provides a useful overview of such critical approaches, and indicates an increasing interest at that time in White (compare Satendra Nandan, 1978; Michael Cotter, 1978) as colonial and post-colonial writer.) It has already become apparent, however, in the examination of AS and TA, that any fixed cognitive framework is inevitably placed sous rature in White's fiction. Moreover, White's purpose in selecting the

space and time of Voss has been to interrogate the type of colonialist literary representation to which JanMahomed refers, and to propose alternative forms of discourse.

The choice of historical setting for Voss, in a time when Australia 'has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology' (JanMahomed, 1986:83), emphasises the interest in this novel, as in TM, in the process of signification. The settlement at Sydney is far from settled in its significance; Bonner, the merchant, still fears to find himself 'apprenticed to the past' (Voss:17); there are other uneasy wealthy men, emancipists, 'whose wealth had begun to make them acceptable, in spite of their unfortunate past and persistent clumsiness with knife and fork' (Voss:113); even the genteel Bonner household is served by a child murderer, the emancipist, Rose Portion. It is entirely possible, as Laura Trevelyan observes, 'that the whole civil history of those parts was presumptous' (Voss:85). This observation is echoed by the narrator, who deflates into meaningless puppets, 'cardboard or little wooden things', the Bishop, members of the Legislative Council, Judge and other 'grave and appreciative persons', who are taking official leave of the expedition, while the undomesticated landscape takes precedence:

> ... and there predominated the great tongue of blue water, the brooding, indigenous trees, and sky clutching at all.
>
> Voss:113.

There are, in fact, two set-pieces relating to this dockside scene. The scene already cited is authorial and richly comic. It is not representative of 'life', for that is 'resumed' once the scene has been played out and 'the Queen had been saved, in song and with loyal hats' (Voss:114). Its solidity, the solidity of 'Our Colony', is created for the purpose of demystifying it. The trappings of the imported ideology, 'God,

and soil, and flag, and Our Young Illustrious Queen' (Voss:113), are no more than 'appropriate words' declaimed as a sign of official importance, but the signal for the resumption of life is visceral: a horse 'dropped its fragrant dung, and life was resumed' (Voss:114).

The other dock-side scene is viewed from the perspective of Frank Le Mesurier (Voss:99). On the point of departure, Le Mesurier foregrounds three elements against the 'pearly distance' and 'the humdrum grind of enterprise, of vehicles and voices'. These are young Moreton Bay figs, apprehended in the act of living, ('the leaves ... now opening their actual hand'); two aboriginal women, seated on the dirt and 'dressed in the poorest shifts of clothing, but the most distinguished silence'; and a little boy, 'introduced especially into this regretful picture' (my underlining), who is selling hot mutton pies along the quay. This is, of course, parodic of those ubiquitous travellers' sketches of colonial life, which shared many a portfolio with the equally ubiquitous sketches of the natives, disporting themselves in suitable yet authentic fashion. Frank isolates for himself, as future spectator or consumer, elements of special interest, trophies of place: the Moreton Bay figs, the domesticated aboriginal females (the poverty of their status presumably sanitised by their elemental dignity). The more interesting element, and the most consciously treated, is the figure of the small boy.

The child figure, dangerously close to sentimentalism despite the fact that he is engaged in picking his nose, is placed there by Le Mesurier because the child 'would not have asked to live in any other surroundings. He belonged to that place'. The value inversion of the last sentence is noteworthy: for this essentially proletarian little person, his value, identity and permanence are not in question: they have been inscribed by the place to which he belongs. His system of signification irresistibly brings to mind a lad of a similar age and time who,

when asked to declare his religion to the colonial court, proudly responded: 'I am a Native', (cited in Russel Ward, 1973:8). Typically, neither Le Mesurier nor the author/narrator underwrites this evaluation; it is merely part of a landscape that is becoming the past - 'illusion or miasma' - with only the possibility of representing for Le Mesurier 'the actuality for which he had always craved' (Voss:100).

It is, however, underwritten by the less peripheral figure of Belle Bonner. Outwardly the conventional foil for her cousin, Laura Trevelyan, Belle's responses to the departure of the expedition foreshadow her role in the final chapter of the novel. Earlier, at the Pringles' picnic (Voss:56-74), while Voss and Laura are grimly concentrated on each other, Belle responds with a simple childlike immediacy to her physical freedom. She runs, shouts and gathers a trail of younger children behind her like any tearaway - and is moved smoothly into the phase of the 'initiate' (Voss:59), flying off 'recklessly', her trail now become 'a great train of worshippers', to build a temple for a goddess (Voss:65). Clearly, Belle is a 'natural' being, albeit a 'natural' being in a strictly Classical sense. That she is more than this becomes clear in the dockside scene (Voss:115-116). Belle makes a pointed comparison between herself and one of the women sketched by Le Mesurier, seeing herself as 'bound' and the Other as 'free'. Yet this is more than the blindness of a daughter of privilege to squalid reality: what Belle envies is the aboriginal freedom to participate meaningfully, even by waiting all night if need be (Voss:115), in a communal experience. It is not the ship nor anyone in her, and still less the ideological emptiness of Progress, that moves her, and she is powerless to speak the significance of the event. 'Her thoughts moved in pictures' (Voss:116), as Jackie and Dugald's do, and the trophy she laughingly demands from Voss is also aboriginal: 'a black's spear with blood on it'. There is that in Belle Bonner which is as much native as it is natural.

Her importance in the developing system of signification should not be underestimated. In the first chapter of the novel, the omniscient narrator informs his reader that she is to have many descendants - 'for the creation of whom she had been purposely designed' (Voss:18). More than biological engineering is suggested: the author, like Le Mesurier, has 'placed' Belle Bonner as a fecund possibility of the native-born, from whom might spring alternatives to the exploitative materialism of her father and the equally exploitative idealism of Voss.

It is as bride, 'the myth of Belle Bonner', that she ruthlessly exorcises 'the spirit of the explorer, the scarecrow that had dominated the house beyond all measure with his presence, and even haunted it after he had gone' (Voss:310). Yet despite all the familiar language: 'dedicated virgins', 'sacred white', 'origins of ritual', the final image of the bride is not 'a pure white, heavenly symbol, trembling to discover its own significance' (Voss:310), but the mirror image of the sacral witchetty grub: 'inside the shuddering white cocoon from which she would emerge a woman' (Voss:330).

Belle's party, which is the final event in the novel, is conceived as the 'transformation scene' (Voss:432) from pantomime. It is in this sense a grand finale, bringing together all the disparate elements of Sydney society, and indicating the closure of the narrative. True to the transformation scene metaphor is the satirical undercurrent: the world of rank and fashion still smiles and stabs - the Ugly Sisters still entertain themselves with the destruction of their friends. Similarly, Belle's opulent beauty is such that 'a big, conquered, white rose dropped its tribute at her feet' (Voss:433), yet her moon symbolism can also be devalued into a vulgar overdressing: '"Effie, do you not realise that Belle Radclyffe has come as the Moon?"' (Voss:434).

It has been argued by Diana Brydon (1984) that White 'writes women in', seeking 'to give a voice to Conrad's silent female centre', to articulate that silence and to give that absence a speaking presence. ('To Conrad's Marlow women were "out of it and rightly so".') She also points out White's perception of 'the marginalisation of female experience as an analogue for the marginalisation of colonial experience generally' (Brydon, 1984:389-390). In the case of Belle Bonner, it has been apparent from the first that, while her marginalisation is inevitable, it will be only partly successful. While much of her behaviour has been shaped by the controlling orthodoxies, her subjection is only partial: she maintains the ability to step beyond social structures; she finds refreshment in visiting the cordyline australis rather than in her father's 'oppressive camellia grove' (Voss:430); most importantly, she has not permitted her restrictions to separate her from Laura.

The meeting of the cousins at the party is apparently that of an ill-assorted pair: Belle, the Moon and Laura, the crow, yet the fact that both are somewhat ludicrous, in the eyes of Sydney society, prepares one for the narrator's assertion that they are 'sisters'. The comic image of the two ladies erecting 'an umbrella in the middle of the desert' (Voss:437) allows one to read both in terms of the colonial analogue. Each finds her female signification in the social code inhospitable - it is significant that Laura has 'never succeeded in learning the language' (Voss:438), while Belle has learned it as 'phrases', 'and spoke them with a hesitation' (Voss:434).

Belle's life-role is sufficiently circumscribed for her to feel uneasy at times, so that 'her glance would waver, as if it had encountered the danger of distinguishing what has been given from what has been withheld' (Voss:430). She is still part of the patriarchal order and harmony that Willie Pringle and Topp fear produces 'our inherent mediocrity as a people' (Voss:447). Nonetheless, as Pringle points out, this mediocrity may not be

the final state: 'rather is it a creative source of endless variety and subtlety'. Pointedly, the narrative voice links this discussion of the possible expression and interpretation 'of things in general, and of our country in particular' (Voss:446) with Belle's moon, made potent:

> So they talked, while through the doorway, in the garden, the fine seed of moonlight continued to fall and the moist soil to suck it up.
>
> Voss:447.

Laura's final accommodation to her circumstances has been to adopt the nineteenth-century alternative open to her. She has withdrawn to the margins of this society to become a teacher. Being the mother of Mercy further ensures her detachment. Nonetheless, this voluntary retreat into the stereotyped position of 'a distressed gentlewoman ... or some poor immigrant girl without connexions in the Colony' (Voss:402) is purely subversive. Laura's hope, she announces to the nonplussed Bonners, is 'to give the country something in return' (Voss: 403), and that gift is a speaking voice for her girl pupils. Her headmistress, Miss Linsley, intends to offer the 'young ladies of the best landed class' the most confined, discreet version of the patriarchal culture, which will merely 'increase the mystery of woman in the minds of dreadful colonial males' (Voss:404). Under Miss Trevelyan, however, the young ladies begin 'to breathe poetry', even to write it!

Laura's willingness to make her knowledge and strength accessible to others draws a little group around her at Belle's party, mockingly codified in the social system as 'a court' but inscribed by the narrator as a group of 'pioneers', among whom 'talk' may be the means of reaching their goals:

> ... conversation was the wooden raft by which their party hoped eventually to reach the promised shore.
>
> Voss:446.

Laura speaks to the 'pioneers' about speaking - about the languages of art set free from both patriarchy and imperialism, languages, in effect, of a native culture. These are to be part of the country's future, but, predictably, Laura dates that future from the 'now' of the closure of the narrative, in this way subverting the narrator's stated intention to close. Perhaps the story of Voss has already been freed from its confines and made 'native' - the reader cannot fail to recognise the author of Voss as foremost of those who, Laura predicts, will write down the legend because they 'have been troubled by it' (Voss:448), and who have found the answers to their questions in their native air.

It is helpful, in turning to the examination of Voss, the legend written down, to return to Conrad's Heart of Darkness, seminal text of cultural encounter. Voss is regarded by several critics as a significant development, extending the exploration of Conrad's novella beyond the boundaries of his limiting ideology. Wilson Harris, in Explorations (1981:74), sees the failure of Voss to return to the coast and civilisation as a movement 'away from an imperialist reading of the experiences of confronting otherness and being elsewhere towards a national one' (cited in Williams, 1985:42). Brydon (1984:391) sees White's elimination of a mediating narrator, like Marlow, in A Fringe of Leaves as a similar advance, and in Voss too, the Marlow figure is absent. In her consideration of White's work in relation to the 'enabling myth' of Heart of Darkness, she finds most significant

> ... not the dominance of a master's example, but the subversive rewritings that example initiates, and the different voices its silences allow space to speak in different cultures.
>
> Brydon, 1984:389.

One of the more intractable problems in novels of cultural encounter has been to allow the space of the text to admit the

voice of the aboriginal. Flemming Brahms sees Heart of Darkness as

> ... a work in which the civilised language of European culture does not allow the author the perspective upon his subject matter that he might have wanted to establish himself.
>
> Brahms, 1982:233/234.

Jeffrey Robinson points out that

> ... a writer from the settler community may have just as much difficulty entering imaginatively into the consciousness and cultural life of the aborigine as the writer from the metropolis had in imagining the colonial world.
>
> Robinson, 1985:148.

Brydon has acknowledged White's attempt to circumvent the drive of his inherited language to write him by countering this language with references to other language systems, such as aboriginal rock paintings and the language of dream (Brydon, 1984:394-395). (Noel Macainsh (1982) considers alternative languages to be a structural feature of most of White's novels.)

While it is accepted that White makes use of Other language systems in general, it has not yet been acknowledged that in Voss he has employed the analogic relationship between woman and the indigene to articulate not merely the 'silent female centre' but also, in great part, to give the silent aborigines a speaking presence.

Kurtz's Intended is rigorously excluded from the body of Heart of Darkness and is so constituted as the object of Marlow's activities that he feels it imperative to save her soul by the lie. Women, we understand from Marlow, are by nature 'out of touch with truth' (Conrad: 1921:12). Such limited persons are obviously unsuited to the masculine penetration of the unknown,

and the exploration of a body of meaning. The Intended exists to nurture Kurtz's original version of his own greatness, to embody the ironic 'victory' of illusion over reality. She feels unable to live without his voice; his last words will validate her continued existence. Not only is she convinced that her condition of subjection is 'natural', she also believes it is the purpose for which she has been constituted.

Laura, by contrast, occupies much of the space of Voss, indeed, it is her first meeting with Voss that constitutes the opening of the novel. The last event given from his point of view is the dream journey undertaken with her, which leaves him 'ready to meet the supreme emergency with strength and resignation' (Voss:393). Instead of a life of worshipful mourning, Laura's later life is 'content', if 'rigorous', since she forbids herself the indulgence of introspection, 'however great her longing for those delights of hell' (Voss:404). When she is forced to speak of Voss, she speaks with a respect for truth and a knowledge that, inevitably, 'all truths are particoloured' (Voss:444). Indeed, as Macainsh points out (1982:446), Laura terminates the text by deflecting the enquiry away from herself as one who can tell the truth. In my view, by this deflection she also renounces her position as speaking subject and directs the enquirer to re-turn to the text.

Norbert Platz (1984) suggests that White deliberately draws upon European literary tradition in modelling Voss upon two submerged novel forms: the nineteenth-century or mid- Victorian social novel, which dominates the Sydney sections, and the psychological novel, which dominates the outback experiences of the other members of the expedition as well as Voss. Platz links these forms to particular perceptions of 'Australia': the social novel to the functional, progress-oriented view of the country held by the emergent capitalist class; the psychological novel to the transcendental idealism of German philosophy, embodied in Voss, the individualist. As Platz points out, the

apparent disjunction between the two is illusory. In terms of each, Australia is an idea (Voss:44), a passive potentiality to be fixed, objectified and consumed.

> Seen in this light, Voss, the German monomaniac, is not all that alien to Australia. He represents nothing more than the metaphysical extrapolation of Bonner's man-centred utilitarianism. Both Bonner and Voss assume God-like qualities, for both have targeted their thinking to submitting the continent to human will.
>
> Platz, 1984:174.

The placing of Laura Trevelyan as a speaking subject becomes vital to this reading. In the introductory chapter, she is embedded in the social novel, functions adequately within it but is not of it. Between the announcement of Voss's arrival and his entrance, Laura's position as other is detailed (Voss:9). 'In the absence of a rescue party' (Voss:10), she has developed both self-sufficiency and a private contempt for the men who control her world. What disgusts her is human flesh in its most naked form: the brutalised servants. Laura shrinks from that which threatens to remind her too vividly of the degradation of which human beings are always capable. What she most fears is 'the country which, for lack of any other, she supposed was hers' (Voss:11, my underlining).

Although Voss's alien status is stressed (he is more often 'the German' than 'Voss'), the narrative voice takes pains to point out a balance and similarity between the two outwardly dissimilar figures: 'They were in almost identical positions, on similar chairs, on either side of the generous window' (Voss: 11/12). Laura's mention of her early memories stimulates not only her recall but also that of Voss (Voss:12-13). Her memories are a constant dissolving of things and people so that her 'new home ... in New South Wales' appeared a first promise of something like permanence. Voss, on the other hand, has sprung from a world of static safety, from which escape was mandatory if he was to achieve 'freedom' - although 'the purpose

and nature of that freedom' are as yet unknown. (Like Laura, he has experienced a revulsion for 'the palpitating bodies of men' (Voss:13).)

What Laura first recognises in Voss is a most distinctive characteristic: 'He does not intend to make a fortune out of this country, like other men. He is not all money talk' (Voss: 28). It is his lack of materialistic motive, as well as his lack of fear of the country, that makes the colony seem different, as even Mr Bonner is forced to observe: 'as if it did not exist until now, ... Or as if it has now begun to exist as something quite different' (Voss:29). If Laura is to be seen as the female equivalent of the indigene, the German's Other attitude to the country must be regarded as the focal point of attraction. Indeed, although Voss speaks idly of women and their occupations, reducing them to 'insect-women' (Voss:86), Laura is nonetheless prepared to challenge him with her perceptions of his nature. Whereas an earlier male challenge from Tom Radclyffe, 'to read little Laura's thoughts' (Voss:82), met with a judiciously gauged humiliation, barely within the limits of convention, Voss's condescending ignorance is passed over and it is Laura who challenges him to see himself. (It cannot be unintentional that the vital metaphor in her speech is the desert.)

Laura does not set herself up as Voss's chosen opponent for she is aware that he has no ability to see her in that role. Rather, she announces that just as he has set his will against the country, which he will make in his own image and likeness, so she will set her will against him, as 'a critical monster' instead of 'a compliant mouse' (Voss:186). Later, in her letter accepting his proposal of marriage, she stresses mutuality - they would have to 'wrestle with our mutual hatefulness', 'pray together for salvation', 'face each other, almost as in a looking-glass' (Voss:185-186). And she confirms that it was Voss's lack of fear that attracted her; that unlike other men he was not put to flight by her refusal to be cowed by him.

What she offers him appears in his second dream of her, which occurs immediately after he receives her letter (Voss:187-188). In this dream, Laura is able to interpret the unorthodox structure of a native seed and to attach the word 'together' to it. She appears 'native' to the country, in possession of its codes. The dream is not only intensely erotic; it also insists upon Laura as both in and of the place, the fertilisation of which she controls.

From this point on, it is impossible to dislodge Laura. She turns up unpredictably in the text, sometimes in dream but very frequently as part of Voss's experience of 'reality'. She forms part of the Other system of signification which marks off Voss, Le Mesurier and Henry Robarts from Palfreyman and the mutineers. These three, who penetrate furthest into the body of the continent, are progressively penetrated by an aboriginal system of signifying, which radically alters their Eurocentric views of space and time. Each of the three experiences alcheringa, the aboriginal dream-time, a form of spiritual intercourse with the world which co-exists and is co-valent with 'normal' intercourse. Thus the white boy, Harry, who is the least 'enlightened' of all, sees the white bird-soul escape from the hands of the black boy, Jackie (Voss:243), and later, at the burial of Palfreyman, watches 'the white bird depart out of the hole in Mr Palfreyman's side' (Voss:344). Barely literate in European terms, he reads the ritual drawings in the cave fluently (Voss:280). Unable to manipulate the language that has hitherto governed him, he aspires to learn Other languages 'under the platform' (Voss:246), languages which will truly speak him.

Such language, as Harry knows, is already speaking and writing Frank Le Mesurier. From the traveller and amateur artist, appropriating what he sees, Frank has become the possessed, appropriated, like an initiate shaman (Voss:281), by a language, as the arch-reactionary Turner is quick to sense, 'like certain

bits of the Bible. They are cut up, like, but to make trouble, not to make sense' (Voss:255). What is being written is revolutionary: 'Mad things ... to blow the world up; anyhow the world that you and me knows' (Voss:255). From a utilitarian point of view, however, Frank's notebook is harmless, for , as Harry Robarts is able to see, in the different time of alcheringa;

> These here deserts will see it, the pages blowing about, till the sun has burnt 'em. We will not be here.
>
> Voss:247.

Neither the non-sense of Le Mesurier's notebook nor the 'official journal of the expedition' of Voss is to be read by Laura 'with that interest women took in the achievements of men' (Voss:91), or by anyone else within the text but outside the desert. If the author/narrator knows of them, it can only be because 'the air' has told him. Thus, the author/narrator legitimates himself as another who has been penetrated by the country, one whose language, therefore, has been partly appropriated by the Other system of signification. There is consequently an abdication of the author/narrator from his position of power as 'maker', in favour of a legitimacy of greater, less personal significance. In rebuttal of Jeffrey Robinson's view of the writer from the settler community who must struggle to enter 'into the consciousness and cultural life of the aborigine', this author/narrator contends that it is he who has been entered.

This renunciation of patriarchal authority is also what is demanded of Voss. However, while it is accepted that the 'move into the hinterlands is to move away from the old fixed ego of the individual and away from linear notions of time and crudely causal historicity', the effect of this move cannot be to enclose and restrain the 'new' world as both Williams and Wilson Harris claim (Williams, 1985:143). To throw even 'a meta-

physical outline' around it would be to create the fixed boundaries of the map, the map which Voss conspicuously fails to make (Voss:85). I have argued elsewhere against the limiting view of myths as 'medium of transformation' in the novel, and the assumption that a new set of fixed meanings (fixed by whom?) is the invariable substitute for an old set of fixed meanings. If this were the case, the renunciation by Voss of his patriarchal authority or, in terms of the text, the cancellation of his coronation (Voss:393), would be a merely personal gesture, leaving the throne vacant and ready to receive another pretender.

It is significant that Laura and Voss, in the final dream, are undertaking yet another journey, 'in search of human status'. The nature of the journey is 'interminable'; they themselves are but small figures 'in the immense landscape' (Voss:393). There is to be nothing but journey - it is only the nature of the new quest that provides satisfactions and the serio-comic idyllic quality of the dreamscape. The author/narrator tenaciously maintains the link between dream-time experience, 'a species of soul, elliptical in shape', and the Victorian 'reality':

> All these objects of scientific interest the husband was constantly explaining to his wife, and it was quite touching to observe the interest the latter professed even when most bored.
>
> Voss:393.
> (my underlining)

Banality is insisted upon; there is something here that is not unrelated to the 'inherent mediocrity', or 'creative source of endless variety and subtlety' of the final chapter. A process is suggested, which may or may not result in the 'feminisation' of culture. This process is imaged in the Sydney chapters where Laura both lives within her restrictions and defies them. Thus she is unmarried yet passionately married, a barren spinster but a mother, a detached headmistress and yet a revolutionary.

The possibility of some autonomous and final Truth is rigorously denied, attractive though the red herrings in the text have been. The author/narrator forestalls the reader's interrogation by himself questioning the 'meaning' of Voss at the moment of his death. But this is mere strategy: the narrative voice asks the question in order to claim that the death does not tell him the answer (Voss:394). Jackie may be possessed by the 'great spirit' of Voss, but one is never assured - 'of that spirit he would never tell, because nobody was to know of it but himself' (Voss:421). Judd asserts that Voss 'is there in the country, and always will be'; moreover, that this is so in the 'honest opinion' of many aborigines (Voss:443). But an 'honest' opinion relayed by an unreliable witness loses much of its credibility. In the language of the corroboree, performed at Jildra and witnessed by Boyle, the fate of the horses is narrated, but the fate of Voss is an empty space in this text (Voss:414). Laura, who may know the exact details of Voss's decapitation, does not object to Judd's conflation of Voss with the Palfreyman figure, which in its turn was relentlessly conflated with the Christ figure (Voss:342). She may not wish to look at the 'work of irreproachable civic art', which now re-presents Voss to the people of Sydney, but can still be humanly comforted by his escape from experience into history (Voss:440). Her own final escape into the banality of hunting for her lozenges is a parody of her aunt (Voss:55), and, paradoxically, 'Nobody misunderstood Laura Trevelyan better than Mrs Bonner' (Voss:402). Laura's escape into parody represents a refusal to play prophetess. The word 'truth' has a slippery relativism about it, with which she has long been familiar, and from which she will not exclude herself:

> "I think I love truth best of all". Pausing. "That is not strictly true, you know, we can never be quite truthful".
>
> Voss:385.

Macainsh (1982:447) rightly points out that the 'disintegration' of the text of which James McAuley (1965) complains is a deliberate refusal on White's part to provide the reader with a fixed set of meanings. It is not, however, the author's intention, as McAuley suggests, that should be the subject of the readers' interrogation. If the readers will abandon the ideologies of patriarchy and imperialism, he, and she, may find, in the voices in which the text speaks itself, the invitation to dialogue out of which meaning may be produced.

CHAPTER 4

DAS HEIMLICHE/DAS HEIMISCHE:

Riders in the Chariot and The Solid Mandala

Riders in the Chariot

If Voss, in its closing pages, makes present the construct of Australia, the country with a future, what is one to make of the Australia of Riders in the Chariot, the Australia of a hundred years more of settlement and signification? Alan Lawson (1979:283) notes that several critics have found the optimism of Willie Pringle's final speech (Voss:447) an embarrassingly positive view of Australia and the Australian artist. If, as I have indicated in my discussion of Voss, the novel is chiefly concerned with the process of signification before the 'domestication' of the 'new' world by European ideologies could be considered complete, then the entire novel could be considered an embarrassment. White offers an alternative reading of Australia, decentring the potent male myths of heroic pioneering and exploring which, as Alan Frost (1986) demonstrates, have profoundly influenced the development of images of (white) Australian national identity.

Voss privileges three marginal groups: woman, indigene and artist;, and asserts a complicity among them which is essentially subversive of the dominant power structures. White posits the prior existence of Other language, and the signs of significantly antithetical modes of production and reproduction, all of which fail to be accounted for in the developing paradigm. The author/narrator, as I have pointed out, seeks to legitimate himself as artist by claiming a paradoxically

marginal, and thus subversive, role. (Michael Cotter, by ignoring the complicity of the three marginal groups, can readily ascribe to White an 'Australian romanticism' (1977:591) rather than an overt political stance.)

In Riders in the Chariot, Australia is again presented in process, and in dynamic relation to historical conditions extending beyond that continent. (There is a pleasing irony in the juxtaposition of the two German immigrants: Voss, who 'resonates the development and metamorphosis of German transcendental idealist philosophy from Kant, via Fichte and Schopenhauer to Nietzsche and the latter's conception of the "superman/overman"' (Platz, 1984:173), and Himmelfarb, the survivor of German National Socialism.) The commonplace of Bush and City is not central to the novel; Sydney, and more particularly, the suburb of Sarsaparilla, is the 'domesticated' Australia, post-World War II. To what extent meaning has been codified by a dominant ideology and how settled signification has become is no longer, in the novel's terms, an 'Australian' question. The amiable Ernie Theobalds, whom even the most acidic critics of the Sarsaparilla sections find acceptable, makes the principal item in the established code, and its essential corollary, quite clear:

> No man is better than another. It was still early days when Australians found that out. You may say we talk about it a lot, but you can't expect us not to be proud of what we have invented, so to speak. Remember that....
>
> RC:416/417.

> Remember ... we have a sense of humour, and when the boys start to horse around, it is that that is gettin' the better of 'em. They can't resist a joke. Even when a man is full of beer, you will find the old sense of humour hard at work underneath. It has to play a joke. See? No offence can be taken where a joke is intended.
>
> RC:417.

