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In Other Words:
Homosexual Desire in the Novels of Patrick White

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Abstract

To date there has been no comprehensive critical analysis of the impact of Patrick White's homosexuality on his fiction. By investigating the centrality of homosexual desire on a linguistic, stylistic, and thematic level in five of his novels, this thesis shifts the critical perspective on White, and argues that homosexual desire specifically, and sexuality in general, are fundamental to his textual practice. The five novels examined in this light are: *The Aunt's Story*, *Voss*, *The Solid Mandala*, *The Twyborn Affair*, and *Memoirs of Many in One*.

The general categorization of White's writing technique as 'modernist' is problematized in the thesis by relating the stylistic features of his fiction to an analysis of his historical and socio-cultural background. The effects of the medical, political, and legal systems in both Australia and England on the issue of homosexuality are shown as having a direct impact on both the subject matter and the style of White's fiction. Additionally, the thesis demonstrates that far from being an impediment to White's artistic talent, the hostility in Australia towards homosexuality was for him imaginatively productive. As part of the exploration of this area, a review of the politics of past interpretations of White is included in the discussion of each work.

As the thesis is concerned with the interaction of the literary and the political, it engages closely with the concerns of queer theory, feminist theory, and psychoanalysis. The thesis argues that because they explore the issues of sexuality and gender in a noticeably complex and enlightened manner, White's novels are not only a significant addition to the field of gay studies, but also to gender studies. Spanning almost four decades, the novels examined enrich our understanding of the social, historical, and literary construction and regulation of homosexuality in both England and Australia, and inspire new ways of interpreting the elaborate and innovative interaction between writing and homosexual desire.

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Declaration

I declare that, except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is entirely my own work and that no part of it has been submitted for any other degree of qualification.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> All the characters in the books are myself, but they are a kind of disguise.
> - *Patrick White Speaks* [1]

> A pragmatic nation, we [i.e., Australians] tend to confuse reality with surfaces.
> - *Flaws in the Glass* [2]

In his autobiography, provocatively entitled *Flaws in the Glass* (1981), and more recently in David Marr's edition of his letters, Patrick White (1912-1990) attributes his writing talent to his homosexuality: 'If I am anything of a writer it is through my homosexuality, which has given me additional insights'.[3] David Marr reports that in a conversation with Jim McCelland on the same subject, White said: 'My homosexuality gives me all the insights that make me a great writer.'[4] And in *Flaws in the Glass*, he elaborates on the complexity of perception bestowed upon him by his sexuality; more specifically, the psychic roles in which he became involved through it:

> In my case, I never went through the agonies of choosing between this or that sexual way of life. I was chosen, as it were, and soon accepted the fact of my homosexuality. *In spite of looking convincingly male* I may have been too passive to resist, or else I recognised the freedom being conferred on me to range through every variation of the human mind, *to play so many roles in so many contradictory envelopes of flesh.* (pp. 34-5; my italics)

It is with this complex exploration of appearances, role playing, and an elaborate sense of the interaction between identity and sexuality in White's fiction that this thesis concerns itself. Homosexual desire specifically, and sexuality generally, occupy no fixed or easily attained

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1. From 'In The Making' (1969), in *Patrick White Speaks*, ed. Paul Brennan and Christine Flynn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 23.
2. Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass:A Self-Portrait* (1981; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.128. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.
3. Patrick White to Geoffrey Dutton (17.ix.80), in ed. David Marr, *Patrick White:Letters* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 537.
4. McCelland informed Marr of this, June 19 1987. See David Marr, *Patrick White:A Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), p. 581, and note 647, p. 709.

location in his work; instead, each novel poses sexuality as a substantial and valuable part of one's identity *because* it always elides attempts at rigid classification. Sexuality is thus a problem for White, and it is his fascinating and often enigmatic representations of the interaction between sexuality, subjectivity, and society that make his novels such important contributions to gender and gay studies.

With the exception of David Marr's 1991 biography there has to date been no indepth critical analysis of the impact of White's homosexuality on his fiction.[5] Addressing a significant and far-reaching lack in White criticism, this thesis undertakes to investigate the centrality of homosexual desire on a linguistic, stylistic and thematic level in five of White's novels: *The Aunt's Story* (1948), *Voss* (1957), *The Solid Mandala* (1966), *The Twyborn Affair* (1979), and *Memoirs of Many in One* (1986). The publication of Marr's biography, and more recently his edition of White's letters, makes now a fitting and stimulating time to re-evaluate White's work in the light of the information provided by these publications, and to probe its relevance for critical interpretations.

The novels discussed here were chosen because they represent especially provocative examples of White's literary engagement with homosexual desire. They depict less a movement from disguise to revelation than an intricate synthesis of the two, and one that is anchored in an incisive awareness of how homosexual, and indeed, heterosexual desire, is always structured in relation to history, culture, class, race, and dominant ideologies. And importantly, they span White's writing career, affording an overall perspective of the changing face of homosexuality from the publication of *The Aunt's Story* in 1948 to *Memoirs of Many in One* in 1986.