Theobalds is addressing Himmelfarb, who, according to the narrator, has just been 'raised too soon from the dead' (RC:416), from the crucifixion which has been variously perceived as 'burlesque' and 'blasphemy' (RC:412), 'a joke' (RC:411) and 'a disgraceful spectacle' (RC:409). The register mistake that ostensibly precipitates this little homily on The Australian Way of Life has been Himmelfarb's solecism in using the heretical 'Mr Theobalds' instead of mateship's prescribed 'Ernie'. If Himmelfarb is to assimilate, and Ernie Theobalds, at least, would allow him to do so, he needs to give up all notion of 'difference', and at the same time, when 'difference' insists on its presence, know how to deny it.

Clearly, this is a difficult task but it is central to the governing ideology. Perhaps it is also central to the text and to the crucial scene just completed, which the author/narrator appears to have overloaded with parallels and paradoxes. To examine this task of assimilation is to examine what demands it: the encompassing, enabling myth (and that is to say, ideology).

RC is very obviously a text founding itself upon myths. In reviewing the novel, Manfred Mackenzie finds that it 'can be read as a defence of mythopoeia and the irrational' (1963:296); Edgar L. Chapman sees the novel in terms of the intersecting myths of the chariot, which unite in 'White's personal mythology, the Jewish Cabbalistic tradition, the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament apocalypse and Blake's visionary poetry, under the influence of Jungian thought' (1979:186).

Much painstaking critical work has concentrated upon tracing these source-myths (Beatson, 1976; Morley, 1972) and relating them to an extrinsic system extending into other White novels. It would seem that the more closely the myths in the novel resemble source-myths, the more 'true' or valid the novel must be. Even those critics who attack White's use of source-myths attack along the same lines: Colin Roderick objects to the contamination of 'a fictional essay in Jewish mysticism ... by the alien imposition of the central drama of Christian dogma' (1962:63); Margaret Walters complains of 'arbitrary Biblical parallels' and finds that 'White's attempt to re-create the Christian story never succeeds in suggesting a contemporary relevance' (1963:49).

Mieke Bal, in her suggestive essay, 'Myth à la lettre: Freud, Mann, Genesis and Rembrandt, and the story of the son' (1987), considers, and rejects, this type of insertion of a text dealing with myth into a tradition of universal content, in her examination of Thomas Mann's Joseph and his Brothers and an article on that novel by John Yohannan (1982). Bal's insistence on restoring Mann's novel to the historical reality of its day leads her to focus upon his choice of 'the Hebrew myth of the Jew in a foreign country, confronted with a foreigner in love with him' (Bal, 1987:71).

> While rising Nazism, within a neurotic ideology of maleness, started to make the limits between groups of subjects so absolute as to become those between life and death, the ambivalence, both sexual and ethnic, of the encounter between two ambivalent subjects became an acutely necessary alternative.
>
> (Bal, 1987:71)

Bal's last statements clearly relate to Mann's Joseph and his Brothers, not to Mann's version of a universal story with 'stable, fixed-for-ever content that can only become discursively different but will still remain the same' (Bal, 1987:58). In her view, the Hebrew myth functions as an empty

screen onto which Mann transposes a preoccupation of his own - with intersubjectivity, with lack of limits between subjects - a preoccupation in antithesis both to the Hebrew myth and to the historical moment.

What could be the preoccupations of White at the historical moment of writing (1961) which would lead him to choose to project onto a screen of myths that are so obviously 'universal', myths which recall and conflate beliefs and patterns of response that cannot be considered exclusively Australian? Both Voss and The Tree of Man seem to have concentrated upon validating Australian myths, and in their deconstruction of these are essentially polemical. In RC, White appears to have abandoned myth-criticism, transferring his allegiance to re-writing myths of much wider significance. Moreover, in his re-writing, he seems close enough to 'a version of a universal story' for this view of the novel to have become widely accepted as a critical orthodoxy.

Leonie Kramer has seldom followed an orthodox line in her examination of White's work. Considered by many his severest critic, she is nonetheless acknowledged to offer a stimulating interpretation of the texts. In the 1973 Quadrant debate, Green (1973(a):36-47) objects vehemently to Kramer's final judgments of what the novel is about and what Patrick White 'believes': the novel is a critique of transcendentalism written by a secular humanist (Kramer, 1973:8-19). Green defends the opposite view: the novel is essentially religious, has 'a metaphysical coherence' (1973(a):47) and is written by a man deeply concerned with good and evil, betrayal and guilt, and the 'need for salvation' (1973(a):45). Although she suggests that Kramer's article forces one to re-examine the text with scrupulous attention to detail, she has a very particular, partisan kind of reading in mind.

Kramer's article, although it is finally as entrapped by Western metaphysics as Green's is, does demand a re-examination of the text, for quite different reasons. Kramer notes that 'the novel leans towards what Forster calls "the unseen". (For White it is also the <u>unsayable</u>.)' (Kramer, 1973:17, my underlining). She might also have noted that in <u>Passage to India</u> Forster confronts the '<u>unspeakable</u>' (1924:105, my underlining). She questions the capacity of the concept of 'intentional ambiguity' to explain the function of the prevalent ambiguity in this text, thus opening the possibility of unintentional ambiguities at work. In the field of ambiguities, she asks a significant question:

> Why ... does he permit the language to suggest meanings that the characters, incidents and action of the novel combine to deny?
>
> Kramer, 1973:16.

Even more acutely, she comments:

> This is all the more curious when one realises that at the heart of the novel ... is a philosophy of silence. The retreat into inwardness is also a retreat from the inadequacy of language to express the nature of individual insights. <u>One of the consequences of the death of God may be loss of faith in the Word</u>.
>
> Kramer, 1973:18.
> (my underlining)

In conclusion, she finds the novel the most tentative since <u>The Tree of Man</u>, seemingly 'poised in a state of indecision'. Consistent with Kramer's perception of an endemic ambiguity is her finding that while the novel 'seems to gesture towards some larger statement [it contains] too many signs of irresolution and imbalance ... not least in its comic, but crude treatment of materialism' (1973:19) for such a statement to be adequately presented.

Kramer has cogently presented a case for examining the text in terms of its absences, its marginality and its ambivalence, an

examination, however, for which her methodology is inappropriate. The presence of myths with powerful mystical corollaries, the proposition that the narratives of the lives of the four 'riders' are driven forward by an endless desire to regain something denied by the symbolic order, the ambivalent roles of Fathers of sons and daughters, and most particularly the pressure on language to express what it is designed to repress, suggest that Lacanian theory, and its exposition by Julia Kristeva, might more properly be applied to the unknotting of the textual problems.

It is necessary to turn again to the homily of Ernie Theobalds, which is both central and marginal. Ernie, as foreman, represents authority and according to the author/narrator, the mock-crucifixion might have developed in some undisclosed way 'if authority had not put a stop to it' (RC:414). Some of the participants, at least, seem to hope that he will 'accept responsibility' (RC:416). (This, in a sense, he does.) When he jovially asks the rhetorical question: "What is going on 'ere?" the narrator's comments are:

> As if he did not know. As if nobody did.
> Nobody did.
>
> RC:416.

Thus the question is not merely a rhetorical strategy; it is also a 'real', unanswerable question. The repeated, and intentional, ambiguity of 'As if' marks off the two incompatible possibilities: either Theobalds is, against all evidence, pretending not to understand what has been happening, in complicity with the participants, or Theobalds does not understand what has been happening, does not expect the participants to have understood it and expects them to join with him in finding the meaning of it all. In the first case, Theobalds would be part of a general conspiracy to repress meaning; in the second, he would be expecting meaning to be

capable of being expressed. Both of these possibilities are denied: neither Theobalds nor the participants are consciously repressing anything and the question remains empty rhetoric because the events in themselves, in terms of the prevailing symbolic order, are not capable of generating meaning, since they have taken place 'outside' that order.

All events of this kind, including Mrs Jolley's 'humorous' inscription on Miss Hare's cake (RC:60), share common characteristics: they are impenetrable to interpretation, and thus immune to judgment. Theobald's explanation of their dynamic is enlightening. Although he claims initially that Australians 'have' (possess and control) a sense of humour, it seems rather that it is they who are possessed. Within the intensely male ideology of mateship, a curious volte-face occurs. The sense of humour 'gets the better of 'em. They can't resist'; whatever 'joke' is played is the responsibility not of the man but of the Other, the sense of humour which must play its joke through him, and, it seems, despite him.

The radical Other nature of the joke, expressing without exposing the forbidden fields of desire, is not, of course, an exclusively Australian phenomenon. What needs to be disentangled is the relationship of this Other to the symbolic order within the Australian myths of egalitarianism and mateship. Here the split has been radicalised - the sense of humour is disowned, made exclusively Other; at the same time, the Other, forbidden (and feminine), is acknowledged as sometimes overcoming and dominating the patriarchal order. So great is the repressed desire for passive submission to the unnameable that it cannot be acknowledged as part of the self; it must be forbidden meaning since the meaning that has been produced in this system can be sustained only by denying its origins.

False origins have been substituted, or 'invented'. 'No man is better than another' denies difference, insists upon a banal and uniform ideology and yet can only be maintained by permitting or submitting to periods of carnival. (The crucifixion scene is preceded by the intersection of a circus parade and a funeral procession, and is itself a 'show' and a 'burlesque'.) Essentially transgressive, the carnivalesque makes no distinctions between virtue and vice, proper and improper, high and low - 'The word has no fear of incriminating itself' (Kristeva, 1986:53).

Thus it is possible for more than the prevailing symbolic order to be engaged in the scene of carnival. By identifying Himmelfarb as the central figure, carnival both elevates and denigrates him. He is the hated German, the hated Jew; he is the Jew who killed Christ, he is Christ whom the Jews killed; he is clown and king. The event itself is both anti-Christian and anti-rational, yet its ritual of blasphemy acknowledges Christianity more profoundly than the empty Easter duties, legitimately performed (RC:442). Sexuality and death are celebrated by the traces of their absence: the body of Blue, the 'Antinous of the Suburbs' (RC:406) is not merely dehumanised - it is intensely eroticised, and Blue's responses to his elevated victim include a conflation of the erotic and the cruel:

> Howyadoin up there, eh? 'Ad enough, eh?
> Bugger me if the cow don't go for it!
>
> RC:412.

At times language insists on the sacral qualities: 'one of his hands was pierced', 'the disgraceful ribs were gashed' (RC:410); 'At that hour', Miss Hare experiences 'the narrowing spiral of her dread'; 'At that hour', Mrs Godbold is 'pierced' by the memory of 'how the women ... had received the body of their Lord' (RC:411). Nevertheless, 'if some blood had run, it had dried quickly' (RC:411), and the primary images of love that come to the witness, Dubbo, are of a sad and comic sensuality:

'the clergyman, searching the boy's body for the lost image of youth', Mrs Spice 'in the never-ending dance of the potato-sacks', and Hannah the prostitute, curled up with the homosexual Norman Fussell, 'in their sterile, yet not imperfect, fleshly egg' (RC:413).

Kramer's problem with White's language ceases to be problematic in this instance if 'ambiguity' is perceived to be 'ambivalence' - the ambivalence of carnivalesque discourse in which, as Kristeva points out, 'two texts meet, contradict and relativize each other', and in which 'the structure of the author emerges as anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, as man and mask' (Kristeva, 1986:49). Thus, too, the failure of the scene to convince critics of its clear direction, and the author's 'beliefs' in writing it is only a fault in Kristeva's sense (1986:50): where 'faulty' means 'ambivalent'. The scene willingly disturbs, by its failure, every authoritarian principle, including that of the author himself.

In examining both this central and controversial scene and the seemingly peripheral comments of Ernie Theobalds, it becomes clear that the activity of myth-criticism has not in fact been abandoned by White. Nor is the central myth of RC the Judaeo-Christian myth, with Blakean and Jungian corollaries. White's preoccupation can now be seen to be with yet another patriarchal Australian myth, dominating the Australian urban image as the earlier myths of the pioneer and the bushman had done. Just as Mann responded to an ideology of maleness (making exclusive and absolute distinction between groups) with an account of ambivalent encounter, itself excluded from the original myth, so White responds to an ideology of maleness (absolutely excluding all distinctions between groups and individuals) with an account of non-exclusive and plural encounters, both elevating and denying difference beyond the divisive boundaries of any of his source-myths.

In his celebration of the Other, multiple 'definitions' may be distinguished. Himmelfarb is the foreigner or 'reffo', the Jew, meaning Christ-killer, victim of Nazism, sacrificial scapegoat, Christ-figure, failed messiah, possible zaddik and student of Cabbala. Miss Hare is madwoman, representative of a once-dominating upper-class, innocence and ignorance, pride and humility, truth-speaker and mute, visionary and agnostic. Alf Dubbo is a piebald and a painter, a carrier of a secret gift and syphilis; Mrs Godbold, less obviously, a comic no-hoper who elevates humble service to a religious principle, the divine Mother whose need to redeem her husband makes his destruction certain. Here I am not concerned with which of these elements have a truth-value but rather with the fact that each character generates a constellation of distinctive 'meanings', many of which are mutually contradictory. These multiple possibilities are the hallmark of the Other, which is not the simple opposite of the Law, but the complex web of everything which is what the Law is not.

Within a patriarchal culture, the subject is constituted by and enters the world of symbolic discourse, which consists of the laws of language and of society, through his/her acceptance of Le Nom du Père, the Name-of-the-Father. The Law is thus both the father's Name and the father's No; gendered subjectivity is produced together with signification: 'meaning is produced at the same time as subjects are fabricated and positioned in social relations' (Sarup, 1988:31). Consequently, Lacan claims that 'the unconscious is the discourse of the Other' (1966, in Lodge (ed), 1988:102) and thus contains not only the 'excess' or 'remainder' of the libidinal economy which is not to be recognised by the social and historical construct of the symbolic order, but also all those items repressed in the name of the Law. These, as Ryan points out, are not repressed by 'nature', but by 'the wider social and historical textual (in the deconstructive sense) system in which [the unconscious] was produced and from which it cannot be disarticulated (1982:107).

The life situation of each character increases complexities and difference. While they have been inserted into a text where the symbolic order is inscribed in terms of egalitarianism, suburbia and mass material contentment, they are already in revolt against the wholly different systems of signification into which they were inserted in childhood. Here, the Father is structurally important.

Himmelfarb, in reaction against the Enlightenment (which his father takes to the ultimate by his pragmatic conversion to Christianity) turns from his intellectual concerns with German and English literature to the 'mother' tongue of Hebrew, and the texts of mysticism. Here even the word must be split and the letters combined and permuted, and here even the word is abandoned and the discourse of drawing attempted (RC:133-37). The intellect, for Himmelfarb, is seen to have failed not only the descendants of Nietzsche but also those of Spinoza.

In this connection, it is interesting to note these comments by Nethersole:

> The intertext informing Derrida's project of deconstructing Western metaphysics and its concomitant notions of representation in spite of its overt leaning on Heidegger echoes an essentially Talmudic version of the world. Jewish thought and religion circles an unnamed and an unnameable god. furthermore, the site of the 'shekina', the place of meaning is an empty one. The centre is marked by an absence.
>
> Nethersole, 1988:253.
> (my underlining)

Olivier in his comments on Derrida's essays on the work of Edmond Jabès points out 'Derrida's anagrammatical references to himself in the quotations from an imaginary rabbi' (Olivier, 1988:273/274). Megill (cited in Olivier, 1988:273) makes this point: 'If Derrida champions a postmodernist, "poetic" interpretation, he also champions, as Reb Derrida, the "rabbinical", interpretation that still seeks a truth in

things'. Olivier observes that Derrida's deconstructions 'have the effect of showing that aesthetic questions are simultaneously ethico-political questions, but then precisely not in the presence-oriented, logocentric sense of traditional philosophy' (1988:273, my underlining).

Miss Hare appears to have been incapable from birth of satisfying the demands of Xanadu, in itself an unstable system incorporating a second-hand romanticism and the material rewards of capitalism, yet also a place that enables, and is identified with, the visionary. Mary Hare is not only gauche and ugly; she also actively and offensively seeks the unmediated experience of things and creatures, which her father cannot deny and cannot achieve. She will neither support him in his illusions nor save him from the consequences of them.

It is the role of daughter itself that Ruth Joyner rejects. Cast by circumstances into the role of mother of a brood of younger siblings, she accepts the Father as long as He grants her the 'right' to 'hold up' the house (which he almost never enters (RC:234)) and to care for 'her' children. When he withdraws that privilege by supplanting her with a second wife, she removes herself permanently from his family and from definition by a patriarchal structure.

As part aboriginal (on the mother's side), and as subject of Reverend Calderon's Great Experiment, Alf Dubbo is doubly divided - by the absent, nameless white man who begot him, and the Great White Father whose representatives ensure his dispossession just as surely as they profit by him. Illegitimate and unlegitimated, Dubbo's choices would seem to be either to live abjectly on the fringes of the Law which bastardises him or to construct a secret system of signification which will include and elevate him. It is, of course, possible to do both.

It is the presence of Alf Dubbo that puts strain both on the notion of White's view of white Australians as merely xenophobic, and on the doctrine of egalitarianism. Dubbo must be held separate, not only from the respectable pleasures of the suburban home and kiddies but also from their obverse - booze and the brothel. He threatens the stability of the white system not because he is evil or good and not because he is a stranger; but because he is one who is, at least in part, more 'at home' than those who see him as a 'brute that no decent man would touch, only with a broom' (RC:309). The system that proclaims its elision of difference is founded upon difference.

It is possible, then, to consider the four principal characters as not only exiles, but dissidents: persons who refuse to accept the identity 'confirmed' by the dominant ideology and are driven to search endlessly for the lost paradise of the Real. David Bunyan (1987:75-77) points out the close links between mysticism and the Lacanian drive to escape the primary entities, of identity and language, by returning to the Real world of psychic origins. In the construct of mystic totality, we find imaged the elision of difference, the deaths of language and personal identity and the substitution of a non-verbal, non-exclusive participation in 'truth' and 'being'. There can be little doubt that Himmelfarb and Miss Hare can be viewed as mystics in these terms. (R.S. Edgecombe (1985:52-56) illuminates the place of silence and non-verbal activity in Miss Hare's nature mysticism.) Is it possible to accept, as the author seems by his title to invite us to do, that the other two riders in the chariot-sociable (RC:458) are mystics, too?

What meanings are produced by the construct of the Chariot, which is the vehicle of unification of the four Others? As an image, the chariot is curiously incomplete, 'tentative' (RC:458) and, paradoxically, non-visual. Mrs Hare, who admits to having 'seen' it does not refer to its occupants and has not seen the horses that draw it (RC:67). Himmelfarb, who sketches it, cannot see the faces of the riders (RC:135) and later admits

that, because he cannot 'visualise' them, he cannot understand them (RC:155). We are told that Mrs Godbold 'had her own vision of the Chariot' (RC:489) but other than that her image is associated with 'the wings of love and charity', we have no further information. Alf Dubbo finds images of the Chariot in books (RC:320, 353, 342) and his painting is emphasised as 'his conception of the Chariot' (RC:457). There is authorial comment on this 'failure' of the image: it is the lack of definition, of being bound to specifics, that empowers it 'to blaze across the sky, or into the soul of the beholder' (RC:458). It is thus only capable of imaging the Real if it has no 'true' identity fixed through language.

This decentring of 'true' identity is mirrored in the failure of 'understanding'. Himmelfarb offers a number of forms 'streaming with implications' - the Throne of God, the Chariot of Redemption (RC:135) the zaddikim as the Chariot of God (RC:155); Alf Dubbo structures his painting on Ezekiel but was also influenced by the structure of the Apollonian painting (RC:320, 353). The 'meaning' that is emphasised in his painting is the elevation of the four persons to Living Creatures and their formation of an Other society of equals.

The portraits of the four have already been fully worked out in language. (It is significant that even in the case of Himmelfarb's inset narrative, where the conversational sequence of the external narrative seems to demand narrative in the first person (RC:96, 156), the author/narrator refuses to relinquish his overt position as artist/interpreter in third-person narrative.) The portraits in paint are symbolic shorthand for these narratives, placing them, as the intersection of inset narratives and external narrative does not do, face to face in the chariot-sociable, in the process of seeking a common goal.

(The positioning of the different/differing dissidents in the chariot-sociable, and their contrast with the dominant ideology, recalls these comments by Derrida:

> In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-a-vis (facing terms) but rather with a violent hierarchy.
>
> Derrida, 1982:41.)
> (my underlining)

This notion of a common goal seems to invite the interpretation of Dubbo and Mrs Godbold as persons seeking the Real through mysticism. The temptation to systematise in this way is inherent in the ideology of either/or categories. In the case of Alf Dubbo, the reduction to a conversion to 'true' Christian mysticism cannot be sustained. Michael Cotter, examining 'The Image of the Aboriginal in Three Modern Australian Novels' (1977:582-591), views White's creation of Alf Dubbo as the author's demonstration of the integration of elements of white and aboriginal cultures as a means of promoting intercultural harmony. In his view, 'the psychic conflicts within Alf ... are seen as a form of antagonism between Nature and society' (Cotter, 1977:589). In this way, White can be accommodated within an Australian romanticism, dominated by notions of organic cosmogonies and 'wholeness'. This is equally reductivist.

If one were to apply Mieke Bal's perspective to Dubbo, one could question his choice of the Judaeo/Christian myths which constitute his empty screen, and what the preoccupations are which lead him, within his historical context, to employ this particular screen. A necessary corollary is the examination of Dubbo's transposing of himself onto the final mythical screen.

In terms of choice, Dubbo's choice of mythical subjects is restricted to that field of myth to which the Great Experiment has exposed him. Even as a youth, he is aware that his specious offer to paint Jesus may win him Mrs Pask's coveted oil paints (RC:322-323). Art, his mentor explains, is 'a moral force' and depicts the beautiful aspects of 'truth' (RC:315). Art, the adult Dubbo sees, 'could be his only proof of an Absolute, at

the same time ... an act of faith' (RC:344). In a world where 'words had always been the natural weapons of whites' (RC:342), the silent Dubbo would be defenceless were it not for the language of form and colour. Thus, his painting of the Fiery Furnace has a double genesis: in the Bible readings of Mr Calderon and the rotgut Mrs Spice introduces him to on the rubbish-dump of Mungindribble. His Deposition is founded as much on the Brighta Bicycle Lamps carnival and Mrs Godbold's shed as it is on Golgotha. Inasmuch as the Great Experiment has inserted him into a symbolic order which excludes him from any identity other than by its definition, Dubbo's partial escape from it can only be to use it as background to what he himself has seen, known and experienced from his marginal position. In this way, he not only evades definition by the Law but also asserts his right to challenge its definition of itself.

Thus, in the final painting of the 'chariot-thing', Dubbo acknowledges a relationship among all four riders, and must include the mirror image of himself. Authorial comment notes that the riders had 'not yet received beatitude' and continued to be carried on 'along the oblique trajectory' (RC:459). The achievement of an essential identity, unrelated to a social totality, remains illusory, but the painting elevates the status of those who challenge the power of ideologies to impose identities that are no less un-Real.

Dubbo's art is inherently oppositional. As works of social criticism, his paintings speak 'on behalf of the silent cause of history and of those aspects of culture which have been excluded by the discourse of the ruling class in whatever sphere of life' (Degenaar, 1988:74). His work is mediated by the socio-historical dimension in which it is produced. Furthermore, as Degenaar points out, art creation, as well as art appreciation, is a sphere of writing' and therefore creation as well as appreciation are events mediated by intertextual traces' (1988:76). Thus, Bird describes the effect of post-structuralist thinking on art criticism in terms of the shift from intentionality to intertextuality:

> The traditional appeals to artistic intentionality, the determinants of style, or the psychologising of the artistic subject, are replaced by an emphasis upon the essentially plural and diffuse play of meanings across the boundaries of individual works and specific biographies.
>
> Bird, cited in Degenaar, 1988:76.

It is significant that Dubbo's works with their overtly intertextual traces provoke ribald laughter in those who might have been expected to consume them. (He is perhaps more fortunate than Mr Gage, in TM, whose works are eventually consumed by the likes of the aesthete, Humphrey Mortimer.) It is equally significant that the author/narrator does not authoritatively disperse the works without trace - their reading is merely deferred and the time shift in the authorial discourse firmly extends this deferral beyond the text and into history:

> Anyway, the paintings disappeared and, if not destroyed when they ceased to give the buyers a laugh, have still to be discovered.
>
> RC:461.
> (my underlining)

The case of Mrs Godbold is somewhat different. Although the final symbol for her in Dubbo's painting is 'massive, white, inviolable' (RC:458), Dubbo, in the earlier Deposition, refuses the seduction of the Divine Mother (RC:458). Kristeva, in an illuminating essay on the consecrated representation of femininity as Maternality (1986:160-188), notes that milk and tears are the privileged signs of the Mater Dolorosa (1986:173). Dubbo rejects the eternally flowing milk of 'the immemorial woman'. Conversely, the author/narrator privileges the tears Mrs Godbold sheds 'for the condition of men' and drenches her iconic figure with 'a royal purple' (RC:288).

The 'canonization' of Mrs Godbold, as J.F. Burrows (1965:64) points out, occurs after her encounter with Dubbo in Mrs

Khalil's brothel. Up to this point, her maternality is displayed ambivalently: far from being virginal, she demonstrates a powerful sexuality which, moreover, she uses to ensure that Tom Godbold will impregnate her while himself remaining her 'son'. 'Like somebody's bleedin' mother' (RC:261) she offers her man-child the passivity of childhood while concealing, at least until the brothel-scene, her true antagonism to the patriarchal ideology. In her blundering attempt to 'rescue' Tom Godbold from untrammelled sexual contact with a prostitute, she affronts his masculinity publicly. Significantly, when he acknowledges that she has gone as far as she can 'to show me up' (RC:286), she herself feels very close to 'exposure', and would have thought it a 'kindness' were he to have kicked her instead.

It would be imprudent not to recall this dangerous, exclusive mothering in reading Mrs Godbold's humble and compassionate concern for a drunken abo and an old Jew. If Mrs Flack and Mrs Jolley have been responsible for the destruction of their husbands, it cannot be denied that Mrs Godbold bears a similar responsibility. Yet the author/narrator, once the Husband has been eliminated, concentrates only on that which the other two ladies are not: the Mother in her singularity, neither wife nor daughter, but the 'archaic, full, total englobing mother with no frustration, no separation, with no break-producing symbolism (with no castration, in other words)' (Kristeva, 1986:205). We are in the presence of a 'universal' 'timeless' myth.

Dubbo, the artist within the text of RC, has remained engaged in re-writing from within his own position in history, seeking not 'an inherent timeless meaning which is therefore automatically accessible to our comprehension' (McWilliam and Potts, cited in Degenaar, 1988:75) but a contingent and relativising re-writing of the myths of the social process. The artist of the text of RC, however, retreats, at the last minute, from his struggle to oppose the patriarchal ideology and its repression of

difference, his questioning of its definition of itself. Mrs Godbold is no longer a dissident actively, but ambivalently, seeking the Real. No longer a signifier, she is elevated by the artist/narrator to transcendental signified - the myth of the Real in the one concrete form in which it can be imaged - the archaic Mother, the impossible Real, whose absence the subject always acknowledges, but whose presence could only announce the absence of the subject itself. As subject, the artist/narrator cannot subject himself to the archaic Mother, for She is always already absent. If She is inscribed in this text, the text itself is withdrawn from history. For Woman does not constitute the sign of the struggle against ideology towards the Real; She does not exist as part of the process demanding the return of the repressed and the re-establishment of the non-verbal. To follow Lacan: She is not where I am, and I am where She is not. The artist/narrator has succumbed to his own desire for the 'universal' and the 'true'.

The radical change in the author/narrator's perspective on Sarsaparilla once he has installed the benevolent deity is enlightening. The crude, often carelessly directed diatribes against plastic, neon and mixmasters are replaced by a concentration on the fecund potentialities of settlement. The 'new homes rocked and shouted with life' (RC:490); Mrs Godbold admires the children coming from school, a late rose, a row of young cauliflowers. Her six daughters project forward into this world in an infinite chain of gestation (RC:489). This emphasis on 'woman's time', cyclical time, 'the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock' (Kristeva, 1986:191), is dissociated from the problematics of linear time, 'time as departure, progression and arrival' (Kristeva, 1986:192). The retreat into 'nature' is a retreat from history.

In his withdrawal from the dialectic of signification and from the concept of linear time, White has withdrawn from his

interrogation of the historical realities of his novel's origins. It is his own seduction by the mythical totality of Woman that elides that distinction of the Other by which he himself, the author, was constituted.

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The Solid Mandala

The Solid Mandala seems to offer itself for pairing with Riders in the Chariot, not only because it is next in production sequence in linear time and is entitled in the same obtrusively a-historical, mythical style, but also because it constitutes a contraction and retraction of the prior text's spaces and themes. Like RC, SM is a Sarsaparilla text and covers roughly the same time-span. RC, however, extends into the interior backwaters of Australia and the schizoid culture of Nazi Germany, making of Sarsaparilla a node at which four dissident texts touch and relativise one another against the mythically distorted ideology of Australian egalitarianism. In SM, although two world wars take place, and the city of Sydney swells into new forms of progress, Sarsaparilla, and in particular, Terminus Road, seems to have slid to the margins of history, becoming a place where almost nothing happens in sixty years.

What changes there are in the socio-economic patterns of the general Sarsaparilla population - the brick homes, the service station and department store, the telly and the plastic awnings - are now viewed by an author/narrator of amused tolerance and comic compassion. The Witch-Mothers of the Sarsaparilla of RC, Mrs Flack and Mrs Jolley, collapse into the comic realism of Mrs Dun and Mrs Poulter, in the opening section, 'In the Bus'. In the formal patterning of the text, the first and last sections enclose that which is marginal even to this most marginal of communities: the life or lives, lived in the House at the end of Terminus Road.

The House is built with a difference, a typical weatherboard house with, at George Brown's insistence, an Australian version of a classical pediment. The parents of the Brothers Brown have exiled themselves from England, seeking a free society where the difference in class between Baptist husband and upper-class wife will dissolve, in a country 'without shadows' (SM:160). In this they achieve a curious and ironic success: Mrs Poulter, after an acquaintance of decades, sees them both as belonging to a class of 'gentlemen and ladies' - the same class - so that she has never understood Mrs Brown's air of having 'thrown herself away' (SM:16). At the same time, they remain separated from the rest of society, by unconsciously maintaining the sort of class difference they left England to defy.

The adolescent Waldo experiences a fear, quickly repressed, 'that freedom might be the equivalent of isolation' (SM:79). If the House in Terminus Road is isolated from its world, it is not because Australia rejects the difference of the exiles. What might have been a movement towards turns out to have been no more than a flight from, and Australia, for the Brown parents, exists only by virtue of its being 'an empty country' (SM:160), by its not being Home. Freed by their flight from 'God and society', they intend to give their children 'a chance' (SM:48/49), a chance to experience the joys of a rational life where 'nothing can only be nothing' and where myths constitute the evil, the mad and the obscene (SM:55/56).

The House, then, functions as the smallest of microcosms, defined as not-Home, it is also not-Australia. In its romantically self-sufficient society (in which taps cannot be successfully mended nor gates rehung) there is an inbuilt sense of imminent extinction: in a nuclear family of parents and twin sons, not even the transgressive impulse of incest could lead to reproduction. By mingling its matter with the alien material it has excluded, it could guarantee its survival, but only at the cost of ceasing to be itself. The House is neither homely

(heimlich) nor native (heimisch); despite its apparent 'reality', it is the place of the negative, a paraxial region which hollows out the rational monological world it purports to represent. By processes of dissolution, disintegration, sliding away and emptying, 'it moves into, or opens up, a space without/outside cultural order' (Jackson, 1981:43).

In allying the House in this way to the enclosures of the fantastic (Jackson, 1981:47), one is freed from the necessity of reading the 'Waldo' and 'Arthur' texts merely as internal perspectives enriching one's understanding of the characters beyond the external framing sections. In excising the 'Waldo' and 'Arthur' texts from the enclosing discourse, one may liberate them from the realistic construct of character itself. By this means, one may interrogate not only the illusory'"I" who is a whole subject, conscious, knowable', who as 'enunciatory "I" expresses himself in the text', but also the complicity of 'character' with realism, as artistic practice, in concealing its own ideological origins in 'classical reasoning and the appropriating economy that such reasoning supports' (Cixous, 1974:385).

Four of White's main areas of interest have already been examined: his opposition to realism and monological discourse as bondslaves of a patriarchal ideology; his privileging of the impossible quest for the Real; his interrogation of the construct of the unified stable ego, and his pressure on language to admit the semiotic subversion of the symbolic order of signification. In SM all four concerns are carried forward and, in the most direct way, are related to the problematics of writing.

The 'Waldo' text is concerned with the construct of the self as work-in-progress, but work-in-progress defined as a controlling, restricting and denying activity. Taken from the point closest to the pure absence of death (in itself denied by Waldo's

attaching it to the Other, his twin, Arthur), Waldo's narrative loops backward from memory to memory, disregarding the coherent flow of historical discourse. From Waldo's point of view, his life has been his book (SM:162) and should be both logical and rational, demonstrating that he has extracted the essence out of life situations, refined it and translated it into words. (Reality, in his terms, is made more convincing by being 'translated' into a work of art (SM:70).) The structure of 'his' narrative, however, repudiates Waldo's versions of both literature and truth.

The old Waldo, with whom 'his' narrative begins, is in the illogical position of the double bind. It is shortly to emerge that the walk on which he is leading/forcing Arthur is murderous in intent: Arthur is to be walked into exhaustion, to die of a heart attack. Arthur, it seems, must die in order to free Waldo for 'a blaze of last years' (SM:115). This freedom is curiously imagined as being 'spiritually celibate', and yet comically consists of adolescent daydreams: islands, bars, Americans, 'some lovely lousy brown-skinned poster-girl complete with ukelele' (SM:116). The thrust of all this pathetic detail (the sense of loss accentuated by such confusions as that between Clara Bow and Marilyn Monroe) is that Waldo's repressed desire is 'to feel his long limbs had never aged' (SM:116). Two benefits can thus be expected from Arthur's death: Waldo will be freed from a spiritual union as closely experienced as sexuality (and, since it relates to a brother, vaguely transgressive and incestuous) and he will experience himself physically in the role of the Perpetual Youth, free, apparently for the first time, to transgress in carnal terms. (The fact that his fantasy includes catching syphilis and refusing treatment ties carnal transgression ineluctably to a moral scheme.)

Arthur is, in these terms, a source of transgression, and yet seems also to have restrained transgression. Equally, he is that which is one with Waldo (SM:24), and yet is not one with

him, since Waldo also experiences Arthur as something with which, at some forgotten time, he had been 'saddled' (SM:25). If they are indeed one, Arthur cannot be the source of transgression since one may/must be intimate with oneself; moreover, there cannot then be a death of Arthur alone. If Arthur is only some Kind of a burden and responsibility, he could not have the power to restrain transgression; Arthur's death, consequently, can only in some oblique way release Waldo from the obligations of his version of morality.

Two elements thus appear to dominate the 'Waldo' narrative: it is a narrative of repressed desire, and the constitution of Waldo as human subject is inextricable from the divergent ways in which he himself constitutes Arthur. Since Arthur functions as the polyvalent double, he is structurally essential as an expression/repression of unconscious desire. In the empty space created by the disappearance of God, which monological rationalism insists may safely be deflected as 'nothing', Heidegger considers that the uncanny may appear, 'which is neither identical with God's sphere of being nor with that of man' (cited in Buber, 1952:91). In this paraxial region, obscure and occluded, desire is concealed, projected and deflected away, so that those 'qualities, feelings, wishes, objects, which the subject refuses to recognise or rejects in himself [and which] are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973:349).

The House and Waldo's constitution of himself share common characteristics: while appearing to be ratifications of a triumphant cultural order of rationalism, which refuses the anodyne of the transcendental, both image the rupture of this closed structure, and the rejection of its limits, opening it out into a space of emptiness and absence. This emptiness leaves signs without significance, so that even before his final dis-covery of Arthur as Secret Writer, Waldo becomes uncertain of syntax and is deserted by vocabulary (SM:211). In the slow

process during which 'meaning' is made empty, absence, as Cixous points out, is a protracted rehearsal of an encounter with death, which, in a secularised culture, must represent the purest form of lack of being. 'Nothing is both better known and stranger to thought than mortality ... "Death" has no shape in life. Our unconscious has no room for a representation of our mortality' (cited in Jackson, 1981:68).

In the 'Waldo' narrative, Arthur makes the early construction of a stable, unified, ideal Waldo possible - and problematic. Waldo has a Mind, Arthur is backward; Waldo is smooth and subtle, Arthur clumsy and oafish. Waldo 'knows' that in the world outside the House, he is developing into a Promising Lad, while potty Arthur is regarded as 'only half a human being' (SM:75). If Arthur is a burden, he has his uses: Waldo can, and does, use him to point up his own vast superiority. Moreover, as Waldo, the Secret Writer, begins to confront the sterility of having nothing to write about but that which he terms 'himself', Arthur, with his eternal, insensitive presence, makes the perfect excuse for Waldo's failure to execute a masterpiece.

On the other hand, the fact that Arthur has to be controlled also implies that he may not always be controllable. Arthur does not always observe the boundaries within which Waldo has confined him (logically so, since how could such ignorance comprehend Waldo's subtle distinctions). The 'shame and terror' with which Waldo responds to Arthur's cow-tragedy (SM:39-40) are related directly to Arthur's production of something, in the name of Greek tragedy, while Waldo, despite his pretensions, can produce nothing at all. Arthur is also crude enough to appear as 'the flaming angel' of deliverance, humiliating Waldo by responding accurately to his terror of the schoolyard bullies (SM:46). Despite his efforts to remain behind 'his barricade of words and perceptions' (SM:183), Waldo finds that 'his twin brother dragged him back repeatedly behind the line where knowledge didn't protect' (SM:46).

The defensive position which Waldo adopts depends for its success on an ever greater expulsion of matter judged alien. In cultivating 'objectivity' and 'detachment', he can distance himself effectively from everything that has eluded his grasp: Bill Poulter, Dulcie Feinstein, the world outside the House. Arthur remains problematic. As the repository of all that Waldo denies in himself, he must be kept close, to assure by his presence that the Other is safely contained. Yet his constant presence is also an open temptation: again and again Arthur invites Waldo to enter him (several passages (SM:48, 208-209) contain incestuous inferences) and the horror of this temptation is that it offers Waldo 'what he knew for best and certain' (SM:48).

Waldo's impenetrability is seen from the first as unstable. 'His' narrative is repeatedly fissured by sections of dialogue with Arthur on the walk, and the narrative loops are not random but suggested, directed, almost, by scraps of Arthur's conversation. The question of who is leading whom, raised innocently enough in the careful framing of 'In the Bus', becomes increasingly problematic. Instead of being 'behind', Arthur is sometimes 'in front': Waldo's visit to Dulcie Feinstein, with his proposal of marriage, is somewhat deflated by his finding Arthur already present; it is to Arthur that Mrs Brown seems to turn for comfort on her husband's death. 'Words and perceptions' may be trained on these events to diminish Arthur's powers but on three occasions Waldo is confronted with Arthur's dominance in a life-threatening way. Each contributes to the negative process of dissolution and emptying out - as opposed to Waldo's stance of 'a cultivation of personal detachment, of complete transparency - he was not prepared to think emptiness - of mind' (SM:177).

In the first of these incidents, Waldo's Encounter with Dulcie and Leonard Saporta in middle-age, he learns not merely that he is not prized by the Saportas but also that Arthur is. Waldo's

attempt to escape one form of extinction in his sterile microcosm has been to give Mrs Poulter a plastic doll. (Although he has denied the nature of the temptation to voyeurism, his hatred of Mrs Poulter is not only because she 'usually seemed to find an answer' but also, and chiefly, because of his youthful dis-covery of her as an unattainable sexual being (SM:61-62).) From this alien, inanimate substance, nothing could be generated; Arthur, on the other hand, has escaped extinction by having a living child, the Saporta son, named after him. In some terrifying way, Arthur has mixed with the alien substances without harm, and will continue to be, beyond his own death. In his flight from this horror, Waldo almost loses his own life.

Waldo, as Keeper of the Books, protects himself by a violent rupture with Waldo of the House (SM:183). Life in the House, which 'in spite of the classical pediment, was a disintegrating wooden box' (SM:174), is steadily being taken over by the 'gothic arches of dead grass' (SM:127). The clogged grease-trap, the bowls of mutton fat growing greyish fur, are tangible evidence of the processes which left George Brown silent and empty before an unread book, and dissolved the aristocratic Anne Quantrell into 'the true gothick' (SM:167): old Mrs Brown, yellowed and slobbery on cooking sherry. Paradoxically it is the extrusion of the Keeper of the Books into the alien world that preserves the illusion, the 'virgin heart of all the labyrinth' (SM:191): Waldo, the Secret Writer.

The grotesque mingling of incompatible substances takes place nevertheless. Because the power of the double is denied, Arthur cannot satisfactorily be the Enemy. With all other avenues closed, it is only as Keeper of the Books that Waldo comes into close contact with the alien world. Having begun by ratifying him, the world of the Library all too soon begins to threaten. Walter Pugh, Waldo's adolescent alter ego, horridly parodies Waldo's pretensions to literary greatness and, worse yet, goes beyond him by dying 'heroically' in the war and leaving, as

testimony, a handful of poems. In adulthood, Waldo's junior, Crankshaw, gets above him in rank and begins to represent the Inquisitor. In the black comedy of Waldo's interview with Crankshaw (SM:171-173), his paranoia invests the Inquisitor with cunning subtlety, aimed at trapping him into revealing the secrets of Waldo of the House.

Waldo's existence becomes dominated by the need to maintain separateness: Waldo from Arthur, Waldo and Arthur from Mrs Poulter and Sarsaparilla, the Keeper of the Books from the Secret Writer. Before the devastation of the second Incident, separateness collapses into unexpected forms. The House itself is assaulted by a visitor from the remote past: Johnny Heynes, the schoolyard inquisitor. This time, withdrawal into the central 'sanctuary' of the House does not guarantee the power of isolation: Waldo must see the House through Johnny's eyes and hear of Arthur through Johnny's perceptions. Johnny's notion that Arthur, the dill, 'wasn't so loopy as they used to make out' (SM:190) is threateningly similar to another inversion: Waldo has conscious memory of another overheard conversation, so horrifying that it lay repressed for six years. In 'his' world of the Library, where Arthur never appeared, he has heard himself described as 'nutty', and one of the 'throw-outs' (SM:177).

His decision to protect his private papers from further assaults, 'that part of him where nobody had ever been' (SM:191), leads him obliquely to experience, through the 'great dress', a part of him where he himself has never been. The 'brilliant truth' is not the metaphysical statement he is always preparing to write, out of the 'crystal core holding itself in reserve for some imminent moment of higher idealism' (SM:183). In the nacreous refractions of an old fan and the tiny distorted mirrors of glass beads, Waldo's Gothick Folly appears 'in radiance and splendour' (SM:193). Hollowed out by his expulsion of desire, Waldo is compelled to 'recognise' himself as what he never was and never could be. Estrangement and alienation leave

him 'open' and vulnerable to transgression: the only possible 'truth' is distortion. As transvestite, as Mother, as Memory, Waldo grotesquely parodies his own longing to be permanently significant. As transvestite he unites with himself, becoming the woman he has never possessed; as Mother he ensures that there will be the 'right' sort of progeny; as Memory, he dictates how 'the whole rout of brocaded ghosts and fleshy devils' (SM:192) will be forced to acknowledge him.

The privacy of this experience (shattered, did he but know it) allows him to repress it and once again don the disguise of respectability. It is even more imperative, however, to defend, protect and keep separate, since what is being defended is now consciously known to be inauthentic. The Library, his public life, now seems extraordinarily safe, since 'nobody of his group would be expected to strip in public, unless in a purely intellectual sense' (SM:194). Terminus Road 'which he loved because of Memory's skin' seems equally secure, despite Arthur's incompetent burrowing after 'that vicious ferret, the other truth' (SM:195). Both lives, however, collapse into each other and, in each case, Arthur is responsible.

The Tennyson poem, copied down in youth and unconsciously appropriated in later years, is taken from Waldo's pitiful hoard of 'good things' by Arthur's recognition of it as Tennyson. The poem Waldo had prided himself on as a kind of counter-statement to his 'rival', Goethe, can no longer validate him, and it is the double, in its innocence and ignorance, that deprives him of this protection.

In flight from the obscenity of Arthur as mirror reflecting undesired truth, Waldo congratulates himself on the separateness, the sanctuary, of the Library. Here, though he suspects 'other obscenities sat hunching over the tables' (SM:196), they cannot, by being naked, force him to see himself naked too. The Incident, which effectively destroys the Library as fortress of reason, confronts Waldo with Arthur, as one

obscenity among the many, but made visible to the librarians by his 'grotesque' choice of texts. The Keeper of the Books dissolves into Waldo of the House; Arthur the dill dissolves into Waldo, the student of human nature; the physical expulsion of Arthur from the Library is only a superficial triumph. To Waldo, Arthur in 'his' Library is a transgression; Arthur's reading is in itself a transgression; Arthur's reading of The Brothers Karamazov (a secondary reflection) in order to understand the Grand Inquisitor, in order to help Waldo, is a grotesque opening out of Waldo's closed categories. Without returning to the compensatory transcendentalism of religion, Arthur has confronted the absence/void in the centre of the House. Acknowledging the human desire for an absolute signified, an absolute meaning, he chooses to read Dostoevsky, for whom the symbolic order constantly deflects or defeats desire. As the double, he threatens to speak the unspeakable, to uncover the hidden, to make naked the disguised.

The Incident is repressed at great cost, requiring of Waldo an increased emptiness, a greater slyness in concealing his dissolution from himself. Dissolution, however, begins to present itself as the only true form of protection. His fear of his own death is no longer compensated for by the thought of his extension into eternity by the testimony of his writings. To let them go beyond his control would mean they were no longer his - what survived would not safely embody him. To destroy them himself, once dying is unavoidable, offers the ultimate narcissistic pleasure of devouring oneself. Although no longer so certain that Arthur is wrong in his belief that 'words are not what make you see' (SM:57), he continues to try to re-arrange them, maintaining a fiction of control in this private place, at least. (His body, no longer so controllable, involuntarily expels tears, even, on one horrific occasion, a flood of faeces.) This, together with his plans for life without Arthur, protects him, until the final confrontation.

Arthur brings out the dress from its hiding place, finally uncovering what most of all should be hidden, holding it in front of him 'so that Waldo might see his reflexion in it' (SM:212). Even as the need to defend the Secret Writer from Memory urgently rises a metamorphosis takes place. The dress 'turned into the sheet of paper Waldo discovered in a corner....' (SM:212). As Arthur dis-covers Waldo, so Waldo dis-covers Arthur - Arthur, offensively and obscenely doubling as Secret Writer. His crude poem, which he has not even troubled to keep, denies distance and separateness, all the neo-classical virtues of objectivity and deliberate impersonality. As 'disgusting blood myth', it celebrates pain, and death as ineluctable absence; if it does not interrogate, it at least confronts the limits of being.

Innocently responsible, Arthur kills Waldo even while Waldo believes he is about to kill Arthur. The double, which like the semiotic pulsion of language, was always there before the cultural construct, is most deadly because it is closer to the origin, and the dominant structures and signifying practices are constituted by denying its prior presence.

The title of the novel has, up to this point, received no validation. The 'solid mandala' is mentioned only twice in Waldo's lengthy narrative. In the early stages of the narrative, Arthur merely explains to a shop manager that the marbles he carries 'are my solid mandalas' (SM:55). In the final stages of the narrative, Arthur reminds the dying Waldo that he would have given him 'the mandala', if Waldo had wanted it (SM:213). Waldo, however, responds, not to the mandala but, reductively, to marbles, for which he declares he never cared, since he could never 'control' them (SM:214). In essence, the antithesis of the Waldo/Arthur construct is already stated here: Arthur, the ultimately uncontrollable, works within the twin and open-ended structures of myth and reality; Waldo, in rejecting anything that cannot be contained within his own restrictive myth of rationalism and objectivity, has unknowingly constructed the life-threatening myth of the double.

In the Arthur narrative, the concept of the solid mandala opens out into an explication of the empty space at the centre of the House and the emptying-out of Waldo. A typical White pun alludes directly to this. When Arthur, having identified the talismanic marbles as mandalas, seeks to understand what the 'totality' is which the mandala symbolises, his father gives this explanation:

> 'That is to say', said Dad, he could not clear his throat enough, 'it means', he said, '"that which is a whole",' adding: 'Spelt with a w - naturally.'
>
> SM:240.
> (my underlining)

That which is a hole, the vacant space, is what the mandala offers protection against; its 'solid' nature, in the form in which Arthur recognises it, reinforces the notion of 'full' against 'empty'.

While I do not propose to add to the numerous commentaries on the Jungian basis of the structure and content of the text, it seems appropriate to note the relevance of Jung's comments on the modern mandala:

> Prejudiced by historical analogies, we would expect a deity to occupy the centre of the mandala. The centre is, however, empty.... The centre, as a rule, is emphasised. But what we find there is a symbol with a very different meaning. It is a star, a sun, a flower, a cross with equal arms, a precious stone, a bowl filled with water or wine, a serpent coiled up, or a human being, but never a god.
>
> ****
>
> A modern mandala is an involuntary confession of a peculiar mental condition. There is no deity in the mandala, nor is there any submission or reconciliation to a deity. The place of the deity seems to be taken by the wholeness of man.
>
> Cited in Riemer, 1967:13.
> (my underlining)

The gods have, in fact, been dead from the beginning of Arthur's narrative. Out of Götterdämmerung comes the question, 'Who and where were the gods?' (SM:217), but this is not a thematic question. It is a question to which even the child-Arthur knows the answer even though he cannot speak it. The comments of Jung are ambivalent towards this absence of the gods: on the one hand, he describes the mandala unoccupied by a god as 'empty'; on the other, he describes it as being 'full', occupied as it is by symbols of other kinds, which appear to indicate to him the 'wholeness' of man.

This uncertainty as to the validity or potency of the mandala unoccupied by a god is not shared by Arthur. As he explains to Waldo, 'We learned too late about all this Christ stuff. From what we read it doesn't seem to work, anyway' (SM:200). Although he uses the word 'worship', the objects of worship he cites are also called things 'to concentrate on': a dog, a glass marble, a brother and 'Our Lord'. What he is expressing is not the need to believe in an Absolute, but the need to accept that one behaves as if there were an Absolute. In this sense, Arthur is as much a child of the Enlightenment as his brother is. The radical difference is that Arthur reacts against the orthodoxies of secular rationalism as well as against the orthodoxies of religious belief. (While he cannot undo the knot at the centre of Waldo's mandala, this does not prevent him from seeing it as 'the whole point'.)

Whereas, in RC, White is concerned with divergent attempts to escape the tyranny of the symbolic order, setting the four riders to live against it, in SM, he withdraws from the broad view of cultural systems. The elegance of SM's structure mirrors the analytical dissection of the concept of 'character', isolated from the influences of cultural order in its microcosm of no-where. Moreover, the mythical element of the split double is directly related to the potential of artist, or writer. The origins of this no-where, for its inhabitants, lie in the symbolic order of the Enlightenment and, in contrast with this

system, Sarsaparilla appears more acceptable. (It is close to the Australia imaged in Voss by Willie Pringle.) Those critics who see White as an expatriate, always more in sympathy with European systems, fail to balance this Sarsaparilla text against the other.

As in TM, where the narrative voice must speak, since Stan and Amy Parker are unable to enter into meaningful dialogue, so in SM, more elaborately, the separated Waldo and Arthur texts demonstrate a similar failure. In this instance, however, the novel is a clinical demonstration of the effects of the withheld self, plunged into the uncanny world of the fantastic.

In linking SM to the fantastic, it becomes clear that Lacanian theory remains an appropriate instrument. (Jackson (1981:135, 176-177) points out the close correlations between Lacan's distinctions between the imaginary and the symbolic, Bakhtin's carnivalistic and official selves and the thetic and non-thetic principles of Sartre.) Like grotesque, by which White's texts are often fissured, 'the Fantastic can be seen as an art of estrangement, resisting closure, opening structures which categorise experience in the name of a "human reality"' (Jackson, 1981:175). Not only do such texts subvert and interrogate the nominal unity of character, they also question the possibility, or honesty, of fictional re-presentation of such a unity. In its place, they articulate the repressed desire for the impossible unity of imaginary and symbolic in the impossible Real. As Jackson notes, the fantastic, in this sense 'is inherently idealistic' (Jackson, 1981:179). At the same time, in a secularised culture, this idealism cannot finally be projected into such a union, and these longings for escape from the uncanny, imaged in the androgynes of AS and TA, 'are apprehended as impossible, except in parodic, travestied, horrific or tragic form' (Jackson, 1981:179). The modern fantastic, as this writer indicates, is an inverted form of myth.

In SM, White hollows out realism itself, by strictly adhering to a realistic perspective until the conclusion of the Waldo narrative. (In my analysis of that text, I have, of course, worked backwards.) It is the Arthur narrative that compels reassessment of the novel's direction: while Waldo appears to have constructed a myth of the double, he himself is found to be within the writer's myth of the double. This signifying practice is common to myth and, as O'Flaherty remarks (1980(a):99), effectively blurs the boundaries between 'real' and 'unreal'.

The texts which Arthur chooses to read also constitute comment on the pressures exerted on monological realism. These include 'alien' material: the Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads and works on Zen; erotological works; Alice Through the Looking Glass and The Brothers Karamazov. The alien and the erotological both represent the forbidden/desired; the choice of Carroll and Dostoevsky points to more specific pressures on language and the idea of 'character'.

Through the Looking Glass, itself a fantasy, interrogates 'reality', 'identity' and the language system which underpins them. In the world of non-sense and non-signification, Waldo's contention that words are what make you see is unmasked as inherently ideological: words are what make you see what the patriarchal order permits to be seen. The semantic emptiness of Alice's world does not evoke 'real' terror, however, framed as it is by controlling views of the possible and the impossible.

Arthur finds no such comfort in Dostoevsky, whose fictions of fantastic realism subvert the official, public versions of 'reality' and 'identity', dis-covering the cost of constructing an 'I' to conform with a symbolic order. The title of The Brothers Karamazov, and Dostoevsky's engagement in that novel, as in other works, with elements of the fantastic and the double, do not necessitate instating Dostoevsky as 'the true Secret Writer of The Solid Mandala' (Mackenzie, 1979:153). They

do, however, press home the nature of the text within which Arthur is reading, a repetition of the signifying practice by which realism is subverted.