The fact that White's work is later than most modernism, yet sustains the same acute focus on individual consciousness and subjectivity, is evidence of the continued relevance of this literary concept to writers concerned with the difficulties intrinsic to the adoption of sexual and social identities. Fundamental to the epigraphs quoted above are notions of the complex interaction of the individual psyche with the phenomenological world, a key theme White shares with modernist

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5. Rick Wallach has written on critical reactions to White's work, and on the homophobia endemic to David Tacey's criticism in, 'On the Limits of Archetypal Criticism', *Antipodes*, 6: 2 (1992): 133-8.

fiction. Virginia Woolf, for example, claims that modernist fiction has as its *raison d'être* an

> attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves [authors], even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist. Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.[6]

The Aunt's Story, the novel White had 'most affection for' and which 'Australians do not like ... because they have not experienced all those European cross-currents of the 'Thirties which go to make up "Jardin Exotique"', clearly demonstrates the influence of modernist techniques.[7] In particular, the epigraphs to each section underline its affiliation to concerns of modernist fiction. Olive Schreiner supplies the first one:

> 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.

Henry Miller furnishes the second:

> 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.

And Olive Schreiner again provides the third:

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

The influence of psychoanalysis in each quotation is revealed in the presentation of an isolated and unique individual consciousness determining how the world is perceived. The infiltration of the past into

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6. Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Fourth Edition, Volume 2, ed. M. H. Abrams et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 2034.
7. Patrick White to Geoffrey Dutton (13.xii.59), and (12.viii.59), *Patrick White:Letters*, pp. 160, 158.

the present also demonstrates the importance of psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity.[8] The same juxtaposition of different languages that Randall Stevenson discusses in relation to Conrad, emphasizing how 'the particularity, the arbitrariness of each' creates 'a sense of exile ... from reality itself' occurs in Part II of *The Aunt's Story*, where time becomes a continuous flow mirroring Theodora Goodman's consciousness.[9] And the emphasis in modernism on what Georg Lukács saw as characters' 'private worlds, detached from social reality' is, essentially, the pivot upon which *The Aunt's Story* revolves.[10] Despite such strong thematic and structural similarities, outside the field of Australian literature White's work is not considered as a late example of modernism. A comprehensive account of his appropriation of modernist techniques lies beyond the scope of this study, but in the Introduction I venture to suggest directions which such a focus might take, particularly in the domain of modernist literature whose primary objective is to chart the difficulties intrinsic to the adoption of gender and sexual identities. As late examples of modernist-influenced fiction, White's novels extend our knowledge of the scope and relevance of this genre to the concerns of sexual identity.

Most surprisingly, as a homosexual writer who won the Nobel Prize in 1973, White's work does not feature in gay criticism or anthologies whose focal point is the politics of gender and sexuality. For instance, in his recent anthology, *A Queer Reader*, Patrick Higgins mentions White only to downgrade him:

> Just as football managers say some players pick themselves, so no eleven playing for the cause could do without Wilde, Strachey, Auden, Isherwood or Orton. They will always command a place in the first team. Other members of the squad might find it difficult to maintain a run of first-team appearances, for competition in the squad is strong. Baldwin, Beaton, Behan, Bernstein, Blunt,

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8. Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* is probably the clearest example of this. The motivating principle of *The Twyborn Affair* is the impossibility of ever wholly freeing oneself from the past. This is discussed in chapter five.
9. Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction:An Introduction* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 189.
10. Georg Lukács, 'The Ideology of Modernism', in *20th Century Literary Criticism:A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), p. 480. Other critical works on modernism include, Stan Smith, *The Origins of Modernism:Eliot, Pound, Yeats and the Rhetorics of Renewal* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995); Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms:A Literary Guide* (London: Macmillan Press, 1995), and Marianne deKoven, *Rich and Strange:Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

> Bowra, Cheever, Crane, Douglas, Housman, Howard, Jarman, Keynes, Leavitt, Maugham, Minton, Mountbatten, Nichols, Nicolson, Plomer, Porter, Sassoon, Welch, White and Wittgenstein are all players who with a different team manager might have found their name on the sheet.[11]