'Reality is not limited to the familiar, the commonplace, for it consists in huge part of a latent, as yet unspoken future word' (Dostoevsky, cited in Jackson, 1981:19). In earlier novels, White privileges the writer/artist, particularly in terms of a 'latent, as yet unspoken future word'. He has, however, dealt only obliquely with the problematics of writing, that is to say, with the way in which future writing may possibly escape the tyranny of the symbolic order, of which it is itself a sign. In SM, this problem is directly confronted. In the double, the Secret Writer appears in two positions. Waldo, as Secret Writer, is in possession of the language codes but, lacking a safe connection to those other selves which proliferate in the realm of the imaginary, is condemned to use writing as endless defence of his own 'reality' principle. For Arthur, on the other hand, words themselves have always been problematic (they tend to drift away from meaning: 'God', for example, 'is a kind of sort of rock crystal' (SM:87)). To write at all is an act of transgression, since writing 'belongs' to the culturally legitimated I. Dance and song are accessible forms to him, based upon those principles of creative non-verbalisation which Kristeva considers typical of the semiotic, that is, they 'speak in a place where it [ça] doesn't speak' (Kristeva, 1986:275). Nevertheless these do not, by definition, challenge the dominant cultural order. If the non-legitimated, repressed self is to do so, it can only be by entering, paradoxically, the field of language, the constitution of which depends upon the act of its repression.

The transgressive forms of writing which White privileges in his own work are mythical, fantastic and grotesque: such forms

> ... image the possibility of radical cultural transformation through attempting to dissolve or shatter the boundary lines between the imaginary and the symbolic. They refuse the latter's categories of the 'real' and its unities.
>
> Jackson, 1981:178.

Whereas in TM and Voss, White seems to gesture towards other writers beyond his text, in SM the failure of the Secret Writers to 'publish' their works creates a gap which his own text appears, provisionally, to have filled.

CHAPTER 5

~~WOMAN~~:

The Eye of the Storm and A Fringe of Leaves

The Eye of the Storm (1973) and A Fringe of Leaves (1976) share a number of perspectives. Both have a woman as protagonist; both embody classical Western literary references as structural principles; both constitute White's re-examination of his earlier works, and the presentation of fresh perspectives on certain powerful issues raised in them.

The most significant of these issues relates to that mythical totality of Woman, 'archaic, full, total englobing mother' (Kristeva, 1986:205), with whom Mrs Godbold in RC was ultimately conflated. In both ES and FL, woman is the central figure, but is reinvested with her other roles: wife, lover, daughter. All of these are interrogated and in each case the protagonist is herself engaged in interrogating her 'nature' and the roles she interprets or has interpreted. White refuses any further complicity with the myth; like Lacan, his premise seems to be 'There is no such thing as Woman' (cited in Kristeva, 1986:205).

In ES, the fused Shakespearean references to two figures of mythical status, Lear and Cleopatra, concentrate attention upon the relationships between power, seduction, age and death. Against this screen, White projects a preoccupation of his own. In FL, the screen is provided by Vergil, and in particular, the Fourth Eclogue, conflated with the enabling myth of Heart of Darkness.

(Eleanor Leach (1974), in her examination of the Eclogues, points out that the Fourth Eclogue represents the paradisal mode of pastoral myth, 'presenting mankind as he wishes to be', while the Sixth, in contrast, is 'an attempt to grapple with man and nature as they are. This contrast provides a focal point for

the essential myth of pastoral: man's troubled quest for a renewal of identity' (Leach, 1974:217). To this must be added the perspective of Vergil as part of an exclusive male discourse, where, as Mahony (1987:244) puts it, the study of Latin 'besides being a linguistic badge of male identity, served as a sex-restrictive passport into a world where males controlled the educational, diplomatic, medical, clerical and legal life'.)

In FL, the concepts of birth or re-birth, patriarchal power and female 'nature', and the failure of 'identity' to contain even a silent subject, appear against the mythical screen in the person of a female Voss.

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The Eye of the Storm

ES, unlike other White novels, is tightly structured around a single event, in terms of which the text is overtly constituted from the outset and which determines its closure. I have elsewhere discussed White's fictional structures and his protagonists as being concerned chiefly with process and with the interpretations of process. (Kristeva's 'subject in process/in question/on trial' (1986:213) neatly contains the essentials of those concerns.) The event towards which all process inevitably tends is death: the final metamorphosis, the last question, the ultimate ordeal and examination. This event is characterised by its position in secularised culture as signifying absence itself - 'signifier without signified ... absolute secret, absolute newness, which should stay hidden, for if it is manifested to me, it means I am dead: only the dead know the secret of death' (Cixous, cited in Jackson, 1981:69).

In the increasing marginality of his discourse, from AS onwards, White, in this text, presses marginality to its limit, toward one of the few boundaries he is prepared to recognise.

Since death itself is unspeakable, it is only those processes which precede and announce it which can make its absence present. Mrs Hunter is, indeed, as one reviewer has remarked, 'an unconscionable time in dying' (Green, 1973(b):395), for dying is the last signifying process, the last means by which meaning can be established. In the person of Mrs Hunter, the process is established as 'natural': her dying is what must result from her great age; what such a 'natural' process does to the body and to the personality that inhabits/inhibits it is examined in detail; the cultural/countercultural responses to such a subject-in-process are revealed as arbitrary and individual, uncovering as much as they conceal.

Unlike the marginal Sarsaparilla texts, this text insists on centrality as a structural principle. The house in Moreton Drive might have begun as an unfashionable address (ES:32) but Centennial Park has long since ceased to be a backwater. At the centre of the house and the household is Mrs Elizabeth Hunter's bedroom, where the 'great showdown' (ES:18) is to take place. The silver sun set into the rosewood bed above Mrs Hunter's head marks off her room as a microcosm, towards which all her retainers are drawn and into which her children make their forays. It is filled with the objects of rituals: 'columns of crystal and trumpets of silver' (ES:588), vestments, wigs and jewels - the treasured minutiae of existence that make life-statements in tombs as well as in boudoirs - and those other objects, the kidney-blanket, the macintosh, the bedpan and the wheelchair, that as unequivocally mark the onset of dissolution. Part royal tomb, part boudoir, this is also the space of the 'great conjuring trick' (ES:50), the gap or emptying-out which Mrs Hunter's death on the 'throne' reveals as the greatest ambivalence of all.

Death, however, for the greater part of the novel, is what Mrs Hunter denies. No longer in perfect control of either her mind or her body, she has acquired enough wealth by a judicious marriage to control her environment and the circle of women attendants her state requires. She can remain in 'her' house, where her husband was never more than a guest, and, in the absence of loving friends and children, buy the services of those whose profession it is to serve. These services must fulfil a complex set of needs. There are the purely physical needs of an old, frail body - for washing, feeding, rubbing and medicating; there are the needs of a still powerful narcissism - to be adorned, amused and idolised (also to ambush and attack); there are more obscure needs - to rest in a silent undemanding relationship, to be free to let go and briefly become 'as redemptive as water' (ES:12). Mrs Hunter does not intend to die while life still affords her these satisfactions.

The certainty of her imminent death is apparent to everyone else, however, and in the opening chapter the most generous witness of this dissolution, Mary de Santis, weighs up the value of this dying against the complex horrors of the still-living Mrs Hunter. Age has done more than wither Elizabeth Hunter: the narrator identifies her as an 'old woman' in the opening sentence but rapidly devalues her into an 'almost chrysalis', an 'old creature', 'a giant baby', with the milky stare of a purblind dog. Nothing emerges in the first scene of Mrs Hunter's own point of view; she is what the narrator and de Santis make of her. This is something fragmented: a voice, a head, a disturbingly sporadic ability to see or see through. Her speech drifts erratically, and this loss of control, particularly reinforced by her brief return to her time past, inclines one to pay careful attention to her words, for it is obvious that Elizabeth Hunter is involuntarily revealing herself.

The revelation is not attractive. This 'old creature', already so relentlessly presented, has grotesque pretensions to

appearing intelligent and beautiful. Her voracious appetite encompasses everything: being able to see better means that de Santis cannot 'escape' her; her dreams of time past involve appropriating a richer child's possessions as her own; even a glass of water is something to smack her lips over. Worst of all are the improper advances she makes to de Santis: not content with simply using de Santis' strength, which is willingly given, she also seems to seek another, meretricious intimacy. Even de Santis admits that she is

> ... this ruin of an over-indulged and beautiful youth, rustling with fretful spite when not bludgeoning with a brutality only old age is ingenious enough to use ... .
>
> ES:12.

It is de Santis who, in her nightly care of Mrs Hunter, experiences moments of empathy 'approaching perfection', which she is honest enough to admit may have quite another meaning for her patient. 'Perhaps' the malicious old woman shares her secret night thoughts, but de Santis cannot be certain. What makes it seem possible to her is her own secret life, that of the 'high priestess' at her 'office', assisting in last rites, while

> ... in her daytime form, Mary de Santis of thumping bust and pronounced calves, might have been headed for basket-ball.
>
> ES:14.

Before the internal life of Elizabeth Hunter is revealed, a basic environment of ambivalence has been posited. Great pains have been taken to estrange the reader from the central figure, while at the the same time the point of view of Mary de Santis insists on the possibility of obtaining moments of satisfaction from contact with her patient. This, however, is only a possibility: it is clearly established that these moments may be no more than de Santis' interpretation, in validation of her own belief system.

In the section that follows, Mrs Hunter listens to 'her thoughts, her life'. These press in a specific direction: while they begin with her perception of herself as someone who had always seen too clearly, they end with her trying to remember something that eludes her. Moreover, the main content of the section is concerned with how others have seen her, and they have not found her lovable. What she recalls is being admired but also being found manipulative and cold. Husband, lovers, children, acquaintances, she remembers them all with a mixture of contempt and frustration. With the exception of the words 'special grace' at the end of the section, there is nothing to indicate that Mrs Hunter has ever known anything but her own will.

Throughout this chapter and the next, Elizabeth Hunter's memories flicker episodically, involuntarily revealing what has constituted 'meaning' for her during a long life. Two elements predominate: early childhood and her associations with men. These are closely connected. In childhood, she experienced the satisfaction of manipulating her richer 'friend', Kate Nutley, into getting rid of her dolls, but her triumph was eclipsed by the account of Lilian Nutley's murder by her lover, beside 'some great river' in Manchuria. What the young Elizabeth has desired and got is power; what she still desires is intensity of experience. Her memories of her first lover, Arnold Wyburd, reveal that she tasted the pleasure of getting him to succeed 'in leaping a barrier' (<u>ES</u>:37) (it is his climax she enjoys, not her own). The fact that her desire for him arises when he brings her her <u>will</u>, 'the guarantee of her eventual death' (<u>ES</u>:36) escapes her. Her ambivalent lust for Athol Shreve is 'an essay in sexuality', he is the awful male reality she decides to risk in the absence of an ideal, a 'probably superhuman relationship' (<u>ES</u>:92). It is a 'necessary instance' (<u>ES</u>:98) which fails to provide her with power over Shreve or a private intensity of experience. Her husband she has tolerated sexually, until she was able to create their unofficial separation: once he accepts her terms she offers him 'the

pleasures of this calmer, therapeutic relationship' (ES:34). They are all Kate Nutleys to her, simple souls, who, despite their efforts, never penetrate her, and with none of them do her experiences approximate those with which she invests the murdered girl. The fact that Lilian's 'magnificence' is a gallop towards death does not impinge on her consciousness.

These fragmentary episodes are dispersed among the events of the sick-room: the duty-changes, the visits of doctor and solicitor, the arrival of a daughter. Many of these banal events, however, open out into other ambivalent significations. De Santis recalls her first attendance on Mrs Hunter, fifteen years earlier, and struggles to accommodate her first idea of Mrs Hunter, 'this vision of fragmented beauty' (ES:17), to the 'faint faecal whiffs', 'the insinuating stench of urine from an aged bladder' (ES:16), the 'desiccated carcase, blotched with brown, streaked with yellow, scarred by knives' (ES:19). Sister Badgery assists at the ceremony of the jewels and finds herself 'worshipping an ancient idol for its treasure' (ES:42).

Sister Manhood has her own ceremonies: the more distasteful one is rubbing Mrs Hunter's back, which is bliss for her patient, who revels in Manhood's powerful physical presence, but an additional torture for Manhood, whose physicality is a source of considerable ambivalence to her. The fact that Mrs Hunter so easily penetrates Manhood's emotional life and so easily reduces her to the level of a rutting goat makes her view her patient as an 'old witch' (ES:83), the 'Old Bitch of Moreton Drive' (ES:105). 'E. Hunter was more powerful than any man you could remember' (ES:103, my underlining).

It is Manhood's physicality that equips her for her part in the rituals of femaleness. De Santis struggles to maintain her construct of Mrs Hunter's 'soul'; the pedestrian Badgery revels in the symbols of great wealth, but Manhood is engaged in a complex response to Mrs Hunter as female to female. On the one hand, she is repelled by the grotesquely ugly body she touches,

yet on the other, she can accept the grotesquerie of 'beautifying' it as a 'ritual of anointment' (ES:45).

The introductory emphases on rituals and ambivalence demonstrate the extreme fragility of Mrs Hunter's centrality. Her power base is not merely money but her ability to project herself mythically. Like the other E of TA, she empowers herself by representing to others a perpetual promise, the forbidden/ denied. Basically, the response of these others takes the form of 'worship', with its composite elements of awe, adoration, guilt and terror. Arnold Wyburd, initially presented as 'family solicitor', has never ceased fearing the person he tries to cover up as 'his client's wife' and 'the widow' (ES:26). His second transgressive act in a lifetime of rectitude is to steal E. Hunter's blue sapphire (her piercing glance symbolically, and safely, encapsulated). His single sexual experience of transgression has remained Dionysiac: 'the invitation to drunkenness [evokes an intensity that] perhaps ... was what others know as "poetry"' (ES:578). In the void of experience without absolutes, Mrs Hunter has acquired the mythical status of the Real.

It is the Dionysiac aspect of E. Hunter that Lotte Lippmann and Flora Manhood privilege, interpreting this according to their own needs. In the dining scene (ES:139-146) between Lippmann and Basil Hunter, the stress on the scene as theatre (ES:139) is not merely an entry into the perspectives of Basil Hunter; it opens out into a discourse on the nature of the invitation to drunkenness and its relationship to both myth and theatre. The background to the scene, apparently for Basil Hunter only, is a storm, or rather 'storm effects', complete with 'zinc thunder' (ES:142). Heard only intermittently, and in no way impinging on the well-housed, well-fed inmates of Moreton Drive, or the two professionals, acting out a scene about acting, the cue for Lear's great scene goes unrecognised. Only for an audience will these 'noises off' constitute comment on this play-within-a-play. The actor who plays Lear and Hamlet: 'all

the great German roles' (ES:144) is confronted by an actress whose archetypal Fool has the classic ambivalence: 'to find what in all things is ridiculous' (ES:79), and to satisfy the audience's need for drunkenness - 'to be translated out of themselves? to be destroyed?' (ES:144). Such, says the actress/Fool, is the ambivalent role of Lear, as grotesque as it is tragic.

I have elsewhere referred to the fantastic as an inverted form of myth, and indicated that it functions mythically by destabilising accepted views of reality. ES, in my view, establishes a similar mythical status for drama and theatrical performance. O'Flaherty observes:

> In our day, drama (or film) often takes the place of the communal ritual that was a frequent (though certainly not inevitable) complement to the traditional myth. Drama built upon archetypes functions as the enactment of a myth.
>
> O'Flaherty, 1980(a):100.
> (my underlining)

The two mythical archetypes conflated in ES are the Father/King and the Seductress/Queen. Without overt reference, a network of identifications has indicated Mrs Hunter as such a queen, the most notable Western version of whom is Cleopatra. Her elevated but ambivalent status, her powers of seduction, the ambiguities inherent in any interpretation of her, qualify her to play such a role. (It now becomes necessary to use the theatrical metaphor more generally. E. Hunter is the Actor consciously playing the role of Seductress/Queen. What else she may be is, as it were, part of the enclosing drama, entitled ES.) The Seductress/Queen is ageless. She may face death but never that which is 'worse than death' (ES:45): the destruction of her mythical status. Cleopatra herself believes she will be destroyed, if she is forced to see

> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I' the posture of a whore.
>
> Antony and Cleopatra, V, ii, 219-220.

However, what is destructive of all mythical status is not, paradoxically, grotesquerie nor, as Shakespeare carefully points out in the playing of the scene just cited, its endless repetition as drama, but the severing of any connection between the myth and reality. As long as others can recognise the mythical figure, it exists: the death of the myth occurs when it no longer performs a mythical function. This constitutes part of the fragility of Mrs Hunter's role: the processes of aging militate against the Seductress/Queen archetype, designed as it is to represent 'the unverifiable atemporal "truth" of the symbolic order and its time' (Kristeva, 1986:154). This "truth", Kristeva points out, becomes mythical once it is represented by the form of a woman, enclosing the unrepresentable form of the unconscious "truth" in a body which becomes 'fundamental fetish, phallus-substitute, support for all transcendental divinity' (1986:155). The Seductress/Queen shores up the structures of patrilinear society by safely representing Woman as 'a specialist in the unconscious, a witch, a baccanalian, taking her jouissance in an anti-Apollonian, Dionysian orgy' (Kristeva, 1986:154). The bodily dissolution, so heavily stressed in the first two chapters, cannot be comfortably accommodated within these boundaries.

The Father/King, however, may be, and often is, pictured as old, weakened, dead, even murdered. Since the Father guarantees genealogy, he is necessarily part of a temporal order, in which objective time will distinguish him in terms of his before, now and after. If, as Kristeva says, 'there is no time without the father' (1986:153), it is equally true that there is no father without time. The Father/King exists within a system of kinship which demands the death of the father in order for the system to function. (Kristeva points out that in Moses and Monotheism, Freud develops a thesis 'of the murder of the father as a

"historical" (or the) [sic] event that is basic to humanity, and specifically to monotheism' (Kristeva, 1986:224).) King Lear provides three scapegoats for the crime of seeking the death of the father: two 'unnatural' daughters, who attempt to seize paternal power for themselves (the act of transgression imaged in woman since Eve and the serpent), and an illegitimate son/subject, placed outside the Law by his own father's transgression with a woman. In this way, the desire for the death of the Father/King is made newly transgressive, since it is intended to overthrow the socio-symbolic order, not to enforce it. Balanced against the transgressors are the 'natural' daughter, whose virginal qualities are indicative of her sacrificial role, and a legitimate son/subject whose role will be to restore the symbolic order. The mythical status of the Father/King is thus left undisturbed by dissolution and death; it is attacked only by acts which intend to overthrow the patrilinear society he represents.

By reducing the Lear and Cleopatra figures to these mythical schemata, it becomes possible to assess a conflation of them more precisely. It is clear that the separate figures do not, in fact, represent a conflict of interests: each privileges the belief-system of the patrilinear society. Problems arise with a conflation which produces a feminised Lear and a phallicised Cleopatra.

(Dorothy Hunter refers tellingly to her mother as

> ... a jewelled scabbard in which a sword was hidden: which would clatter out under the influence of some peculiar frenzy, to slash off your ears, the fingers, the tongues, or worse, impale the hearts, of those who worshipped.
>
> ES:71.

Mrs Hunter herself admits to de Santis (ES:164) that part of the freedom of her dissolution is that there is nobody to 'take the sword out of my hand because they consider it dangerous'.)

What is the status of a Mother/King or a Seducer/Queen? Once again, there is no conflict of interests. The Mother/King has succeeded in taking paternal power for herself, thereby, as Mrs Hunter admits, making the children 'her' children. (It is significant that she is unable to give her children the breast.) She is therefore herself the 'unnatural' daughter and 'illegitimate' son/substitute. The Seducer/Queen can no longer be a phallus-substitute since s/he has the phallus; equally, since s/he now represents the symbolic order, s/he cannot also represent its unconscious "truth". The key motif of this conflation is clearly its grotesque illegitimacy: the fact that 'something is illegitimately in something else' (Harpham, 1982:11). The perception of these two figures as grotesque returns one to the consideration of their ambivalent and androgynous natures.

I have elsewhere pointed out that the addition of the concept of illegitimacy to the '<u>unheimlich</u>' introduces the judgments of the dominant ideology or Law. This seems to be borne out here since the conflated figures are clearly illegitimate in terms of the criteria of the patrilinear society. What is less clear is whether White privileges these androgynous figures, offering them the same mythical status as the figures against which they are projected.

In earlier novels, and in <u>Voss</u> in particular, White privileges the 'silent female centre', suggesting that despite the marginalisation of women, they continue to represent a valid and powerful opposition to the institutionalised structures that render them silent. In <u>RC</u>, he is himself seduced by the myth of the archaic mother into supporting the very ideology he wishes to interrogate. In <u>ES</u>, he returns to the concept of myth-making, utilised extensively in <u>AS</u> and <u>TA</u>, and allies it to drama and theatrical performance. (Structurally, the novel consists in the main of rapidly changing scenes rather than of continuous narrative. Only Chapter Four, the inset narrative of

Flora Manhood's fugue, is conventionally structured.) The mythical figures White selects for ES are themselves embodied in Shakespearean drama. What clearly distinguishes ES from the other novels cited is the conscious performance of the Seductress/Queen role by the woman, Elizabeth Hunter, who is not a mythical figure but an actress enacting the myth.

O'Flaherty indicates that the power of such enactment is partly derived from the satisfaction of an audience (1980(a):100), who, by their status as audience, fulfil their need to participate in meaningful ritual. The nature of the myth that is enacted is in itself significant, in that its content may precipitate an eruption of their repressed knowledge, revealing 'an already existing reality, one that was masked and unconsciously denied' (O'Flaherty, 1980(a):102). In Lotte Lippmann's comments on an audience, she not only confirms this view but also stresses the violence of the repression, equalled only by the violence of the desire to be made conscious. She also deals with the effect of performance upon performer: in her view, it is the same 'drunkenness', the same need to be translated out of oneself or perhaps destroyed. The power of her conviction is demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, despite her immersion in the 'real' tragedy of the Jewish Holocaust, and her loss of her 'real' lover, the life of theatre still remains intensely meaningful to her. Secondly, she equates her 'drunkenness' with an unorthodox form of 'Jewishness', closer to conventional religion than her parents' 'scientific' worship of physicians and psychiatrists. 'Loving' Mrs Hunter is a necessary but secondary activity, since Lippmann can no longer 'worship' (ES:139-144).

Basil Hunter's views on their profession must be read with the unrecognised sound of Lear's storm in the background. Two comments are especially significant and both relate to cooking as well as to theatrical performance. In the first of these, Basil wonders whether, 'as a performer', Lippmann does not find it tedious to feed other people (ES:142). In the second, he

refers to cooking as 'this other art of seduction' (ES:145). Clearly, he does not understand her 'drunkenness', although he believes he does. The performance, in his terms, functions for the performer. He must not be expected 'to feed other people'; his art is that of seduction - to persuade his audience to surrender themselves to his power and thus feed him.

(In his intermittent musings during this scene, he recalls a remark made by his second wife, which unconsciously comments on his inability to understand Lippmann:

> ... when we misunderstand each other Basil I must remember you are a foreigner we may speak the same language but we interpret it very differently.
>
> ES:141.)

The fact that Mrs Hunter is an actress is never in dispute: even her subdued husband notices that she is able to produce tears on cue. She is probably, by virtue of having concentrated on a single role, a more skilled performer than her son, just as she is more royal than her princess daughter. What must be established is what her views are on performer and performance. The Kate Nutley episode already discussed revealed two desires: the desire for power and the desire for intensity of experience. During her first acquaintance with de Santis, a younger, more lucid Elizabeth Hunter alludes to the same period. What she has to say is not part of a performance. During this period of 'illness' after the storm, she does not have perfect control: de Santis is expected 'to listen to the thoughts she was forced to project' (ES:156, my underlining). Mrs Hunter's 'confession' is unambiguous: as a child she desired possessions - dolls, jewels and, finally, 'people who would obey me - and love me, of course' (ES:156). In order to ensure her possession of people as obedient and loving subjects she adopts the role of Seductress/Queen. The success of her performances for the general audience is mirrored in Basil's memories:

> ... it is the moment you never catch in a flower however determined you are to witness the miracle of exploding petals, which is exactly what happens as the being descends, in a burst of sensuous joy she needs to share with those standing in comparative darkness below, controlling their breath, their blood, their amateurish attitudes, while her sun beats down on them, the rustle of her skirt, her fall of jewels promises relief from their drought of waiting, from their yes Mrs Hunter no Mrs Hunter how well you're looking at their last gasp they are not relieved they are made drunk.
>
> ES:572.

The problem is that Elizabeth Hunter is only the Seductress/ Queen for others: she cannot consciously represent for herself the unconscious "truth" since her motive for performance is to seize patriarchal power. Thus the intensity of experience, the baccanalian jouissance which she so much desires, is paradoxically her nourishment of others; by satisfying her need for power through the role of Seductress/Queen, she effectively cuts herself off from her own jouissance. This is not necessarily the effect of playing a role, as Lotte Lippmann indicates; it is rather the effect of a particular attitude to theatrical performance and to the enactment of myth.

Unlike the true androgyne, Theodora Goodman or E. Twyborn, Elizabeth Hunter is not driven by the twin desires: to enter or to be entered, nor is she troubled by the unstable boundaries of Inside and Outside. E. Hunter merely acquires androgynous characteristics because of her complex way of seeking to control the world. She is a woman, who in order to conceal her desire to master the symbolic order, adopts its other, 'feminine' face, dazzling her subjects with 'a jewelled scabbard in which a sword was hidden' (ES:71). She tends to avoid sexual contact despite her appetite for sensuality. Just as the role of mother, with its emphasis on selfless love and feeding others, is rejected, so is the role of the sexual woman, with its emphasis on difference - a difference which is not merely biological, but which

> ... is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which is the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language and meaning.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:196.

The closest that Mrs Hunter comes to experiencing a version of maternal love is in her nursing of her dying husband. Alfred Hunter has already been feminised, rendered almost silent and almost invisible, but it is only when he is made completely powerless by terminal illness, that his wife can approach him. She cannot love him as a man loves a woman or as a woman loves a man, but, once he is both powerless and guaranteed not to recover, she can and does mother him. In this way, by experiencing maternity without pregnancy, she avoids the fundamental challenge to identity, which as Kristeva points out is basic to pregnancy: 'the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other' (1986:206).

In terms of her personal history, Mrs Hunter also achieves, for this brief time, the successful performance of all three feminine functions: daughter-wife-mother, relating them all to the single impotent male figure. The father, who shot himself while she was deliberately avoiding reading to him, now has her attending him day and night; the husband has his wife back in 'his' house, the child is selflessly cared for. Only in the account of her administering morphine to her husband does the phallic under- current of her life appear. Her first reaction of distress is to the sight of 'the slender testicles, the blue head of the shrivelled penis'. The hypodermic she is expected 'to drive into her husband's flesh' seems an 'evil weapon'. Her husband's face, as she withdraws the needle, grotesquely reminds her of a man who 'might have experienced the perfect orgasm' (ES:191/192).

The skiapod of Odilon Redon which she sees during this time terrifies her by its ambiguous nature: embedded in a book

obsessed by death, the skiapod (which she identifies with herself) seems to float free of death - its nature obscure, and the mysterious expression on its face possibly profound, possibly no more than a cunning dishonesty. (In later life, she recounts a skiapod dream to Professor Pehl as part of her seduction of him, and has so far repressed her anxiety as to 'forgive' the Redon figure (or herself) 'because it was in search of something it would probably never find' (ES:390).) It is clear that Mrs Hunter is not entirely sure of her own nature: even while ostensibly 'loving' her husband-child-father, she suspects that she is once more feeding herself on others. The fact that she can later dredge up the skiapod dream in order to seduce a marine biologist indicates how far she has separated it from her original interpretation.

It is in the account of the events on Brumby Island which immediately precede the storm that the extent to which the role has swallowed the performer becomes clear (ES:309-406). A professional performer reacts almost instinctively to the presence of an audience, and the audience, as Basil Hunter knows, becomes an essential stimulus to and support of the performance. In the prelude to the storm scene, Mrs Hunter can be observed as performer preparing for performance. (Like her son, she knows the value of props and costume: 'Thank God for your clothes: nothing like costume for security' (ES:139).) Despite her increasing awareness of the probability that there will be no audience, she still prepares herself, but these preparations are less spontaneous than usual and seem to need justification. From early morning, the possibility that she is to be left alone has been present and is experienced as 'not even herself for company' (ES:400, my underlining). What she appears to have lost is a company in the sense of a cast, and it is thus that she enumerates all the others:

> Professor Benthic Aggregations Pehl, poor Princess Menopause de Lascabanes, Alfred the Good, Basil my Beloved Only Son, Athol Shreve the - ugh! Arnold the Pure - but Everyone.
>
> ES:400.

This conflation of audience with cast makes it quite clear that Elizabeth Hunter depends on the participation of others in her drama, and according to her script. It is difficult for her to engage in interior monologue and to find appropriate moves, or motivation for them. Even indirect interior monologue can be dangerously revealing but Mrs Hunter is too practised at repression to allow herself to know much more than the Seductress/Queen should. Thus, she can indulge in what she terms confessing her faults and accepting blame, an activity which on closer examination turns out to be self-justificatory. If she is a hypocrite, it is because she was born that way; if she is a mother whose children have rejected her it is because she is 'a mother whose love of life often outstripped discretion, in the eyes of those who were drab and prickly' (ES:401). Although she sees herself as humbled by 'the powers and honours so unreasonably conferred on her' (ES:401), she is also wondering in the most banal way, how she has managed to get away with it.

The scene she plays out with the foresters is dramatically necessary to her: 'she needed to reassure herself that she could still fit into the pattern of someone else's life' (ES:402). Delivered entirely from her point of view, the account of the scene is essentially comic in its relentless exposition of narcissism. Far from fitting into the pattern of someone else's life, Mrs Hunter needs to reinforce the weakened pattern of her own drama by fitting other people into it. Her interpretation of the scene is directed to this purpose: faced with the gracious Seductress/Queen, the comic rustics become 'as reverent as a cloister of nuns' (ES:403). Clumsy reverence is the selected key-note of their performance and she repeats the concept or stage direction four times. They are a useful, if extempore, confirmation of her role, which seems no longer a role but almost the "truth".

Her preparations that evening are made in anticipation of another scene with a man. (The aged Mrs Hunter mistakes both

Arnold and Basil for the archetypal Lover she is always waiting for.) Fortified by her interpretation of her pastoral idyll, she enacts her ceremonies - anointing herself, plaiting her hair into a crown, putting on a dress of classical splendour. Despite intimations 'at another level' that this is no more than 'a ridiculous get-up', she prepares to repeat her performance of the previous night: a seduction aided by music, lighting and food. (Mrs Hunter's approach to feeding others is very direct: Professor Pehl's fish is prepared according to the rites of the second art of seduction, Doctor Treweek gets the pickled onions with a metallic aftertaste, and is left alone to get on with it.) The importance of the archetypal Lover is his confirmation of her own archetypal role, his recognition 'that she had control over more than this hackneyed, girlhood piece, over music itself, and the threads of a brilliant sunset, and experience in general' (ES:406). In the absence of the archetypal Lover, she is prepared to accept the dull, and peeling, Norwegian; what she gets from the cyclone is a violent encounter in which she finds she has 'submitted to someone to whom she had never been introduced' (ES:408-409).

In the cosmic chaos of the storm, with its apocalyptic qualities - 'it is the earth coming to a head; practically all of us will drown in the pus which has gathered in it' (ES:408) - this comic and erotic low note, embedded between 'a supernal blast ... exhausted atoms' and 'the highest pitch of awfulness the human spirit can endure' (ES:408), seems remarkably prosaic. (It is, of course, faithful to King Lear.) Its particular direction is, however, highly significant - the revelation the storm brings about is precisely this: 'the myth of her womanhood had been exploded by the storm' (ES:409). It is not the mythical Woman who experiences the eye of the storm, but the 'unplayed I' of Elizabeth Hunter.

In Mitty Jacka's terms, however, Cleopatra or Seductress/Queen 'is in the end a safer bet' (ES:238). Much critical comment has been directed to accommodating Mrs Hunter's failure to change

significantly after her experience of the storm. White, in fact, directs readers to consider the propriety of Mrs Hunter as a candidate for transcendental experience by having her daughter twice raise the question (ES:71, 570). In regarding Mrs Hunter as a woman acting a myth for others, it becomes possible to see the experience in terms of the 'unplayed I': an experience in which the self recognises itself as a divided subject, split off, until this point, from its unconscious processes, and functioning purely in terms of social constraints. It is not so much seeing beyond as seeing into. To assess Mrs Hunter's subsequent withdrawal from her insight and return to her role, it is helpful to examine what de Santis remembers and what the aged Mrs Hunter's flickering memories omit. This is the period of 'illness' or 'breakdown' after her return from the island.

Mrs Hunter's memories end with her leaving the island 'weak from the great joy she had experienced' (ES:413). The period of 'illness' exists only in de Santis' memory and there is no explanation of how 'great joy' could have caused her patient's collapse. The limitations of de Santis' memory, however, are revealing. (While most of the time the Seductress/Queen holds the stage, I have already indicated that she does not have complete control.) De Santis cannot interpret the events of that time: she does not know that a dinner party is arranged for Mrs Hunter to recall, with ambivalence, her two lovers, Arnold Wyburd and Athol Shreve, at the same time; nor can she read the significance of a letter from Norway. She has no way of knowing why Mrs Hunter responds with such agitation to her construct of sacrificial love: 'love is a kind of supernatural state to which I must give myself entirely, and be used up, particularly my imperfections - till I am nothing' (ES:157). She is uncertain of the cause of her sudden hostile dismissal, after Mrs Hunter has almost acknowledged her as a friend. The reader's own understanding is limited in that most of the significance of the action is still withheld. Its full significance is gained only when its source, the storm scene, is recalled by the participant in the second half of the novel. By what constitutes a gap in

the text an understanding is reached of an unrecorded struggle to 'face the public with [her] very own version of the naked truth' (ES:573, my underlining). Like her son, who opts for 'another go at Lear, and fully clothed' (ES:573), Mrs Hunter prefers at this stage to remain the Lilac King. For her too, participation in the non-play is the equivalent of castration.

The locus of control, which appears so firmly centred in Mrs Hunter in the opening chapters, is gradually displaced, bringing into question the degree to which this ambivalent figure can still dominate her world. Although de Santis opens and closes the novel, her prominence cannot be ascribed to her role in Mrs Hunter's drama. Nor is Mrs Hunter the most significant figure in hers. She acquires a more realistic view of herself (outside the role of St Mary de Santis) by a ridiculous, yet genuine sexual attraction to Basil Hunter. This belated experience of her own physicality leads her to 'betray' Mrs Hunter by failing to plead her patient's case, and she is no longer able to view her as a substitute icon: 'in both physical and metaphoric terms, as the holy relic to which your faith bowed down in worship' (ES:446). The increase in insight more than compensates for the loss of the mythical object; de Santis' joy in life in the concluding section frightens her a little because it is wholly her own. Flora Manhood, whose own ambivalence about sexual love has seduced her into a violently ambivalent relationship with the Seductress/Queen, also makes use of Basil's sex, but in an absurd attempt to use pregnancy against sexual union. Her own womb-centred inwardness is recorded in detail, and is given prominence over the almost silenced Mrs Hunter in Chapter Eleven. In her jubilation over the onset of her menstruation, Flora can reduce the Queen to 'it', a 'bundle of trussed flannel scratching jewellery baby powder stained broacade and ratty sables' (ES:531). The death of Cleopatra is replayed without ritual and without handmaidens. Flora's life direction is set towards sexual love and children.

Chapter Ten excludes Mrs Hunter completely. All the action takes place at 'Kudjeri', the father's house to which Mrs Hunter's children make a pilgrimage. Both are in search of the Father, not the father of their personal history, as a defence against the Mother/King. Basil's fear of castration and emptiness stems from his sense of illegitimacy - he derives his 'place' from the usurped phallus of the mother. Dorothy seeks evidence of paternal power in order to reduce her mother's potency. The act of incest, in their parents' bed, demonstrates the last convoluted stage of displacement. Unable to restructure their historical past, they perform a mythical act of transgression, as if to eliminate their parents by begetting themselves. It is not, however, the mythical act that gives them the illusion of freedom, but the physical death of their mother, and the release into their hands of her money, as symbolic power. (Their permanent entrapment by the myth of the Mother/King is clear in the final sections dealing with the siblings. Each is 'up in the air', returning to a foreign country which has never become home; each, despite plans for a richer future, is still terrified of the void behind the screen.)

It is evident that the interpretations made of Mrs Hunter are ultimately more powerful than the person herself and the myth she wishes to project. Power passes from E. Hunter's chosen myth to E. Hunter as arbitrary signifier and it is important to note that, after the lengthy storm section in Chapter Eight, almost no information is given as to how she herself is constituting meaning. Although she has been directly confronted with her children's aggression, the rest of Chapter Eight largely avoids her internal responses. Her motives for wishing to commit suicide, or for commanding the two performances from Lotte Lippmann are not accessible. Her response to Lotte Lippmann's second dance, as her travestied alter ego, is detailed, however. The familiar narcissistic concerns are again presented, leading to the demand: 'surely, at the end of your life, you can expect to be shown the inconceivable something you

have always, it seems, been looking for' (ES:526). In the developing climax of the dance, Elizabeth Hunter finds herself helpless, her attempts at escape 'as needless as ineffectual as drunkenness' (ES:526, my underlining). She ceases to struggle (is overcome), and in the following sentence acknowledges Lippmann, (the dancing, liberated unconscious) as 'her other self'. The dance is now performed by both selves in 'more fluid' movements; images of the absolute void of the eye of the storm are linked to 'incurable illness old age death corruption' (ES:527). The never identified value of the Lilian Nutley episode is reaffirmed: both selves are 'galloping' (ES:527-528) towards the absence, which constitutes the centre. Only by participating as audience instead of performer can she achieve 'drunkenness' and release from the constraints of her role. The intensity of experience which she sought from some external source is to be found in contact with her own unconscious "truth". This unknotting of the signifying process, which has been denied access to the semiotic drives, 'a "second" return of instinctual functioning within the symbolic' (Kristeva, 1986:118), permits her the paradoxical experience of full presence as the means by which death, absence and non-signification, may confidently be faced.

Throughout ES, White has privileged the power of myths to affect realities, as well as the power of the subject to penetrate and re-form the myth. His Lacanian stance - 'There is no such thing as Woman' - affects not only Mrs Hunter but also de Santis (aspirant Virgin/Saint) and Manhood (aspirant Seductress/Queen). In the dying Mrs Hunter, however, he makes an additional statement: the 'subject in process/in question/on trial' is, in the final analysis, both more, and less, than its socio/sexual identity. White, despite his recognition of the power of ideologies to form and de-form the subject, claims a place for subjectivity. It, too, he contends, has a role to play in the dialectical process: the subject-in-process may merely make meaning by repeating the code of meanings already constituted; nevertheless, as his own text demonstrates, repetition

inevitably contains the capacity for displacement, and the unconscious semiotic will continue to assert itself by disrupting symbolic language and order. The marginal woman, who avoids any mythical attempt to master, and consequently be mastered by, the symbolic discourse, remains necessarily different/ other in her relationship to language, meaning and power, and must engage in an unrelenting struggle to transform that relationship, and consequently, the dominant ideology. It is upon the struggle and not the outcome that the text focuses, presenting, without sentimentality, the constraints placed upon women, both by the myths of Woman and by the 'realities' of the symbolic order which those myths sustain. The mere arrogation of patriarchal power is imaged as intensely destructive, resulting in Kristeva's 'homosexual' woman, whose children are both illegitimate and unnatural.

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A Fringe of Leaves

In turning away from contemporary Australia and placing FL in Australia in the early part of the 19th Century, White opens out a space in which a woman can be imaged within a socio-historical context that does not (yet) contain overt challenges to patrilinear capitalist society and its monotheistic ideology. This is the period of Voss, but where the concerns of that text were to re-write an established pioneering myth, offering alternatives to its male-centred signification, FL takes as its subject 'The Naked Lady' (FG:221) a myth of woman, inherently ambiguous and transgressive in the impossible juxtaposition of woman, naked truth, and socially covered 'lady'.

This myth, the 19th Century narrator predicts (FL:317), will become a myth for 'children, sniggering and incredulous', and will neither supply a 'motive for ritual and moral actions'

(Malinowski, 1926:108) nor invite an interrogation of the legitimated view of socio-sexual structures. Sustained only as a vestigial mythic narrative, 'too familiar, yet incomplete' (FL:317), it will ultimately be 'dismissed' even by children. (A summary of this incomplete narrative is, in fact, given by the Warming children in ES (365).) This vestigial myth appears to gesture towards a form of transgression, or violation of taboo, which, I suggest, is perceived as so inherently hostile to the dominant ideology that it must be repressed. At the same time, the continued existence of the vestigial myth serves two purposes: its failure to affect cultural structures reaffirms the potency of male-centred myths, as its absence would not; at the same time, this continued, if vestigial, presence, never completely denied, reaffirms the presence of the concealed/ forbidden/repressed but always present desire for transgression.

The author/narrator is thus able to place himself, not as re-writer, but original writer of the full myth, and his adoption of a nineteenth century idiom, and congruent narrative strategies, can be read as an attempt to mark his new fictive position.

The writer wishes to distance himself from a position of 'reading into' the myth from an historical perspective that consciously acknowledges ideological conflicts. I have elsewhere indicated the unorthodox nature of the relationship between author/narrator and character, which is most clearly evidenced by the lack of fixed boundaries between their voices. While many critics have regarded this as an intimation of White's inability to grant a 'character' autonomy, they omit to consider the essential obverse: the author/narrator's own autonomy is also disclosed as factitious. The limiting constraints of a realistic discourse are indeed ruptured, but, since White consistently discredits the concept of 'objective reality', a technique which blurs the distinctions between 'actual events' and subjective viewpoints, and between 'real'

character and narrator, merely creates a fault in Kristeva's sense, that is to say, an ambivalence. Consequently, when White situates the narrative stance in FL, he seems to align the author/narrator with the fictive nineteenth-century world, instead of the other way round, as if the text were empowered to define its own author.

The effect of this strategy is to privilege the text above the author, Patrick White, whose highly individual style is inevitably associated with a particular methodology and interpretation of processes and events. (I have elsewhere indicated White's overt indicators of his relationship as author to a text. This is particularly evident in the conclusions of the other 'pioneering' novels, TM and Voss.)

In SM, a formal framing device encloses the narratives of Waldo and Arthur, and appears to demonstrate the separateness of the outer narrated world from the inner. (The fact that, in the concluding section, Mrs Poulter's belief system is radically undermined by the grotesque consequences of the Waldo-Arthur narratives indicates that such separateness is, in fact, illusory.) The inner narrated world has its own focus, and operates, as I have indicated, not on the principles of realistic discourse which dominate the framing sections, but in terms of the subversive principles of the fantastic. In FL, the framing device is again social, and appears to demonstrate the separateness of inner and outer narrated worlds. The concluding section contains the return of a central figure to the social world and, as in SM, the social interpretation of that figure has to be made in terms of meagre events: potty Arthur is finally driven out of his mind, and the corpse of his brother, Waldo, is devoured by their dogs; 'Mrs Roxburgh' survives a shipwreck and capture by the aborigines, is rescued by an escaped convict and reaches civilisation stark naked. The social world, in terms of its own interpretations, accommodates both survivors within its framework: Arthur, as dotty old man,

in Peaches-and-Plums, 'Mrs Roxburgh' in a safe conduct to Sydney, civilisation and the future. Whereas, however, the figure of Mrs Poulter is not confined to the framing sections, but is used significantly in both the Waldo and Arthur narratives, Miss Scrimshaw never leaves the social world. While her function in the prologue is clearly indexical (she comments (FL:17) that Mrs Roxburgh 'reminded me of a clean sheet of paper which might disclose an invisible writing - if breathed upon'), she does not, in the conclusion, reflect any significant change in her belief system effected by the return of the survivor. The 'invisible writing' does not seem to have been read.

It is evident that the enclosed inner narrative of FL constitutes that 'invisible writing'. In a similar strategy in Voss, the author/narrator pointedly indicates his relationship to the text, indicating it as his, possibly 'true', interpretation; it seems appropriate to consider FL as a text, containing 'invisible writing', of which Patrick White, author/narrator, does not wish to appear the source. The narrator, uncharacteristically, adopts language as a mask, recording events and processes as if, like Ellen Gluyas, he too, finds that writing 'forms character' (FL:42) or, rather, that writing is the means by which an ideology determines how a 'character' or subject, or narrator, should constitute itself. By privileging language and narrative strategies appropriate to the socio-historical context of the novel, White privileges the power of language itself. When the 'invisible writing' is read, it is found to be part of the same system of signification as the 'visible' text, the system within which the many versions of the E of FL are constituted. It is only as part of the system that it is intelligible and it is because it is intelligible that it must be suppressed. This is the same double bind that operates upon E: she acquires identities in terms of social constructs and what she experiences through those multiple identities must be suppressed, not because it is unintelligible but because it is 'unspeakable'.

I have been at pains to demonstrate the alignment of the author/narrator with the ideological context of E, which uncovers what the vestigial mythic fragment (or fringe) conceals: the complicity between language and ideology to effect censorship. Treating the inner narrative of E as if he conformed to the tenets of realism, the author/narrator lures his reader into a subtle trap: the suppressed narrative is presented as 'what really happened'; the vestigial myth, in this instance, has a clear ideological origin and operates to suppress 'truth' - a truth 'that was masked and unconsciously denied' (O'Flaherty, 1980(a):102). The trap has been almost too successful: Veronica Brady sees FL as 'closer to the traditional novel, being about education in the art of living with others' (1977:135); Suzanne Edgar is one of many who regret 'the grotesque forced allegory of a sequence involving cannibalism' (1977:69). For such critics, the fact that FL offers an equally mythical alternative is obscured by White's narrative strategies. It is also significant that many critics stress E's learning experiences, viewing the novel as Brady does, as essentially 'about education' and basing their interpretations on E's success or failure in putting her 'lessons' into practice. Such critics seem to take it for granted that 'education' is inevitably for the benefit of the pupil.

Diana Brydon, however, to whose article (1984) I refer in my discussion of Voss, considers FL in terms of the 'enabling myth' of Heart of Darkness, and finds FL to constitute an exploration beyond the frontiers of that novel. In an earlier article, Don Anderson makes a similar connection between E and Voss which he sees in terms of the dynamic: 'Laura: becomes Voss: becomes Laura once again' (1980:409). Both critics offer stimulating appraisals of the novel in terms of its concerns with woman, marginalisation, patriarchal ideology, language and writing. In my own discussion, I shall follow Anderson's approach in regarding the mythologies of woman as central to 'an obsessive text within an insistent oeuvre' (1980:412).

The passivity of E has been noted by almost all critics and interpreted in divergent ways. This marginal passivity is certainly in striking contrast with the dynamic centrality of the E of ES, whose insistence upon selecting and projecting the mythic role of Seductress/Queen, and in the case of her children, Mother/King, dominates the text. Her attack upon the symbolic order which marginalises women is, as I have indicated, not made to subvert that order, but to enter it herself as a dominating principle. The E of FL (a title which stresses marginality as ES is indexical of centrality) raises other questions. Suzanne Edgar (1977) refers to a list of women in fiction given by Leonie Kramer in her review of FL: 'A Woman's Life and Love' (1976). These fictional women are cited by Kramer as examples of women in fiction who unlike E, convey 'a real sense of a woman's consciousness and sensibility ... Dorothea Casaubon, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, Emma Woodhouse ...' (cited in Edgar, 1976:69). Clearly, Professor Kramer is not prepared to view her two perceptions of the novel: as ideas about 'the nature of civilisation' and 'the history of Ellen Roxburgh's inner life' (cited in Edgar, 1976:69) as inextricably and essentially connected. Brydon, by virtue of her perception of the analogic relationship between women and indigenes, rightly views E as representative of the political/personal.

In identifying Laura in Voss as a similar analogue, I have indicated that from the first, Laura is presented as a 'dissident', self-exiled from the female identification constituted by the symbolic order, and decisively taking action against it by a number of strategies of confrontation and subversion. This effectively distinguishes Laura from E, who may be viewed as engaged in the prior processes of becoming aware of her condition of subjection, of the extent to which she herself expresses and upholds the controlling orthodoxies, and of the necessity to find an accommodation for herself in the patriarchal society to which she returns, and in a sense, belongs. In political terms, one may consider E to represent a

prior stage in the life of the colonised, where the struggle is to recognise the state of subjection as 'unnatural', to disclose to oneself the degree to which the dominant ideology is sustained by one's own attitude to language, power and meaning, and, without a positive belief in the possibility of subverting that ideology, attempt an accommodation within the system, which will enable one to survive one's own complicity. It is clear that Laura represents considerable development: her accommodation is to move beyond the purely personal matter of relationships, and to act against her society from within an apparently 'sacrificial' role. Moreover, Laura is a speaking subject whose object is to make silenced women articulate and to encourage pioneers to seek a more 'natural' language; in addition, she speaks and is spoken by the Other languages of dream and dream-time. E's passivity is not merely linked to, but inherent in, her alienation from language itself.

Voss, setting out on the last phase of the exploration, can be so confident of his power over language that he can cheerfully dismiss it:

> "Ach, Dugald, Wörter haben keine Bedeutung. Sinnlos!" "Nonsense", he added, and asked: "Do you understand nonsense?"
>
> Voss:190.

The arrogance with which he convinces himself that it is he who will penetrate the aboriginal world and system of significance by the power of his will is mirrored in his earlier statement to Boyle: 'In general ... it is necessary to communicate without knowledge of the language' (Voss:169). During his process of being interpreted, the emptiness of his condition is demonstrated: although 'doubly locked in language' (Voss:274), his failure to have the aboriginal song translated (Voss:334) does not deter him: he is convinced that by 'intuitive' communication 'with these black subjects' he will 'finally rule them with a sympathy that was above words' (Voss:334). His

'subjects' do not wait to be translated. His later 'sign of friendship' (Voss:365), the shaking of hands, is impotent magic against the aboriginal interpretation of the constellation of man and comet. Outside the power structures in which it inheres, his language becomes what another system of signification determines it to be, so that his last letter to Laura can become, to Dugald and the tribe he meets, 'the pictures of fern roots' or, more ironically, 'the thoughts of which the whites wished to be rid ... the sad thoughts, the bad, the thoughts that were too heavy, or in any way hurtful' (Voss:220). As I have elsewhere indicated, it is the Other system of signification that is translating him.

Passivity and alienation from language thus mark off the E figure from both Laura and Voss. The link that Brydon establishes between Marlow and Kurtz (and Voss, by implication) and E is the quest, but this concept of the quest is itself subject to interrogation. Embedded in the concept of the quest is the will to undertake the search, a conscious decision to set out on the journey. This element is conspicuously absent in E. There is, in fact, such a quest, but it is not hers. The quest figure is the ailing Austin Roxburgh, who, quite uncharacteristically, takes the decision to abandon his library and go half way across the world to visit his brother, Garnet. The nature of that quest (which has failed before the novel opens with the Roxburghs' return voyage) is already indicated in the Prologue. The minor actor, Mr Merivale, comments on the youthful attachment of Austin (who was of 'a different strain') to 'his very unlikely brother'. 'As though he hoped to borrow some of Garnet's health and strength' (FL:12, my underlining).

The 'meaning' of Garnet, 'the imagined brother of his childhood' (FL:177), is shared by their mother, who 'translated "sensuality" into "health"' (FL:132). They use the identical image, carefully infantilised, to express it:

> Garnet was such a sturdy little fellow. I can see him in the firelight, sitting in front of that brass fender after Nurse had given him his bath. Brimful of life and health! Austin so pale.
>
> FL:69.

> Austin Roxburgh had fallen to contemplating as far as he dared the mystery of virility as embodied in his brother Garnet. Risen from the hip-bath which Nurse Hayes had stood on the floor against the fender, the white flesh took on its worth in gold from firelight weaving out of the grate.
>
> FL:176.
> (my underlining)

The image is invoked on three significant occasions. The older Mrs Roxburgh recalls it after the death of the Austin Roxburghs' second infant. Despite E's 'health' (sensuality), neither child has survived.

(It is highly significant that in E's journal , a document whose truth-value is utterly suspect, she records the fact of her first pregnancy in the following terms:

> ... I am of course very happy and Mr R. is overjoyed. His brother Garnet has not got a child, and it is right that himself the elder brother shld [sic] pass on the name through a son and heir. (Provided it is this and not a disappointing girl!)
>
> FL:68.

Writing as Mrs Roxburgh, E demonstrates the extent to which she accepts her reproductive role in the patrilinear system. The child is 'theirs', not hers.)

Austin Roxburgh himself invokes the image on two other occasions (FL:132, 176). (Since 'Garnet' is an icon, it is not surprising that Austin protects it from contamination by the adult Garnet Roxburgh of Van Diemen's Land.) On the first of these, Mr Roxburgh, in whose presence 'reality had always come and gone

... with startling suddenness' (FL:211), is briefly compelled to recognise his isolation from the world outside the book. His yearning to be accepted as a man by the ship's officers is significantly expressed:

> He longed to join the mate in the kind of esoteric conversation the latter would conduct amongst his fellow initiates, a freemasonry to which Mr Roxburgh could never be admitted, it seemed, because he had not learnt the sign. In an even more despondent mood he would see himself locked in his solitary confinement cell, while those outside were able to communicate with the fluency, and according to the rights, of human beings.
>
> FL:130.

There are three elements involved in the narrator's word-play: communal ritual of initiates, language, and penal servitude. The convicts of Van Diemen's Land have not received Mr Roxburgh's attention except as moral abstractions, their lives simply signs of 'retribution and justice' (FL:113). Nevertheless, he himself is a prisoner, within his language system. Language is generally considered by Austin Roxburgh as a logical system by means of which a moral scheme can be imposed upon primal chaos. Part of the attraction of Virgil lies in this. His own journal represents writing in these terms: 'to discuss his mood in rational terms, and thus restore a moral balance' (FL:202). (His censorship of material threatening that moral balance is very suggestive (FL:61).) Yet, in this section, language is regarded more primitively: without the 'sign', which he has not learned, he is condemned; he cannot 'communicate' with the 'fluency' of the initiate. To 'communicate' is thus to use language in a magical/mythical sense, and in this constellation of ritualistic terms, it seems possible to uncover a proleptic play: to communicate 'according to the rights' (rites) 'of human beings'.

Significantly, when Mr Roxburgh attempts the rites of communication with Courtney, he employs 'an idiom he would not

have used in politer circles' and asks a displaced question. Instead of asking for initiation into 'the tying of some immensely complicated knot', he asks instead for 'the time', timidly retreating from 'the direction of poetry' to surface regularity. In the section that follows in free indirect discourse, Austin Roxburgh recalls that, in his case, feeling and 'animal spirits' were discouraged by the mother, 'who feared that too much of either might aggravate his delicate health' (FL:131). The 'Garnet' icon, as he once more invokes it, has a 'health' that feeds on the dangers of sensuality:

> He could remember an occasion, when seated by the curiously woven brass fender, he had watched Garnet leap the rail, and stand crowing from among the coals, clothed in a suit of fiery feathers.
>
> FL:132.

The 'Garnet' icon is invoked for the second time after the wreck of the Bristol Maid. Mr Roxburgh has been observing the boy, Oswald Dignam, in his adoration of Mrs Roxburgh as 'perfection ... if only in a dream, or fog [and] beauty, true as well as legendary' (FL:175). Although he prefers to equate the boy with himself in terms of more concrete secrets: (Oswald's hidden glorybag and his own concealed Vergil), it is secret longing or 'desire' of the unattainable that connects them. He escapes from 'Garnet' by making himself concentrate on his wife 'whose value had been increased by this child of theirs hidden inside her' (FL:177, my underlining). The expression '"one flesh"', which 'he had been inclined to reject as in bad taste' (FL:177, my underlining) now seems acceptable, even supportive. (Austin Roxburgh regards his wife as a conflation of his mother and 'Garnet'.)

Anderson, in his suggestive analysis of anthropophagy in FL (1980) concentrates upon E. I suggest that the concept of 'communion' is a structural principle in the earlier part of the novel beyond E and that Austin Roxburgh is central to its presence. Anderson refers to the culminating incident, in which

'even the refined and valetudinarian Austin Roxburgh contemplates cannibalism' (1980:413) but does not elaborate. The incident represents the climax of a carefully structured narrative. When the survivors reach the cay, they briefly separate, and Mr Roxburgh is presented as 'the solitary explorer' on a 'desert island'. Conflicting views of this archetypal figure are offered: he has just enjoyed 'the luxury of a postponed, ungainly, and not unexpectedly painful stool'; his reaction to 'the moment when self-esteem is confronted with what may be pure being- or nothingness' looks like the misery of a man 'suffering from a toothache'. Indeed, the 'desolate promontory' is not accessible as 'a moral altar for the final stages of his martyrdom'; it is already occupied by the steward, Spurgeon, sprawled out 'as though consigning his meagre flesh to decomposition' (FL:185-186).

Bearing in mind Austin Roxburgh's failed, and indeed impossible, quest to acquire 'health' from renewed contact with the icon of virility, and the extensions of this yearning beyond the production of living issue to communion with other men, one is forced to regard this section as a parodic version of Mr Roxburgh's quest. It is, in fact, an increasingly grotesque parody, in which the original version of the quest becomes fused with the parodic replica. The friendship which develops between Spurgeon and Mr Roxburgh centres upon corruption and decomposition, an association in which the 'esoteric rites' (FL:193) and 'occult powers' (FL:194) into which Austin Roxburgh is initiated are both eroticised (he considers Spurgeon 'his personal conquest' (FL:201)) and debased. After Spurgeon's death, Mr Roxburgh grieves 'as one who had hungered all his life after friendships' (FL:206), and it is the use of this metaphor that stimulates 'his actual hunger', so that he briefly considers the lost body of his friend, comically, as an item that 'might have contributed appreciably to an exhausted larder' (FL:206). Despite the censorship of self-disgust, the language of his dream (which is textually presented on the same reality level as his waking consciousness) validates, and elaborates on

his translation of metaphor into actuality. The authority figure, Captain Purdew (who is also 'mad'), reveals the 'traditional pattern' of such thoughts. In a grotesque parody of a Christian communion service, the insane priest/authority offers the body of Spurgeon in the ritual of communion, emphasizing particularly the pustulent boil, or 'spiritual matter' (FL:207). The appalling pun is not part of reasonable or logical language (Austin Roxburgh could only dream it); it is, however, the grotesque revealing itself not as displacement, but as containment: 'something more than the truth, something real in the extreme, not something arbitrary, false, absurd, and contrary to reality' (Thomas Mann, cited in Harpham, 1982:131). (The theological dimension of this particular sequence, in which the sublime is reached through the grotesque, is exemplified in the act of the mystic, St Catherine of Siena, who, to demonstrate her love of God, the unembodiable, drank a bowlful of pus, the most corrupted form of body. White makes use of this in Memoirs:94, 99.)

Thus the text has slyly inserted a Christian (mystical and theological) valorisation of sacramental communion/consumption/consummation into the narrative of the most rational, most civilised of men, a non-father, at best, a putative father, but still a father in Robert Kroetsch's terms: 'the father is really a metonomy ... representing the whole tradition in a sense, the past literary tradition, the system of value' (cited in Brydon, 1984:394). The representation of such a patriarchal figure as himself alienated, imprisoned and emasculated by the exclusive operation of the symbolic order demonstrates that the repression of the semiotic drives, Rousseau's 'maternal characteristics', constitutes the enslavement of master as much as servant. (Austin Roxburgh's redemptive 'consummation', such as it is, bears a striking resemblance to the martyrdom of a similar figure, Palfreyman, in Voss.)

Mrs Roxburgh has merely accompanied her husband to Van Diemen's Land, and E has no notion of a quest beyond what she records in her journal, while at 'Dulcet', as an instance of 'the inhuman side of my nature'. She admits to having a closer sense of intimacy with Zennor and the alien country she now finds herself in than with the human beings she 'loves'. This 'unreasonable' attitude she ascribes to her 'instincts', which 'hanker after something deeper, which I may not experience this side of death' (FL:92). The placement of these comments is significant: they are embedded in her account of the Aspinall visit, between her observation of Garnet Roxburgh's social attentions to Mrs Aspinall and the confirmation of her suspicions of their sexual liaison. The instincts she writes of may hanker after something more earthy than a mystical union with the landscape.

In referring to Zennor, she speaks of 'parents and family' to whom she did not 'belong'. It is pertinent to recall the father with his strongly physical presence, the male cousin, Will, another semi-incestuous figure of attraction, and the adjective 'trumpery' with which her aunt denigrates and accuses her, and which she adopts herself, at times, as characteristic of her meretricious, delusive femaleness.

Ellen Gluyas and Ellen Roxburgh both speak the languages of groups to which they do not belong, and in terms of which they are identified. The move from Ellen Gluyas to Mrs Roxburgh transposes E from the known to the unknown, but it is not her first experience of displacement. Kristeva comments:

> A woman is trapped within the frontiers of her body and even of her species, and consequently always feels exiled both by the general clichés that make up a common consensus and by the very powers of generalisation intrinsic to language.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:296.

E's attachment to the 'myths of place' demonstrates her need to escape the homelessness of the exile, which is also,

paradoxically, a form of imprisonment (E recognises this as the meaning of the return to 'civilization': 'returning voluntarily to the prison to which she had been sentenced, a lifer from birth' (FL:324).

Garnet Roxburgh epitomises ambivalence for E. On the one hand, he is 'Garnet', icon of male virility, which, out of loyalty to her husband's pale masculinity, she professes to reject, while her own female 'health' recognises its value. On the other hand, as Garnet Roxburgh of Van Diemen's Land, he is the dark side of Austin Roxburgh's moral order, which is sustained by expelling from the visible social system all its transgressive elements. (The irony of Mr Roxburgh's pleasure in 'felix, qui potuit ...', as a literary conceit is demonstrated in his censored journal entry (FL:61) - 'Happy, indeed, is he who can ignore the too substantial shadows ....') An additional complexity is created by E's double identification: as Ellen Gluyas, she sees how a class system, to which Mrs Roxburgh belongs, creates classes of 'miscreants'. A man of the Roxburgh class may end up in the 'morally infected' world of Van Diemen's Land, but without any other form of sentence, free, as Mr Roxburgh smugly observes, to do 'very well for himself'. By a suspect 'accident' Garnet sheds his 'considerably older widow of means', and assures himself of a 'position in the community' and 'a respectable income' (FL:73). The God of the Roxburgh class is indeed the Lord God of Hosts, a militant and aggressive deity, trampling in self-righteous triumph over those who are designated 'the enemy'. Ellen Gluyas cannot but see the 'human beasts' of Van Diemen's Land, the vanquished 'enemy', and what she sees troubles the mind of Mrs Roxburgh, who is 'on the winning side' (FL:95).

Brydon pertinently observes that 'the first task for any colonised person is to separate the false enemies from the true: to choose sides' (1984:390). It seems more appropriate to view E's experiences in terms of this task rather than as the experiences of a quest figure. I have already indicated that E,

as female child, begins to identify herself, as Ellen Gluyas, with guilt and shame, against which work, 'labour' as a 'sacramental function' as Austin Roxburgh would have it (FL:48), provides some protection. As Mrs Roxburgh, she acquires a second function: not only is she Mr Roxburgh's nurse/servant/ mother substitute, she is also his work of art, the object which gratifies his half-smothered creative instincts. The language she acquires, and which 'forms' her 'character', is more vice than virtue: she learns to use writing, as Mr Roxburgh does, though less expertly, to sustain the illusions upon which 'moral order' is built.

(Most significant in her journal entries are the omissions: gaps in her text which conceal her adultery with Garnet, her pregnancy and the dubious paternity of the foetus, the identity of 'An Other' (FL:122). Moreover, although consciously she asserts that she has 'lost the art of common speech' (FL:91), there are significant slippages, even in her written language, that demonstrate its suppressed presence. Thus, in the entry relating her discovery of her 'rival', Mrs Aspinall's pink bow, preserved as a sentimental trophy in Garnet's desk, we find the following: 'I found myself smelling this trumpery object, like I was a dog (FL:97, my underlining).)

Garnet Roxburgh, as she comes to admit to herself, is 'less her seducer than the instrument she had chosen for measuring depths she was tempted to explore' (FL:104). It is a decisive act and she recognises it as 'the only instance when her will had asserted itself, and then with bared, ugly teeth' (FL:119). Garnet would certainly make an appropriate enemy, but E recognises that he only exists in her history because of her femaleness, which, for her, remains the 'true' enemy.

After the wreck of the Bristol Maid, her external identification as 'lady' acquires additional dimensions. Pilcher attacks her as spurious representative of an envied upper class; Oswald Dignam offers her courtly love; the other men in the longboat

sustain themselves by elevating her, as Anderson points out (1980:410), to the status of Mater Dolorosa. Nor is her iconic status wholly withdrawn when she enters the aboriginal world - a world for which she has no language. (The text tends to indicate her by role: 'prisoner', 'captive', 'victim', 'slave', 'beast of burden, 'nurse', also 'work of art' and 'demi-goddess'.) E anticipates that her period of captivity will constitute her 'martyrdom', which presupposes that as 'innocent' upholder of civilisation and moral order, she will be subjected to persecution by the 'enemies' and upholders of darkness. (Her fringe of leaves and her wedding ring function for her in terms of her 'civilised' identification.) In point of fact, intense as her privations are, the aboriginal tribe does not read her in such terms of 'innocence' or 'guilt'. As a woman, and as a woman outside the privileged social structure, her roles are interpreted in terms harsher but not essentially different from those of the society she has been separated from. Were she to have accepted 'marriage' to the privileged aboriginal magician/ scholar alter ego of Austin Roxburgh, she would have led, as her brief experience of the situation indicates to her, the same distinguished, and ultimately boring, life of the wife of an upper class male.

Critics have not acknowledged a singular development in E during her time with the aborigines: only in this section does she begin to laugh - with the children, in badinage with the fishermen, later with Jack Chance. Alongside the distress of her physical privations, a physical freedom of expression asserts itself - the rights of the body. In forgetting other languages, E acquires the pleasures, and pains, of an Other. Brydon rightly points out the significant placement of E's losing touch even with her personal given name, Ellen, immediately before stumbling upon the aboriginal rites of the body (1984:392). This is possibly her moment of most complete, mute nakedness. Logically enough, neither the Gluyas nor Roxburgh language system can express the meaning of her act of cannibalism, except in their own terms. The act belongs to, is

an item of, a system of signification which she never masters, but into which she is steadily drawn by other forms of participation. The wordless hymn against darkness, which she begins by parodying (FL:246), follows the pattern of parody, by becoming more, not less than the 'truth'. At the corroboree among her 'neighbours', in the 'rows of correctly seated women' (FL:253), E, by gesture, sound and rhythm, is a participant, not an observer.

Significantly, she identifies 'Ulappi' as a 'pseudo-black' by reading the scars on his back. Unlike the mainland aboriginals, whose 'conventional' scars form part of a signifying process, his scars are 'what appeared to be a patternless welter' (FL:250). Both Ellen Gluyas and Mrs Roxburgh make contact with him. The triad of 'patternless' scars, Ellen Gluyas and Mrs Roxburgh, placed at the beginning of the narrative of E and Jack Chance, is proleptic of its end. It is Ellen Gluyas who first speaks to Jack 'in her native tongue', and it is she who gives her name as 'Ellen'. It is Mrs Roxburgh, who responds to his horror of being tortured at the triangle: '"They won't dare! I am Mrs Roxburgh!"' (FL:253). The entente that has been initiated evaporates at the sound of the authoritarian voice, and Jack Chance leaves her.

It is mainly as Ellen Gluyas that E lives and journeys with Jack Chance toward Moreton Bay, but, even as Ellen Gluyas, she is chiefly silent. Only at the last moment of betrayal does Ellen Gluyas speak of the most significant event of her life - her attempt to exorcise herself of her guilty femaleness by immersion in St. Hya's well (FL:298-299). Ellen does not 'remember' what her 'sickness' was, nor whether she was 'cured', but even in this act of 'not remembering' Ellen Glüyas reveals her intent not to 'remember' Jack Chance, her lover, except as her convict-rescuer, a convicted murderer. (The roles Jack plays in E's experience are also mirrored in the 'names' she gives him, moving from 'brute' and 'convict' to 'hoped-for rescuer', 'her servant', 'assigned slave', 'decent man', 'noble

creature', 'saviour-lover', 'her little boy', 'monstrous child', and in the final stages of rejection 'more like an animal than a man' - a 'shambling human scarecrow'. The extent to which language speaks E mirrors her complicity in the ideology to which she is subjected.)

Her immediate language shift, after Ellen Gluyas has 'not remembered' St Hya's well, to Mrs Roxburgh, at her most specious, registers that the betrayal has already taken place. Mrs Roxburgh addresses Jack as gracious benefactress, absurdly, insanely, since she promises a reward from a dead husband, but with a message from the patriarchal order which is nonetheless quite clear. If Jack Chance 'can hear 'em settin' up the triangles', he has understood the pattern which his scars illustrate. E will throw in her lot with 'the winning side', and if the Lord God of Hosts demands Jack's flesh, she will willingly sacrifice him.

The silence that E preserves in Moreton Bay about Jack Chance, her lover, is singularly complete: Mrs Roxburgh is even able obliquely to tell the Commandant of the cannibalism as a secret ceremony, 'a kind of communion'. To say she was 'one of them', to admit that 'it is possible to understand what words are about without understanding the words themselves' is an adroit management of words to ensure misunderstanding. Like Pilcher, she can, in some areas, employ language to her own advantage. It is, after all, the system she is born and re-born into. But only a wordless cry 'as quickly suppressed as it was briefly uttered' (FL:361), evokes the wordless lamentations of the aboriginals and her own grief, in the gathering darkness of her last moments in Moreton Bay.

In Pilcher's chapel, E is faced with the ambiguity of her social existence. The two opposing messages: 'God is Love' and 'Lord God of Hosts' exemplify the duplicitous social world to which, in one form or another, she has always been condemned. In terms of these values she herself has been constituted: 'I dun't

believe a person is ever really cured of what they was born with' (FL:299). To the primary guilt of E at merely being a woman has been added the conscious guilt of having chosen to survive socially as a lady. If E could articulate it, she would acknowledge herself as the enemy as much as the victim.

Her accommodation to this ambivalence is ambiguous. In donning the 'garnet' dress, she appears to affirm her sexuality; in speaking dialect to Jevons she seems to offer him a more authentic 'self'. The text gestures toward the 'traditional' happy ending for a female protagonist: marriage and a brood of children. Yet this is held in tension by the iconic figure posed ambiguously 'beside the pregnant mother in her nest of drowsy roly-poly children', which possibly represents no more than 'a circumstantial straw which may indicate an ordered universe' (FL:365-366).

In the conclusion of the narrative Miss Scrimshaw once again functions indexically. Despite, or because of, her position as woman-outsider, whose subtle roles reflect the unstated desires of her social world, from Mrs Merivale's 'professional pythoness' (FL:17) to her reflection of Commandant Lovell as domestic 'commanding officer' (FL:356), she would, if she could, offer a supporting role to her friend. Yet there is nothing to be reflected, no service to offer. Although, 'true to her nature' (FL:336) Miss Scrimshaw has investigated most things, the silent and now veiled text of E, like the screaming of the convict on the triangle, is 'too naked or too cutting' (FL:351, my underlining) to be absorbed into her process of interpretation. It remains a repressed, unread document, yet something she will always half remember, like E's quickly suppressed cry of pain (FL:361).

Paradoxically, it is she who offers herself to be read, in a rush of candour - 'the natural pitfall - you will surely agree - when pioneering in the bush' (FL:362). In this role reversal, Miss Schrimshaw reveals her own hidden desire: '"To soar! ...

To reach the heights! To breathe! Perch on the crags and look down on everything that lies beneath one! Elevated, and at last free!"' (FL:363). The crypto-eagle has no desire for the female roles established by a patriarchal society; she yearns for her own odyssey instead of being no more than the ornamental artefact of a sailor's idle hour, which her name denotes. Nevertheless, bound as she is within her social constraints, she will not go further in interpreting herself than to reveal that 'I am a woman only in my form, not in the essential part of me' (FL:363). She is essentially not a woman; she wishes she were an eagle; she refuses to consider what she might actually be if she rejects the male version of what constitutes 'woman'.

'Mrs Roxburgh' responds to this revelation with the words of 'her humbler friend' and mother-figure, Mrs Oakes. Yet this reply is only a denial of the romanticism of the soaring eagle - E counters this with Mrs Oakes' version of what a woman is but whether she herself will accept this subject-position is left in doubt. It is not clear whether Mr Jevons is the bull-frog to which she will play princess in a general comic resolution. There is textual pressure for such comic resolution: the crypto-eagle is characterised in the 'real' world by flumps and squawks; the 'smouldering figure' of E may resemble 'breathing statuary', but E's own experience of this elevated moment is conjecturally disclaimed as the possible effect of hot tea and tight stays.

It is the indexical figure, Miss Schrimshaw, who observes this tableau vivant and attempts to read it, despite her doubts, as an endorsement of the paradisal values of the Fourth Eclogue by the repression of the insights of the Sixth. (Her attempted reading, of course, is a 'civilised' one and recalls the Vergilian nostalgia of Austin Roxburgh.) As woman-outsider, she focusses attention upon the desire for closure of a 'typical' woman's narrative, a desire which remains suspended in the ambiguity of this final 'scene'.

In constructing E's mythic narrative, White has not sought to resolve ambiguities but rather to focus upon them. Between the two positions: woman as innocent victim and woman as field of transgressive desire, he has inserted a text which binds the fates of women and men together in the same set of contradictions. How these contradictions may be resolved; whether it is possible to resolve them - these are the questions the text, since it is 'only a myth', does not attempt to answer.

CHAPTER 6

MYTH-EN-ABYME:

Flaws in the Glass and Memoirs of Many in One

The examination of the problematics of consciousness, through the androgynes of AS and TA, emblems of contradiction, has been considered as a fictional frame to White's other fiction, excluding FG and Memoirs. In reviewing the adequacy of this structure, it is necessary to consider briefly the texts that have been thus enclosed, and whether the adoption of framing texts which are essentially unstable, ambiguous and ambivalent (and thus in opposition to the very notion of enclosing or foreclosing structures) has generated a critical discourse supportive of the hypotheses of this study.

TM has been read as a text in search of validating structures outside the cultural order, and in particular its mythical structures: pioneering, the Bush-City duality and a 'manly' or 'fraternal' egalitarianism. Stan Parker displays the inherent contradiction in the subject, between what his conscious self (conscious in that it is able to feature in discourse) can represent in a discourse whose features are ideologically determined, and the self which is only partly represented there. The constraints of this particular male-centred ideology, and its supporting myths, are shown to operate not only against social practices and 'transgressions' which fall outside the parameters of that ideology but also, most significantly, against language itself. Stan, as speaking subject, is largely silent, and his silence is displayed as ideologically determined. Language, like consciousness, is demonstrated to be both 'inside' and 'outside' the subject, simultaneously; they are at once 'in' the ideology and 'in' the subject.

Voss is equally regarded as interrogating male-centred myth and ideology, and the interpretations of 'reality' they seek to legitimate as 'truth'. Postulating that the signifying practices which purport to represent the 'truth' about Australia's past are dependent upon the exclusion and absence of women and indigenes as speaking subjects, the author/narrator presents an alternative (and ultimately enigmatic) mythological structure in which he 'writes women in'. The text permits a wholly unrealistic and extra-logical interplay between women and the other systems of signification native to Australia to suggest that the transgression of the symbolic law may be the source of possible social change. The entry of what is 'outside' (woman and the indigene) into the protected 'inside' of Eurocentric patriarchal culture attacks the basic binary oppositions set up by such an ideology, between what is acceptable and what is not. The blurring of the rigid either/or boundaries invites the reader to engage in active critical enquiry - to produce meaning instead of accepting it as 'given'.

RC interrogates the myth of mateship to dis-cover what that myth strives to conceal: the intense desire for transgression which is imaged as submission to eroticised violence. While the suburb of Sarsaparilla overtly displays the characteristics of a mindless utopia, offering 'the prospect of continuing to opt out of history' (Rowse, 1978:10), the carnivalesque scene of the mock-crucifixion exteriorises the political and ideological conflicts normally repressed in a society of 'suburbia ... a society without history or politics' (Rowse, 1978:4). The 'dissidents' presented in opposition to patriarchal ideology in general are read as exemplifying divergent sources of resistance to the restrictions of the symbolic order: the scholar against the Enlightenment, the aboriginal against paternalistic exploitation, Miss Hare and Mrs Godbold against subject-

positions determined for women by the symbolic order operating within class and family structures. The text privileges dissidence as a response to patrilinear ideologies generally, extending its operation beyond the Australian context.

SM embeds a pseudo-dissidence in a Sarsaparilla presented as at least capable of change. The attempt to negate the subjects' insertion into the symbolic order by the mere withdrawal from both the 'old' and the 'new' ideologies into a-topia is dis-covered as both conservative and corrosive. Within this construct, the fantasy (or inverted myth) of the double interrogates the ideological concept of 'character', the coherent, indivisible and continuous whole, and allies it powerfully to classical realism and the 'syntax' of cultural order. By foregrounding its own signifying practice, SM 'begins to betray its version of the "real" as a relative one, which can only deform and transform experience, so the "real" is exposed as a category, as something articulated by and constructed through the literary or artistic text' (Jackson, 1981:84).

Both ES and FL engage the problematic of Woman in terms of both myth and the 'reality' that is sustained by myth. In considering the ambivalence of woman as Other, two subject-positions can be distinguished: woman is both 'inside' and 'outside' male society - 'both a romantically idealised member of it and a victimised outcast. She is sometimes what Defends man against chaos and sometimes she is Chaos itself' (Eagleton, 1983:170). Both positions are mythical and both are constructs designed to sustain the patriarchal system of signification, in other words they are myths of social charter.

The possibility that woman, as dissident, may subvert the patriarchal system, by using male-centred myth as a mask for her subversive activities, is examined in ES. In a text which stresses woman's needs to be connected to her own semiotic drives and, in particular, to her own body as site of pleasure,

the concomitant need for a non-contradictory subject-position within the symbolic order is negatively expressed by the replacement of one contradictory subject-position with another. The double bind of women is revealed through the central consciousness of E. Hunter, who obtains a degree of power within the symbolic order but at the cost of her own female experience. In this way, however, the relationship of women to the socio-symbolic contract, outside their mythical roles as Other, can be seen as based upon the same premises as male relationships to that contract: the repression or displacement by socio-historical constraints of everything that is considered to be inimical to that specific contract.

The mythical roles of woman as 'inside' and 'outside' male society are generalised in FL to other male-centred cultural orders, defined Eurocentrically as Other and 'primitive'. In both aboriginal and 'civilised' societies, E's status demonstrates the capacity of such societies to invest woman with both roles simultaneously. (The text also explores the ideological analogue of woman and indigene in terms of the status accorded each by patriarchal colonialism.) While E's alienation from language indicates the absence and exclusion from that language of female 'intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past' (Kristeva, 1986:194), her complicity in that censorship implicates her in the social function of 'executioner' as well as 'victim'. E is ultimately inserted into a tentative new position, outside the culturally legitimated roles of romantic idealisation and outcast/victim, where she may, or may not, negotiate a more congruent subject-position than those she formerly held.

Readings of these texts have disclosed certain common features of the writer's discourse. This discourse is inherently antagonistic to the common sense approach to realism, and, indeed, to reality, dis-covering both as ideologically determined. Equally, myths of social charter are presented as

legitimating and sustaining ideological systems of signification, which necessarily include perceptions of 'reality'. The subject, however, is neither regarded as wholly predetermined and foreclosed by ideology nor is it the 'autonomous individual' of the bourgeois novel (an equally ideological construct). Presented as split and decentred, 'unfixed, unsatisfied, the human being is not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory, perpetually open to change' (Belsey, 1980:132). The mythical structures which are privileged in this discourse are equally contradictory and open-ended, setting in motion the intent-to-interpret, which Gould (1981:43-44) postulates as the essential element in myth, but refusing to supply a cognitive map which will in turn foreclose upon meaning. These mythical structures do, however, interrogate and destabilise the commonly held view of 'reality' suggesting that our perceptions of the 'real' and the 'unreal', the 'true' and the 'false' are unstable, arbitrary and ambivalent.

The androgyne, as central, contradictory figural consciousness in the framing texts, interrogates not only our preconceptions of what is 'possible', 'important' or 'real' in terms of the self but also the contradictions inherent in the repressive ideology itself. The framing texts themselves are inherently ambivalent, unstable, offering an 'authenticity' in conveying the social world or the interior experiences of the individual in quest of identity only to withdraw it, in favour of incoherence, dissolution of the classical unities of space, time and character, and gestures towards their own textuality. While on the one hand there is an authorial voice, it is not indubitably authoritative: though the narrator might seem to be speaking through the 'character', it is equally possible that the 'character' is speaking through the narrator. If the reader seeks a stable point of reference, she will not find it in identification with the protagonist (whose 'identity' is always open to question) nor with an authoritative discourse which has

full control of 'language, power and meaning'. As interrogative texts, these works may be regarded as functioning like myths themselves, setting in motion, through language, the reader's intent-to-interpret that very triad of language, power and meaning, and refusing to supply a system of signification, other than their own enigmatic and unstable language, out of which the reader herself must produce meaning.

Finally, the framing texts denounce the concept of sexual identity, seen as 'innocent' and 'natural', as another common sense item of ideological origin. Attached to the bio/ physiological construct are 'characteristics' which have their basis in a patriarchal system, one which has founded its symbolic economy upon a radical separation of the sexes. For, as Kristeva remarks:

> without this gap between the sexes, without this localisation of the polymorphic, orgasmic body, desiring and laughing, in the other sex, it would have been impossible, in the symbolic realm, to isolate the principle of One Law - the One, Sublimating, Transcendent Guarantor of the ideal interests of the community.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:141.

Kristeva (1986:139-159) presents an extensive analysis of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as patriarchal monotheism. She proposes that Jewish monotheism was devised to create a community 'in the face of all the unfavourable concrete circumstances: an abstract, nominal, symbolic community beyond individuals and their beliefs' (Kristeva, 1986:140). In this essentially symbolic construct, community and cohesion were to be produced in the name of the Law, and submission to a single (in this case, male) deity, for, as Kristeva remarks, it was only 'the word', or symbolic act, that was available, in the absence of state or land, 'to gather together this society that history was bent on dispersing' (1986:142). Since the Law can only function in terms of interdiction and division, '(thing/

word, body/speech, pleasure/law, incest/procreation ...)', the Other is a necessary construct. In the patriarchal construct, woman, as the Other, is the site of desire; she represents those elements which cannot be accommodated in a symbolic community 'in the grip of the superego' (Kristeva, 1986:141). Males were thus enabled to live through an abstract symbolic authority which granted them knowledge and power, while at the same time they could both enact and control eroticism by the establishment of the legal principle of patrilinear descent.)

The female and male androgynes reflect, in the similarity and dissimilarity of their narratives, the divergent meanings that are produced by this external pressure. The female androgyne of AS, as a phallic threat, is depersonalised and institutionalised (not both/and but neither), and her only defence is to produce her own meaning out of that neutralised condition, exteriorising the depersonalised and institutionalised in the mad Miss Pilkington, in order to protect the both/and interior. The male androgyne of TA does not constitute a phallic threat, since s/he has the phallus, but the both/and construct is, instead, interpreted in terms of the Law, which by its 'maleness' it is seen to uphold, and by its 'femaleness' transgresses. Thus the female androgyne must be interpreted as No-body, while the male androgyne is interpreted as that which the Law denies and in terms of which It is constituted. The female androgyne must represent an absence of meaning where the male counterpart demonstrates a surplus of meaning.

This social interpretation of the androgynes, determined by the male/female bias of each, thus opens out into another set of binary oppositions, between what is meaningful and what is meaningless. Even that which transgresses the Law while it upholds It is a meaningful contradiction (even if in excess); that which is denied its transgressive nature is equally denied its nature as contradiction - it must be neutralised as meaningless. This powerful association of meaning, the Law, and

sexuality invites in AS, and affirms in TA, an interrogation of the subject: 'from the anxiety of fragmentation, to the subversion by language, to the encounter with the unknowability of history itself' (Gould, 1981:83).

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FLAWS IN THE GLASS

To be the subject of one's own discourse is always, in one sense, a fictional enterprise. The autobiographical form guarantees no more than that the subject of the enunciation will openly focus upon the subject of the énoncé. It remains a discursive practice whose truth-value is relativised by its nature as discourse. Where an autobiographical text is marked by the subtitle: 'a self-portrait' other questions are at once raised. The article usage relativises the autobiography to follow: there is no reason to consider it a definitive text. As one among many possibilities, such a text can offer no more than a perspective - its interest for the reader lies as much in what the text specifically omits from this perspective as in what it foregrounds.

The fact that the text is marked as self-portraiture recalls the contradictory nature of the mirror image in its relation to perception. While the Venetian glass mirror was responsible for a greater clarity of image reflection than had previously been possible, it could not determine the perceptions of the Renaissance painter who gazed into it. His reflection of that mirror image inevitably incorporated much that was not present in the mirror image, or eliminated items that were present in the image, so that the self-portrait was both more and less than the mirror image - something which inevitably worked through that image to produce yet another image. The self-portrait thus attempts to use the external self 'out there' to signal the

internal self 'in here' - that self which is formless, invisible and 'pre-sign'. It is an attempt that gestures at its own contradictoriness: an attempt to be both the perceiving subject and perceived object within a single system of signification, simultaneously Self and Other.

The self-portrait makes a clear statement as 'reflexion': it is a product coming back upon its author or source, and in this way it directs attention to itself and the means by which it has been produced. Yet the 'meaning' that a self-portrait seeks to produce is neither 'pure', 'innocent' nor even 'natural'. The eye/I that perceives the specular image has itself been constructed out of the exteriorisation of self in the Lacanian _stade du miroir_, and has been constituted by the very system of signification it now seeks vainly to subvert. It is only conscious of itself as I/eye because it has been irrevocably split. Whatever is expressed of the self 'in here' is expressed not only 'through' but also 'by' (and, sometimes, 'in spite of') the eye/I 'out there'. Thus the self-portrait is inherently ambivalent; it cannot unify; it can only repeat the dualism of its origins.

I have considered the possibilities of the mirror in self-portraiture and autobiography at some length, not only because the title and sub-title, as well as the introductory passages of the first section of _FG_, openly demand it, but also because the mirror, as many critics have noted, is a dominant image in White's fiction: 'White's characters time and again peer into mirrors, reflecting objects or water, and into one another' (Scheick, 1979:137). Scheick's approach is phenomenological, and his interpretation of this motif is limited to a 'yearning for a sense of self as object, fulfilling the self as fragmentary subject'. However, if consciousness is not taken to be the synthesising unity and sole guarantee of Being, the mirror motif may be read differently. The mirror, in the model of ego genesis proposed by Lacan, and expanded upon by Kristeva,

may function by increasing, not narrowing the gap - the I 'out there', simply by being 'out there', is not 'in here' - yet while it is other, it cannot safely be regarded as 'not-I'. The mirror, as Bersani points out, produces distance, establishes a different space; it functions as 'a spatial representation of an intuition that our being can never be enclosed within any present formulation - any formulation here and now - of our being' (Bersani, cited in Jackson, 1981:87). What is on this side of the mirror may become less rather than more real. The specular image, in fact, reflects both ambivalence and desire.

FG, as self-portrait, increases complexity by refusing to admit any possibility of clarity whatever. Regardless of the perceiving eye/I, the specular image itself is incapable of a 'true' reflection. As flawed glass, it has an inherent capacity for distortions, which are wholly external to the perceiver. A self-portrait, working through such reflections, is produced through a double set of distortions - the writer of such an autobiographical text might have been forgiven for withdrawing from the task. Such a text might be a reflexion in yet another sense, bringing discredit upon its author by drawing attention to its doubly flawed origin.

Peter Shrubb, in a lengthy review of FG, initially responds to the text collectively, in the name of the 'many readers' for whom Patrick White's works 'have to be seriously admired or disputed with' (1981:28). In a brisk common sense approach to the autobiography, he notes that 'for many readers it's natural to be curious about the man ... we might very well hope to find Flaws in the Glass matter for thought, and even for pleasure' (Shrubb, 1981:28). This would appear to be a familiar argument for the transparent text: the expectation of the readers is of a way through the text to the author: the text as a 'truthful' reflection of his ideas, convictions, social background and psychological state. One might briefly consider the text of the reviewer advancing these opinions, and speculate on the inter-

textual pressure which has inserted the horribly familiar 'matter' in the place of the expected 'food'. Could the omission of 'food for thought', with its overtones of Lévi-Strauss and Saussure, have driven this text into an even less welcome quotation? One might follow Shrubb's example of offering an alternative version, as he does for the opening sentences of FG, which he does to make it clear 'that our experience, reading this book, is not of my sentence but only of the sentences it is offered as a supposed alternative of' (1981:28). (By this one must assume that he means that there is a text which gets in the way of the 'truthful' reflection.) If one were to hope to find FG 'food for thought', one could then adopt a different methodology in reading it, one in which 'the link which one establishes between things exists before the things themselves, and helps to determine them' (Saussure, cited in Lévi-Strauss, 1978:495). These crucial links, in the case of FG, could be between mirrors, myths and texts. These structures are taken to precede the text of FG and may write it through the author, 'to no less an extent than he, by acts of artistic will, shapes such structures to his ends' (Anderson, 1980:401).

The most significant common element of the three links in this chain is their duplicity. Each has a surface 'authenticity' and could be taken for a reflection of the 'true' and the 'real'. Each is nonetheless opaque and invites the participant engaged in dialogue with it to produce his/her own meaning out of the experience of engagement. The meaning is not 'out there', nor is it wholly 'in here', but is produced, as Holland notes, 'in a space which is neither inner psychic reality nor external reality ... in a "potential space" which both joins and separates the individual and the person or thing he cares about, which originally was the space between the mother and the child separating a self from her' (cited in Gould, 1981:64).

I have separated FG and Memoirs from the other texts in this study, not because they could not be enclosed in the unstable

and ambivalent frame of reference of AS and TA, but because they deal in a very specific way with the same 'matter' or 'food', relating the unstable, ambivalent, and androgynous to texts whose subject is, and which are subjected to, the writer himself. I have elsewhere noted that the texts examined do more than gesture towards their own textuality; they also at times, place and displace the writer, writing him 'in' and writing him 'out'. An authorial presence in the texts has frequently been found disturbing - Peter Shrubb expresses a typical response of this kind, in which an authorial presence (which calls attention to the text and away from 'reality') is regarded as a compulsive display of 'mere personality':

> Readers of Patrick White's novels, in which a peacock iridescence of prose is so strong an element, will perhaps know what I mean. That possessive prose, which leaves nothing unhandled, which sucks blood so greedily from the novel's characters that they often come to seem no more than ideas that must fulfil, like voodoo creatures, the prose's insatiable demands, is in mild remission in this book of autobiographical episodes, but even if he is not pulling the strings, there is a puppeteer behind the curtain here too. I found his presence, as I say, oppressively difficult, sometimes, to escape.
>
> Shrubb, 1981:30.
> (my underlining)

John Colmer more interestingly sees the texts as ambivalent in their demands upon the reader:

> ... the texts presuppose and to some extent create two kinds of reader, the one literal-minded and obtuse, needing to be bullied, prodded and cajoled into seeing all the links in the grand design, the other intelligent, sensitive and imaginative, able to grasp the deeper significances of the text.
>
> Colmer, 1984:86.

The first criticism relates to the dominance of the text over 'characters', and the demands the text makes upon them. The

second refers to the demands made upon the reader, who, like the 'character', receives ambivalent treatment. In FG, the 'character' with whom the text is principally concerned is that of the writer, Patrick White, in that sense, both 'out there' and 'in here' - a positioning which, as I have indicated, is a network of contradictions. Colmer's comment indicates that the reader is never offered a secure and non-contradictory subject-position. This is evident in the texts already examined, and, in the case of FG requires additional comment.

The discussion on the mirror and self-portraiture has already indicated the instability of the autobiographical text. The reader is in danger of approaching such a text, as Shrubb observes, in the hope of finding her way through it to the author. There is an additional duplicity at work, against which the reader must guard herself. As text and as mirror-reflexion, FG must be taken to offer only the subject-position of intent-to-interpret and the possibility of the production of meaning. Thus, although, in a very real sense, the writer Patrick White 'exists' (and his name appears as 'proof' on the spine of the book that is read), the 'I' of the énoncé, Patrick White, as 'character', is mythical, both more and less real than the Nobel Prize winner.

The text of FG has the same tripartite structure as AS and TA, and here, too, the three sections are discrete, linked only by a central consciousness. The first section, 'Flaws in the Glass', has a recognisably autobiographical form; the second, 'Journeys', uses the travelogue; 'Episodes and Epitaphs' consists of nine discrete items or sketches. As in the framing texts, there are 'Australian' and 'European' sections, but, in the case of FG, the final section is 'Australian'. 'Episodes and Epitaphs', in fact, concludes with an overt allusion to TA, and, in particular, to the non-conclusion of that text: the projected but unrealised pastoral idyll or 'moment of grace' in a Sydney garden. The conclusion of FG projects into the future,

and the conclusion of the text is the wished-for conclusion of a life-text. In its allusion to the failure of that conclusion in TA to indicate more than the conclusion of the text, and in the conjectural introduction of the topic: 'If I were to stage the end I would set it on the upper terrace ...' (FG:256), the text acknowledges the discrepancy between the life of the writer and the life of the text, as well as the gap between desire and fulfilment in both. Characteristically, this conclusion is part of the last item in the final section; entitled 'What is Left?", it is neither an 'episode' nor an 'epitaph'. Nor, as Memoirs will show, is it the last word on, or from, Patrick White, as 'character' or author.

'Flaws in the Glass' examines the life of a subject, like a specimen, trapped in the distorting waters of an aquarium, sometimes retreating 'into the depths', sometimes, foregrounded 'like a thread of pale-green samphire' (FG:1). The text makes few concessions; there is no chronological pattern (even dates are sparse and arbitrarily supplied); the topography is often distinct in detail, yet always unchartable as a whole; the 'characters', without the stabilisers of time and space, so bewildering that Shrubb rightly defies 'any reader to name and identify, even after two readings, the various (perhaps even multifarious) aunts and uncles' (Shrubb, 1981:29). Clearly, the text is making demands on the reader, and specifically, a demand to be read outside the conventional framework of the autobiography. Brian Kiernan observes that 'the subject here seems a character in one of his own fictions' (1983:168) and the text demands that the reader respond to it in those terms.

The subject, or character, is presented as a well-known Australian writer who reviews his life in a number of different ways. He is conscious of the fact that first-person narrative differs from interior monologue and, indeed, he is a highly self-conscious narrator, presenting his narrative in such a way that the reader must acknowledge, at every step, that the text

only exists to express him or what is significant to him. He anticipates that the connection between his own 'real' life and his novels and plays will interest his readers, and includes overt sections - where he wrote which novel, and what suggested the topic or aspects of the characters - as well as innumerable hidden allusions to events and characters in the 'real' life which have reappeared in his works. He is at pains to show himself as a particular kind of writer, as he is inclined to try to sum himself up as a person. It all seems relatively simple:

> In the theatre of my imagination I should say there are three or four basic sets, all of them linked to the actual past, which can be dismantled and reconstructed to accommodate the illusion of reality life boils down to.
>
> FG:154.

> What I had always aspired to was, simply, truthfulness and trust as far as the human body and fantasies allow, and the security of permanence.
>
> FG:100.

> I see myself not so much as a homosexual as a mind possessed by the spirit of man or woman according to actual situations or the characters I become in my writing. This could make what I write sound more cerebral than it is. I don't set myself up as an intellectual. What drives me is sensual, emotional instinctive. At the same time I like to think creative reason reins me in as I reach the edge of disaster.
>
> FG:81.

The first extract concludes a section, apparently merely informative, in which houses the writer has lived in are identified as sources for houses in his fictions. The concluding sentence, however, says something different. Using the theatrical metaphor, the writer, as director, speaks of imagination as containing the raw material, or sets (derived from 'the actual past'), which can be reorganised into new forms as required. The metaphor should then extend into the purpose

of this activity: the material would be needed for a new play or text. In the first sentence of the section, the writer, in fact, uses the same verb 'accommodate' and refers to the activity quite directly: 'All the houses I have lived in have been renovated and refurnished to accommodate fictions' (FG:153). Does this first sentence have the same meaning as the last? In the first, the metaphor is domesticated: fictions like people need homes, and the writer's dwellings 'in the actual past' have been spruced up for their new tenants. Here fiction has been appropriated by real life; its needs are for 'realism'. In the second, with its theatrical metaphor, what is to be accommodated is, appropriately enough, 'the illusion of reality', which could be fiction in need of 'realism', but merely viewed from the illusionist perspective, were it not for the qualification: 'the illusion of reality life boils down to' (my underlining). The register shift marks a radical shift in direction towards outright contradiction. Having led the reader to believe that the discussion centres on the use of real tangible experience (as solid as houses) as illusionist devices in realistic fiction, the writer announces that the real tangible experiences are in themselves an illusion, so that 'realism' and 'reality' possess the same fictional/mythical quality.

The second extract refers to the writer's personal aspirations. These, in view of the first extract, would seem to be self-defeating: where 'reality' is 'illusion', a quest for 'truthfulness' seems deluded. Are there 'truthful' illusions, in which one can put one's 'trust'? The rider, 'as far as the human body and fantasies allow', is equally unhelpful. What, other than the human body and human fantasies, marked as inimical to 'truthfulness' and 'trust', has been omitted, but exists, which does not, by mysterious means, constitute part of life's 'illusion'? What kind of 'permanence' can be generated in the shifting world of illusion, and how would one recognise it as 'true'? (For that matter, how has the writer discovered

that life is 'illusion'? Where is the other half of the binary set?)

The third extract refers to the writer in both his personal and professional capacities. The first assertion is that the writer sees himself as behaving in the same way, and being the same person(s), in 'real' life as in his fiction, where, he says, he 'becomes' his characters. This, however, is not quite 'sameness': the writer, as 'person' and as 'character' can be either a man or a woman, according to the needs of 'events' or 'character'. The writer, in other words, responds ambiguously, and androgynously, in a world of 'reality' which, in any event, is only a 'fiction'. Moreover, this is not a willed response: the writer is 'possessed', 'driven' by something he identifies as 'sensual, emotional instinctive'. This shamanistic stance is cautiously, and ambiguously modified: he 'would like to think' that something called 'creative reason' (which seems to differ from what is involved in being 'an intellectual') acts as a brake and saves his work from some unspecified 'disaster'. This is very difficult: what is the disaster from which fiction must be saved; who or what is the possessor that appears to write these fictions, and indeed to live, through the writer? In these circumstances, can one legitimately ask the question - who is Patrick White? For that matter, who is in possession of the writer in this text - is this the voice of a man or a woman?

If the reader has approached the text, aspiring, like the principal character in it, to 'truthfulness' and 'trust', she is likely to be frustrated. She might even agree with one of the writer's relatives, who, he tells us, responded to one of his early novels, <u>The Tree of Man</u>, with: 'Does he think he's pulling our legs?' (<u>FG</u>:31).

One is forced to read this text as yet another interrogative text. All that one has is language, the medium which the writer in the text has chosen, or which has chosen him. In discussing

Bakhtin's category of ambivalent words in narrative, Kristeva comments on a sub-category of ambivalence:

> A third type of ambivalent word, of which the hidden interior polemic is an example, is characterised by the active (modifying) influence of another's word on the writer's word. It is the writer who 'speaks' but a foreign discourse is constantly present in the speech that it distorts. With this active kind of ambivalent word, the other's word is represented by the word of the narrator. Examples include autobiography, polemical confessions, questions-and-answers and hidden dialogue.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:44.

In the text of FG, with its founding metaphor of the doubly duplicitous flawed glass, we observe the ambivalence inherent even in the apparently denotative or historical word, 'writing as trace of dialogue with oneself (with another), as a writer's distance from himself, as a splitting of the writer into subject of enunciation and subject of utterance' (Kristeva, 1986:44). It is this active ambivalence that characterises the text of FG, an ambivalence which is doubled by the reader's inability to identify the narrative voice, according to one of the basic either/or conventions of identification. Since one cannot identify the narrator, how would one go about identifying 'the other'?

The problem of identity affects one's approach to the three discrete sections. Since they are discrete, ought one to assume that the central consciousness is the same in each? Would the writer in the text view a different narrative as a different set of events (actual or fictional) and is the narrative voice in each section that of a man or a woman?

The writer offers his readers an explanation for 'Journeys': in 'speaking of Greek islands', he will 'try to show ... how they add to this self-portrait I have undertaken, and the most important relationship of my life' (FG:171). There is a more

open, almost crude ambivalence in operation in this section. The basic love/hate ambivalence is the structural principle: Greece, Greeks, also apparently 'the Greek', are objects of the writer's obsessed and irrational attention (FG:201). As an odyssey, these journeys dis-cover an anti-hero: the writer in his 'long despairing rage' which he projects onto the Greece he announces he 'understands'. This is an arrogant position to take, more so when the writer does not distinguish between what he feels and the 'truth'. 'What you truly feel about a country or an individual of great personal importance to you generally shocks when you are honest about those feelings' (FG:201), but this does not extend your feelings into something beyond the personal and the idiosyncratic. Words such as 'truly' and 'honest' are, in any event, received ambiguously from this writer; it is simply not possible to accept his statements at face value.

The 'rage' itself, however, is worth examining, for such anger presupposes a wrong done, a recurring injury, a failure to fulfil a promise, perhaps the failure to be the Promised Land. In fact, the source of this emotion is constantly shifting. In the final paragraph of the section, it is AMERICA 'writ large across its victim ... tattooed into the body of a goddess turned prostitute, by poverty, materialism, and international politics' (FG:217). This is wonderfully gross bravura: over-emotional, irrational, language for the display of anger not for identifying the source of it. Is GREECE the victim, or the GREEKS? Are the Americans responsible for the appalling food, the omnipresent stench of excrement and urine, the provincial snobbery, the corrupt religious? Who and what are the Greeks?

For that matter, how is it that the Greeks have not escaped AMERICA, 'as the Greeks invariably do from any of their predators' (FG:192)? Which is the true Greek - the 'anchorite of true vocation, looking like a rusty old black umbrella' (FG:161), the two women, mother and daughter, whose innocence

'was pure, touching and is still revitalising to remember' (FG:194)? Why is the young woman, who had lived in Australia but had been forced to return to her village, to be preached at by the writer and his companion, and judged obtuse because 'our attempts to reconcile her to the distinction of her village naturally failed' (FG:215)? The fact that 'she was obviously wrung by nostalgia for the hairdresser and other Australian "amenities"' (a fact which is, of course, not a 'fact' at all) seems to give her a great deal in common with the writer, whose bowels, brain, and spirit seem constantly wrung by the Greek experience, despite his epiphanous moments of 'revelation'. Are the peasants who remain on the land, 'locked into their traditions on island and mountain fortresses', inevitably 'the true nobility of Greece' (FG:203)? Why is the escape from poverty by the expatriate inevitably a slide into 'corruption' (FG:185)?

The 'Greek dichotomy of earth and spirit' (FG:215) is another questionable concept. The writer describes a number of occasions (FG:193, 194, 214, 216) on which he briefly experiences 'revelations', but each and every one is directly related to an experience on earth and of earth - of walks on Skyros, a view of Navarino Bay, or moonlight on Mount Cynthos. Saint Sophia, on the other hand, is characterised as 'noblest of churches', and 'the embodiment of an ideal, none of the finicky Gothic soaring and aspiring towards Heaven, but a balanced statement of conviction that the spirit is here around us on earth' (FG:167). How are we to interpret the Greek dichotomy in view of this statement and in what way is the dichotomy particularly Greek?

One is forced to accept that in 'Journeys' the writer is displaying an extraordinarily conventional face. Like other Australians of his age (he is sixty-nine), he still yearns for 'Home', that European haven from the brash Australian experience. Like many Englishmen of his age and class, he centres his yearnings for the pure, the primitive, the

Classical, on Greece, secular Home of 'true' culture. Projected onto 'Greece' are all the yearnings for 'a miracle' (FG:197), for non-contradictory experience, for the dissolution of limits, for an approximation of the mystical quest, for union with an absolute 'Other'. 'Journeys', despite its conventional associations, is a text of lack, driven by desire to express the impossible quest, and the inevitable frustration, through the most banal metaphor.

The final section of FG, 'Episodes and Epitaphs', appears to contain material which could not contribute significantly to the first section, and which also fell outside the second section, or Great Metaphor. Most items could be read as anticipations of the expectable questions of a journalist interviewing a well-known writer, and hoping for good copy: "What did you think of - feel about - the Nobel Prize/lunching with the Queen of England? Could you give us your views on Australian theatre, Australian opera stars, Australian politics? You and Sydney Nolan were close friends at one time - could you tell us ...?" The item entitled 'D.' is apparently offered as an example of the 'common humanity' interviewers hope to find in their more elevated subjects. D.'s identity is not disclosed, nor, for that matter, is his/her sex.

In the telephone conversations, which display the writer's comfortable familiarity with demotic, there is a careful evasion of the identification of the two speakers. Which is Patrick White? The omission is deliberate: sometimes the writer is very like some other people, and in this mood announces that 'truth' might be more accessible in the gossipy tin whistle duet than in more pretentious works. These, one can assume, include much of the fiction of Patrick White. 'This is what I think tonight, no doubt I shall see differently in the morning, and as differently on every other morning I am fated to live through' (FG:183).

This is undoubtedly the most 'Australian' section, and it is not possible for an outsider to assess the validity of many of the statements relating to Australian public figures. These could, and did, cause a violent reaction in Australian readers; Shrubb, for instance, strongly disapproves of the item on the ex-Governor General and his wife as setting 'so low a new low standard of public discourse' (FG:32). The reference to the spouse of the English Queen as 'a Glücksburg bully apeing the English in his tweedy hacking jacket' is a common point of reference for most outsiders, however. This is clearly the Australian pastime of 'knocking', something more than 'unfair criticism', as Keith Dunstan demonstrates, allying it in his comprehensive study to a 'national sense of unsureness', leading to a 'skill at hitting at tall poppies, attacking all those who showed a special talent or those who rose to positions of importance' (Dunstan, 1972:4). Is 'Episodes and Epitaphs' a perspective on the Australian writer 'at home'?

The final segment, 'What is Left?', continues to mock (and knock) reader and writer. The writer and his life partner are two kinds of grotesques: 'papier mâché versions of monsters left over from the pre-historic landscape' or/and 'that bloody pair of poufs'. The reader, who has, after all, elected to read an autobiographical text, is reminded of her ambiguous status as 'voyeur'. Yet, if 'Journeys' concluded with a frustrated coup de grâce, 'Episodes and Epitaphs' gestures towards a 'moment of grace'. In the theatre of his imagination, the writer/director, if he could, would stage the unambiguous conclusion to his life as he does his text - within the continuum of sense experience, to which his language has attached so much contradictory, and exploratory meaning.

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Memoirs of Many in One

FG, in its conclusion, concerns itself with the death of Patrick White, well-known Australian writer; Memoirs celebrates not the Death of the Author, but the Death of the Secret Writer, and the superannuation of that well-known Australian author, Patrick White.

I have elsewhere indicated the tendency of the White texts to resist closure, and, for that matter, disclosure. Some, such as TM and Voss, conclude with clear references to their own significance as texts, indicating their conclusions as opening out into other texts. RC, SM and ES conclude with a female survivor whose significance has received widely divergent and contradictory interpretations. The female survivor of FL is the principal protagonist herself, and her 're-birth' into 'civilisation' has been praised as a valorisation of social education, decried as anti-feminist bias, and valued as focussing on the question of woman's restricted choices rather than upon an answer. The framing texts, AS and TA, function even more enigmatically: in AS, the story of Theodora Goodman might appear to have ended, but only because its presence has been concealed beneath the presence of the mythical Miss Pilkington; in TA, E, as son and daughter, remains fixed as promised and absent event in the mind of an old woman, as if the stories of E can be reduced to nothing-but a desired non-event in the lives of Others - in this sense, being stories incapable of resolution and closure. They are alike, however, in the 'disappearance' of the protagonist, leaving texts which can do no more than mark an enigmatic absence.

The text of Memoirs is a reflexion of and on all these positions, as well as of the conclusion of FG. It is a text drawing attention to itself as text, to its intimate relationship with other texts, and to its function as a particular kind of closure and disclosure. The survivor, who is male, has at

least double significance: the significance attributed to him by the writer of the Memoirs, and his significance as the editor of the text. (He is thus both 'in there' and 'out here'.) The publication of Memoirs simultaneously marks the absence of its writer, and the presence of its editor. It also marks the new subject-position of Patrick White, previously known to readers as that well-known Australian writer, but now, evidently, content with his displacement to the secondary, non-creative role of editor of the writing of the other. (He seems to have been radically displaced: the house in Centennial Park, described as his own in FG, seems to be the home of Ms Gray, while Patrick White, until his capture by Hilda Gray, appears to have had a flat somewhere. Of course, the writer in FG has indicated that houses can accommodate fictions as well as the 'illusion of reality life boils down to'. The 'true' owner/ occupant of the Centennial Park house may never be disclosed!) He has also submitted to a new subject-position in narrative: whereas he has been accustomed to 'becoming' the characters, both men and women, in his own fiction, he has now, in his own identifiable person, become a character in the fiction of the other. On the other hand, there is a very particular relationship between editor and writer. The editor acknowledges, somewhat reluctantly, that his responsibilities to Ms Gray are considerable: 'her life was mine historically, personally, and if I cared to admit, creatively' (Memoirs:179). 'I I - the great creative ego - had possessed myself of Alex Gray's life when she was still an innocent girl and created from it the many images I needed to develop my own obsessions both literary and real' (Memoirs:192). The reverse, however, could also be true: 'Only Alex really knew, because she might have created me, and I her' (Memoirs:180).

There is, as one reviewer points out, 'something so essentially silly and third-rate about a contemporary novelist playing the eighteenth-century game of pretending to be editing the papers of one of his fictional characters' (Reynolds, 1986:60). It is

a very old joke indeed, and one of its functions is to point to its origins, to place this text in the novelistic tradition so that its nature as novel may yield to the interrogation of the nature of fictional writing. These games of verisimilitude repeat themselves in the text: one section of the Memoirs is epistolary, and we are directed by the editor to read it as a journal. At the same time, the editor is either unable or unwilling to give an authoritative, or authorial opinion on the journal as reflecting a 'true' or 'imaginary' tour of outback Australia. 'Truth' is not a functional concept in this text; the transparency of the old joke indicates from the outset that the entire text, and even such extra-textual items such as title and author, are abusing the devices of realism, employing them purely to dis-cover their duplicitous nature.

Duplicity, however, once recognised as such, gains rather than loses significance. The mirror, the myth and the text, all invite engagement, and the production rather than the reproduction of meaning. A text, such as Memoirs, which openly discloses its duplicity, invites engagement with that which duplicity strives to conceal: its status and means of production as text.

White, as I have noted elsewhere, indicates his relationship to texts, sometimes writing himself 'in', sometimes writing himself 'out', sometimes, as in FL, elaborately concealing himself to avoid being 'read into' the text. Within the texts, the author/ narrator has an unstable, non-authoritative position - frequently offering a lengthy comment on a character's situation or responses, only to vitiate this omniscience, and, incidentally, disclose it as a fictional device, by a conjectural disclaimer. This rhetorical strategy, of course, enables the narrator to have his cake and eat it too; he draws attention to an interpretation of a situation or response, thus situating it firmly within the text, but then refuses to take responsibility for it, ensuring merely that it, and the doubt

cast upon it, are made present in the text. Writing, as Don Anderson observes in relation to FL, is a pervasive concern, 'with writing one's journal, with writing one's self, with resisting being written by others, with writing as an index of culture' (1980:401).

Memoirs is pre-eminently a text about writing, about the process which is the production of texts. In order to dis-cover this process, the Author must be exploded, relativised, put in his place as no more than a convenient fiction. The subjectivity of the author must be displayed as radically split, always displaced, functioning within the signifying practices in terms of which he has been constituted, both by his acceptance of the symbolic law and by his transgression of that law.

Kristeva, in her discussion of language as a signifying process, rather than as a static system inseparable from sociality (1986: 25-33), points out that a structuralist model of linguistics

> ... can speak only of those social practices (or those aspects of social practices) which subserve such social exchange: a semiotics that records the systematic, systematising or informational aspect of signifying practices.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:26.

The limitations of such a model, in her view, preclude it from

> ... apprehending anything in language which belongs not with the social contract but with play, pleasure or desire (or, if it does attempt to take account of these, it is forced to infringe its epistemological purity and call itself by such names as stylistics, rhetoric, poetics: aleatory forms of discourse which have no empirical status).
>
> Kristeva, 1986:26.

Her interest in meaning and thus in the speaking subject, lies in the inclusion of such signifying practices which

> ... although they do subserve social communications, are at the same time the privileged areas where this is put to non-utilitarian use, the areas of transgression and pleasure: one thinks of the specificity of "art", of ritual, of certain aspects of myths, etc'.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:26.
> (my underlining)

Kristeva's insistence on the speaking subject as a divided subject (conscious/unconscious) posits the subject as reunited with its body, its unconscious and also its history; on the one hand, subject to a logico-symbolic system and on the other hand, to biological drives and their opponents, social constraints. Her constructs of genotext and phenotext introduce a dialectic of modalities, the semiotic and the symbolic, into the signifying process that constitutes language; a dialectic which is equally constitutive of the subject. In this way, the splitting (or doubling) of the subject, in the text of Memoirs, is the same impossible splitting of texts in general, for in these, too, genotext and phenotext are inseparable. Both exist within the same signifying process but whereas the genotext (which includes not only the semiotic but also the advent of the symbolic) manifests itself as process: 'the release and articulation of drives as constrained by the social code yet not reducible to the language system' (Kristeva, 1986:28), the phenotext is describable in terms of structure or of competence/ performance. Thus Eagleton can view Kristeva's construct of the semiotic as throwing

> ... into confusion all tight divisions between masculine and feminine - it is a bisexual form of writing - and offers to deconstruct all tight divisions between the scrupulous binary oppositions: proper/ improper, norm/deviation, sane/mad, mine/yours - by which societies such as ours survive.
>
> Eagleton, 1983:170.

Kristeva herself describes the 'semiotic disposition', which signals the presence of the genotext, as containing all those

functions - displacement, condensation, the compulsion to repetition, and functions establishing links between the signifying code and the fragmented body of the speaking subject

> ... which suppose a <u>frontier</u> (in this case the fissure created by the act of naming and the logico-linguistic synthesis which it sets off) and the transgression of that frontier (the sudden appearance of new signifying chains)
>
> Kristeva, 1986:29.

Identifying the semiotic disposition means in fact identifying the shift in the speaking subject, his capacity for renewing that order in which he is inescapably caught up; 'and that capacity is, for the <u>subject</u>, the capacity for enjoyment' (Kristeva, 1986:29).

Thus <u>Memoirs</u> insists on the centrality of the writer as split subject, reflecting the mode of production by which texts are produced, and which, in a sense, they also reproduce; that is to say, the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic within the signifying process. Viewed in this way, the memoirs can be taken to represent a text dominated by the semiotic disposition of the genotext, while the editorial contributions (including control over the text of the memoirs, from which there may be significant omissions and expurgations) constitute a schematic version of a phenotext, structured according to the rules of communication and dominated by the demands of the symbolic order. The relationship between the two texts, however, is not so clearly divided: as Kristeva (1986: 28/29) points out, there is no signifying process within which both types of text are not found: the genotext is, in one sense, not linguistic, but rather 'language's underlying foundation', nor can the phenotext altogether escape the heterogeneous and contradictory process of signification which constitutes the genotext. This dialectical relationship of the texts is a precise reflexion of the relationship and 'characters' of the

writer and the editor, who, since they are 'she' and 'he', have been placed in the obvious either/or category, but, by virtue of the transparent joke, also indicate both/and.

Barthes associates texts and textuality, naming and meaning in the following way:

> To read is to find meanings, and to find meanings is to name them; but these named meanings are swept away towards further names; names invoke each other, come together, and their conglomeration calls out to be named anew; I name, I unname, I rename: thus passes the text: it is a nomination in the becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic project.
>
> Barthes, cited in Ray, 1984:177.

Barthes' double view of naming and the dialectic he postulates between naming as subjugation and closure and naming as subversion and endless reopening creates a sense of textuality as permanently in suspension, of meaning as never 'anything other than the plural of its systems, its infinite, circular "transcribability"' (Barthes, cited in Ray, 1984:178). The editor of the memoirs, in his introduction, foregrounds Ms Gray's propensity to name and unname herself 'according to mood or period' (Memoirs:9). He himself has already attempted to subjugate her to a genealogical structure, enclosing her within the institutionalised category of the family tree. His introduction, however, fails to contain her; it is the series of names: 'Demirjian', 'Bogdarly', 'Papapandelidis', Xenophon', 'Gray', that opens out into an account of everything but the central consciousness: the editor's duties apparently have an historical rather than a personal origin. If there is a sense of an oppositional relationship, it appears to be between Hilda Gray (her mother's slave/her mother's keeper), as keeper of the archives, and the editor, as yet not named, to whom the memoirs have been entrusted. For him, there appears to be at least a general possibility of identifying 'the truth', even though in this case, between the archives as history and the memoirs as text, 'it might be difficult to decide' (Memoirs:16).

It is to Hilda's 'proposition' that he 'submitted, with misgivings'. Those misgivings may be connected to the relationship with the writer, which the editor has so carefully avoided. He continues to avoid the writer and concentrates attention upon the writing: 'this Levantine script' of which some of the 'dramatis personae' (the fictive nature of the text is heavily stressed) 'could be the offspring of my own psyche'. Whether the editor wishes to acknowledge it or not, the text of the memoirs could have been written by him. Thus the split subject is again foregrounded, with the emphasis, this time, on the blurring of the frontiers, on the impossibility of separating out the strands of genotext and phenotext, of naming as closure and naming as endless reopening.

The first section of the memoirs celebrates the plurality of meaning, even in the face of 'the end'. Alex Gray is not no-body, but, apparently, everybody - or at least every-body she chooses to be. This may be her hated mother-in-law, Magda, and/ or Cyril Ogdon-Bloodsworth, Magda's partner in fellatio; 'it' could be a convenient label, 'Eleanor Shadbolt', for her bemused hosts at Watson's Bay; she is the Greek nun, Cassianí or the Catholic Sister Benedict. Her 'creating' brings the threat of institutionalisation, and of the sinister psychoanalyst, Dr Falkenberg, who will rebuke her for transgressive behaviour, seduce her and then punish her for it by having her locked up. A writer can, of course, be institutionalised:

> The writer, attaining the status of a classic, becomes the imitator of his early creation; society makes a mannerism of his writing and returns him a prisoner of his own formal myths.
>
> Barthes, cited in Ray, 1984:172.

Alex Gray, the Secret Writer, who cannot resist a pun, suggests these possibilities to the reader: is the writer, at the end of a career, endangered? Will s/he become the victim of those who hold power in the name of the institutions of literary criticism

and its supporting ideology, to become 'a prisoner of his own formal myths'? Is the untrained Australian mind, the Hilda mind of rationalism and a horror of "words", about to enter into a conspiracy with that 'old bore', Patrick White?

Patrick, according to Alex, is '"sick of himself"', '"sick of writers. Of me - if he weren't so polite .... Literature, as they call it, is a millstone round his neck"' (Memoirs:177). Unlike Alex, who can never have enough of naming - '"A freshly acquired name gives me a fresh leave of life."'(Memoirs:177, my underlining - Patrick has adopted 'the wheelchair approach to exploration' (Memoirs:145). Despite his search for 'the unanswerable, the unattainable' (Memoirs:88), he no longer has the explorer's 'stop at nothing' approach. As a spirit guide, he is a failure, unable to guide himself, an old, arthritic Mother Superior. As a writer, '"he's never exactly come good himself. Patrick is too piss-elegant by half"' (Memoirs:124). At times, Alex finds him 'horribly like his on-and-off ally Hilda', advising against taking risks on crypto-mystics and the stray Dog, counselling the direct, open and safe approach '"on the ground floor"' (Memoirs:93). The editor, whose restraint in not eliminating at least some of these deflating views of himself has been enjoyed by most critics, comments on his own work only once; in his apologetic 'Editor's Intrusion', he wonders whether his work, 'the flesh and blood of your own creating' can withstand the demands of 'insistent characters like Hilda, Alex, Hilary, Magda' (Memoirs:61). (Such is the reader's trust in the editorial skills of Patrick White (family tree, notes to every chapter) that she almost fails to wonder why this should be one of those points at which, the editor insists, his 'intrusion' becomes 'unavoidable' (Memoirs:60).)

The editor's skills are no match for Alex; the second section of 'Editor's Remarks' does not achieve discreteness, but is simply taken over by 'Memoirs (contd) [sic]'. Equally odd is the editor's failure to notice that Alex has entered his 'Epilogue':

the cab driver who takes Patrick and Hilda to St Damian's to witness The End is not merely the same person who took Alex off to the Sand Pit; he is also described verbatim in Alex's language: 'neither young nor old, firmly fleshed of thigh and arm, wearing dark glasses, a cynical expression, and Digger's hat' (Memoirs:156, 180). Patrick has merely inserted the final comma, a stylistic flourish, perhaps too pointedly indicating the device so frequently employed in the novels of Patrick White. His cab, too, slides past houses and gardens 'and railings, railings', but where Alex leaps from suburban railings to thoughts of transgression and 'being locked up', Patrick is conscious only of emptiness, of houses and gardens 'which in all these years I hadn't bothered to people'.

Neither Patrick nor Hilda wish 'to encourage him', and thus the theatrically enigmatic cabbie fails to become the 'witness for the prosecution' that Alex thinks he might be. Or is it possible that he could be a witness for the defence? Could it be possible that Alex, the 'bloody phoney princess', actress, writer, self-confessed criminal, murderer and crypto-pouf is more accessible, more 'Australian' than her editor? As Patrick in his rather pompous and pedantic manner might put it, it might be difficult to establish 'who was guiding who - in the idiom of our day' (Memoirs:61).

When Alex and her text have reached The End, Patrick remains with her 'monstrous mistake' (Memoirs:17), her 'monstrous joke' (Memoirs:180). There is no escaping Hilda, who will keep him as she keeps the archives; relentlessly well-meaning, she will preserve him for the rational pleasures of bourgeois order. This 'authoritarian bigot' (Memoirs:190) will never know that she is no more than the instrument of the Secret Writer's revenge: if Patrick has cannibalised Alex, he himself is now preserved for rational consumption, 'by the parasite students and academics who eat out your liver and lights - your heart' (Memoirs:164). Since he has always been in complicity with the

symbolic order, it is within its most sterile conventions that he must be enclosed. 'We were quits, oh yes, but never quit of each other' (Memoirs:192).

Alex, as Veronica Brady (1986:71) points out, has her revenge on more than her friend and fellow traveller, Patrick White. In her final performance, in Nothing or Something, or possibly Something or Nothing, Alex, who is every body, trains her guns on Everybody. Those 'who will sit in judgment on the Pantocrator' are lined up in rows; to be mown down as much by the Creator's 'great quark of laughter' (Memoirs:168) as by the blanks she fires at random. If institutionalisation is inevitable, if, indeed, she must be 'brought to a fulle' (Memoirs:174), the Secret Writer will not go quietly. Rejecting her status as 'the spirit of the land, past, present, and future' (Memoirs:150), she forestalls her cue, dislocates the text into which she has been inserted, indeed, submerged, to emerge from her pseudo-grave, shrieking 'I am the Resurrection and the Life' (Memoirs:151). History is rejected for myth, linear time for monumental time, the Law of the Father for the lore of the body.

David Malouf, in reviewing Memoirs, observes that it has the form of 'a drag-show or burlesque', 'a hallucinatory example of playing up, of pure play' (1986:12). He situates it in that area of transgression and pleasure which Kristeva isolates as the semiotic disposition of the genotext, an area to which Brady also alludes in her discussion of the text as carnival (1986:72). The source material for this text of pure play is drawn from the texts of Patrick White, as well as from the Sydney society with which Patrick White is familiar. Those texts, with their obsessions and their insistent questions, are pulverised by the text of Alex Gray. Dolly Formosa may have a familiar look, 'interestingly ravaged, ageless, ready to do battle with art and life', but at the close of her magnificent dance 'in time with the rhythm of the earth', 'a draught from an open door hits me in the pubics' (Memoirs:136/137).

Mystics and metho-artists, Gods and Dogs, great creative artists and geriatric nuts, the text admits them all, and privileges none. Was it the pompous Patrick who imposed such seriousness on these figures, or has Alex borrowed them from him to star in her high camp farce? Which text relativises the other?

Harpham comments that 'as black/white, grey is the colour of mediation, of metaphor, of entropy, of the impure union of opposites' (1982:140). In her naming, unnaming, renaming, Alex has passed her life in 'a tireless approximation, a metonymic project' (Barthes, cited in Ray, 1984:177). Gray is the name which, the editor points out, she 'could not very well avoid' (Memoirs:9). Certainly, Gray seems to represent the 'grey earnestness' (Memoirs:17) Alex so passionately rejects and firmly associates with Hilda. Yet on her breaks for freedom, whether as Eleanor Shadbolt, the Empress Alexandra of Byzantium and Nicaea, or pilgrim in search of a saint, she chooses to dress herself in grey (Memoirs:36, 66, 97, 111, 138). 'Grey for a pilgrimage' (Memoirs:36) sounds like 'grey earnestness', particularly inappropriate for a shoplifting escapade or the revolutionary violence of the Avenging Angel. It is, nevertheless, a consistent element in the 'nomination of becoming', or consistent enough to warrant interrogation, particularly since mediation, metaphor and entropy seem so far removed from her activities.

Alex is sure of one thing; even 'from the depths of the grave': 'I don't want to - DIE!' (Memoirs:150). Her search through multiple identities is for 'something more positive than life' (Memoirs:144), 'to discover - by writing out - acting out my life - the reason for my presence on earth' (Memoirs:157); it is a quest for signification: the desire for an absolute signified. Readers of the novels of Patrick White are familiar with this desire for the impossible Real, but not with its manifestation in a 'character' who, on the one hand, ought to be taken seriously, since she is very old and much closer to non-

signification then she would like to admit, and who, on the other hand, is engaged in 'pure play' and 'non-sense'. None of Alex's strategies is destined to succeed; each collapses into absurdity, making the protagonist, whatever her name, a grotesque parody of the romantic quest figure. Harpham, in examining grotesque doublings in Mann's Death in Venice, points out that the grotesque parody is an entropic version, a version that fills like a metaphor the gap of evenness between self and other and so constantly tends to a lower degree of organisation (Harpham, 1982:138). Whereas White's texts have marginalised figures made central by the dominant signifying system, and moved towards the centre those marginal figures made silent and/ or invisible by the dominant social forces, the memoirs marginalise the very figure made central in Patrick White's texts: woman, alien, aspirant mystic/saint, mythmaker. Death, whether Alex recognises it or not, exercises its entropic pull, towards a state of undifferentiation where all tensions between the symbolic and the imaginary will cease. That zero point of entropy, of absolute unity of self and other is identified by Lacan as the profoundest desire of the subject, 'an eternal and irreducible human desire ... an eternal desire for the non-relationship of zero, where identity is meaningless' (cited in Jackson, 1981:77, my underlining).

The double function of parody, however, ensures that the quest figure does not lose, but, on the contrary, gains significance. The double bind is made obvious: each unnaming, each renaming drives Alex forward in an endlessly repeated series of namings; she is never anything else than a subject-in-process, the 'mobile, unfixed subversive writing subject' (Kristeva, 1986:87), caught in the endless metonymy of desire. At the same time, in each escape and escapade, the fantasies which disrupt signification, albeit temporarily, also give rise to jouissance, making 'a game, a space of fantasy and pleasure, out of the abstract and frustrating order of social signs, the words of everyday communication' (Kristeva, 1986:207). The fact that the

physiological mechanism is running down at the same time as the grotesque quality of the parody increases points to the increased momentum towards entropy, yet this momentum in no way affects the opposing drive to interpret the world, and in that way, to close the gap between event and meaning.

Absolute signification never arrives, yet the possibility of its appearance is never entirely ruled out. Religious or spiritual epiphanies are radically diverted into farce; it is the editor who hesitantly identifies Alex's dying moments ('horror or ecstasy') as 'what I saw as the moment when the last of human frailty makes contact with the supernatural' (Memoirs:183). Yet there is a single 'vision' which is left unexplained in Alex's letters from the outback. After the disastrous reception of Dolly Formosa, Alex slips out of the Royal-Imperial-Commercial Hotel at Ochtermochty, just before dawn. The text offers a view of the hotel as an emblem of the grotesque 'putrescence which living breeds': cockroaches at play in the leftovers, stickiness and stains of 'grease, alcohol, semen, and wine' underfoot (Memoirs:138). Of this putrescence, Alex sees herself as an extension, 'a detail in its reflections of human nature'. Despite this (or because of it?) Alex insists that an archetypal Being is present on the dusty plain with her. She 'cannot see' his face, but she can 'sense' that it smiles, 'know' that it must be 'dark as the smooth dark kneeling thighs', 'feel' a stream of understanding flowing from his presence (Memoirs: 138/139). The language in which the effect of this vision is described is tellingly banal: 'bathing my shattered body, revitalisng my devastated mind'. The section that follows offers a gloss on this 'miraculous' recognition scene: as the actors prepare to leave, abandoning Alex in the process, she becomes aware of her insubstantiality. People 'look through' her, do not 'seem to know' her, are prevented from 'recognising the person approaching'. The snapshot she picks up from the street shows the recognisable details of her body, 'limbs daubed with Nile silt, crimson talons, lacquered toenails, except for

the one removed by jamming in a door'. The face, however, is too blurred to offer confirmation of identity: 'it could be anybody's' (Memoirs:140).

Clearly, a fantasy that fails can be recouped in more than one way: on another occasion, Alex rescues herself by managing 'to regain unconsciousness' (Memoirs:73); on yet another, she flees 'anywhere, into a formlessness of time and space' (Memoirs:83). When situations become too entangled, Alex prays 'to be removed to another situation. And as usually happens, my prayer is answered' (Memoirs:107). Her own parenthetical comment on the remarkable efficacy of her prayers is a clear directive to avoid too spiritual an interpretation:

> (If I keep up this sort of thing I may qualify as a candidate for canonisation. I may even pass the Test and contribute something to the Australian tourist industry by becoming Centennial Park's Very Own Saint.)
>
> Memoirs:107.

Fantasy must follow upon fantasy; each functions as if meaning and transcendence are discoverable; each uncovers mere absence and emptiness; each is succeeded by another in the impossible quest for the absolute. Alex's life and text, the life and text of the unconscious, are 'a powerful myth of endlessly unsatisfied desire' (Jackson, 1981:159). Gould, in his theoretical exposition of the unconscious origins of desire, art and myth, situates this powerful myth, in his consideration of the Lacanian theory of ego genesis:

> By revealing itself as the absent element in conscious discourse, the surplus meaning or the blatant lack which we cannot control, which creates our history as much as its own, and which reveals the gap between event and meaning, Lacan's unconscious becomes, as it were, <u>a myth of the self amid language</u>.
>
> Gould, 1981:76.
> (my underlining)

Thus, this text, memoirs and editorial contributions, is a true reflexion upon the text of the self-portrait, FG, a reconsideration upon that attempt to use the external self 'out there' to signal the internal self 'in here' - that self which is formless, invisible and 'pre-sign'. Making no attempt to unify what is irrevocably split, the text, instead, points to that division, and to the dialectic between these selves, out of which a particular kind of writing is produced.

In one sense, White has remained an exile, writing himself out of the world of common sense 'by becoming a stranger to [one's own] country, language, sex and identity (Kristeva, 1986:298). His texts seek to interrogate the cultural and institutional codes whose truth and validity appear guaranteed by master discourses; the myths that sustain these 'truths' are destabilised and decentred, allowing speech and centrality to the socially impossible and/or invisible. They privilege those other dissidents who, in their attempt to establish the status of truth, extend themselves beyond rationality into '<u>madness, mysticism</u> or <u>poetry</u>', in an effort 'to articulate that impossible element which henceforth can only be designated by the Lacanian category of the <u>real</u>' (Kristeva, 1986:217). Scapegoat groups, such as women and indigenes, are dis-covered as the essential Others, upon whose exclusion and 'guilt', and hence sacrifice, the socio-symbolic contracts of Western society are founded.

Essential to these texts is the specific role of subjectivity, which is displayed as inherently ambivalent, both dependent upon the Law and also subversive of it. A tentative structure, the subject-in-process is presented as capable of work, that is to say, of production and reproduction; it is thus inherently capable of transformation and change. The process of transgression, which receives its definition from the symbolic order, is represented as the means by which the subject may be able to renew and transform that order, from which s/he can never be

separated. At the same time, transgression is neither sentimentalised nor accorded transcendental value: it is itself an ambivalent activity, as capable of destruction as of renewal. Similarly, marginal groups or individuals are generally represented unsentimentally; their roles as victims do not cannonise them. White's concern is with the polarity of victim/executioner; he seeks to dissolve this opposition as he seeks to dissolve other either/or categories. He postulates a network of dialectics which will relativise the monolithic dualities upon which Western society rests, proposing that subjective, sexual, ideological identities be placed sous rature in order to negotiate the socio-symbolic contract in radically different terms. What those terms should be does not form part of these texts; it is clear, however, that as texts of desire, they provide 'an authentically civilising scepticism about the nature of our desires and the nature of our being' (Bersani, cited in Jackson, 1981:176).

As transgressive and interrogative texts, White's novels are in opposition to the capitalist and patriarchal order which dominates Western society, and which masks its mythologies behind the tradition of rationalism. Jackson (1981:177), in her consideration of the fantastic as a subversive force, notes that the non-thetic or semiotic can be linked to those forces or energies which have been considered inimical to cultural order since Plato's Republic. Chief among these transgressive energies are: 'eroticism, violence, madness, laughter, nightmare, dreams, blasphemy, lamentation, uncertainty, female energy, excess' (Jackson, 1981:177). The mere foregrounding of these energies would not constitute sufficient grounds for considering White's texts subversive. These texts, however, radically undermine the categories of reality and realism, exploding their coherence and dis-covering the ideological basis of their 'truth'. Memoirs, possibly the final work of an exile and dissident, experiments with the limits of identity in the writer himself. It displays the writer still ceaselessly

producing and destroying meaning in endless transformations. A most serious work, Memoirs 'is a way of surviving in the face of the dead father, of gambling with death, which is the meaning of life, of stubbornly refusing to give in to the law of death' (Kristeva, 1986:298). Inherent in that seriousness is the playfulness of the text, an extreme playfulness, which opposes the jouissance of its discourse to that law of death:

> A playful language therefore gives rise to a law that is overturned, violated and pluralised, a law upheld only to allow a polyvalent, polylogical sense of play that sets the being of the law ablaze in a peaceful, relaxing void. As for desire, it is stripped down to its basic structure: rhythm, the conjunction of body and music, which is precisely what is put into play when the linguistic I takes hold of this law.
>
> Kristeva, 1986:295.

So that in The End there is no end ...

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