Even though Higgins' sweeping relegation of such important gay figures weakens his point, White's absence from so many studies given over to gay writers illustrates the difficulty critics find in co-opting him in any straightforward way for a 'cause'.[12] Joseph Bristow's introduction to *Sexual Sameness:Textual Differences in Gay and Lesbian Writing* is a case in point. Bristow's focus on the sameness of gay men by virtue of their sexuality (and on the sameness of lesbians by virtue of theirs), and his objection to the term homosexuality purely on the grounds that it '*denies the gendered difference* between men and women who desire their own sex', omits precisely what is crucial for White - the differences between gay men themselves, and the impossibility of assuming that a shared sexuality will in any straightforward way provide a basis for a unified challenge to heterosexism and homophobia.[13] Given this, it is inevitable that from the outset White would be precluded from a gay critical enterprise intent on establishing 'an immediate and exact fit between ... sexual *behaviour* and "gay" *identity*.'[14]

The complexity of White's approach to homosexuality anticipates and engages with many of the divisions that exist amongst gay and queer theorists today. For example, the often intense apprehension of the fictional characters that figure homosexuality derives from the real

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11. Ed. Patrick Higgins, *A Queer Reader* (London: Fourth Estate, 1993), p. 315.
12. Recent studies which omit White include: Mark Lilly, *Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan,1993); ed. Joseph Bristow, *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992); ed. Diana Fuss, *Inside/Out:Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); ed. Ronald R. Butters et al., *Displacing Homophobia:Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture,* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989).
13. Joseph Bristow, *Sexual Sameness,* pp. 2-3. Italics in the original. Bristow does say that 'Desiring the same sex, we are not desiring the same things' (p. 3), but as far as White is concerned, differences between gay men problematize the very concept of homosexual desire.
14. Simon Watney, 'Queer epistemology: activism, "outing", and the politics of sexual identities', *Critical Quarterly,* 36: 1 (1994), p. 21. Italics in the original. Tim Edwards examines how 'gay liberation' tended to define the person wholly in terms of their sexual orientation in, 'Beyond sex and gender: masculinity, homosexuality and social theory', in *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory,* ed. Jeff Hearn and David Morgan (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 110-23. See also Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents:Meaning, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1985).

difficulty in negotiating a passage from closeted or private homosexual behaviour to proclaiming oneself publicly as 'homosexual'. The anxieties attending this psychic and sexual relocation survive today for many men and women who are 'in the closet', 'out', or thinking of 'coming out'. This is because it is never possible to be wholly 'out' in the context of homophobic societies simply because the concept of 'coming out' depends on and always reproduces the closet. Thus Judith Butler asks: 'What or who is it that is "out", made manifest and fully disclosed ...?'; that is, who controls what 'out' signifies, and can it ever signify exactly what individuals experience?[15] The split between Queer Nation and queer theory occurs in this impasse between epistemological concerns and revolutionary practice. Queer Nation was set up in the United States in 1990 (and was followed by Outrage in Britain in the same year), its primary objective being to counter the increase in 'anti-gay prejudice, discrimination, and actual violence.'[16] Its springboard is the reappropriation of a term of derision for itself and on its own terms, and it is committed to political intervention, to 'reclaiming ... public places in which gay men and lesbians have been abused or have been excluded.'[17] Academic queer theory's foundation in epistemological rather than logistical concerns (Sedgwick), and its deconstruction of claims to ontological presence (Butler) resist the claims of identity politics. This has led Eric Savoy, Donald Morton and others to claim that 'the implication that any concept of agency is imprisoned within the play of irony' relegates 'homosexuality to something very like its *pre-modern* delineation - an incohate and not-yet-emergent taxonomy of desires or acts that cannot *quite* be termed a "subjectivity".'[18]

The gap between proclaiming a valid and acceptable subject position for homosexuality, and defining what shape, if any, it might take, is also the crux of the matter for White. And just as the debate

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15. Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in *Inside/Out:Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, p. 15.
16. Simon Watney, 'Queer epistemology', p. 13. Queer Nation separated from the New York branch of ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in April 1990. See also Eric Savoy, 'You Can't Go Homo Again: Queer Theory and the Foreclosure of Gay Studies', *English Studies in Canada*, 20: 2 (1994): 129-52.
17. Eric Savoy, 'You Can't Go Homo Again', p. 141.
18. Eric Savoy, 'You Can't Go Homo Again', pp. 139,137. Italics in the original. Savoy defines 'queer' as 'includ[ing] both its performative role as a defiant adjective and its status as a revisionist category that seeks to undo all categories' (p. 129).

amongst the queer activists and the queer theorists falls short of producing agreed-upon strategies to combat homophobia, so White's novels never deliver easy conclusions. White's sexuality was an open secret before he 'came out', with *Flaws in the Glass* in 1981 - forty-four years after his return to Australia. But White's investment in his class position, and in his role as a novelist in a country which demanded of its artists that 'society must be allowed to pretend that homosexuality did not exist, and a man must do nothing to disturb that pretence', meant that he developed a very individualized and private perception of his sexuality.[19] Marr asserts that 'Homosexuality was lived not debated by him' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 526), a luxury not all homosexuals could or can afford. It was not until the 1980s that White became 'cautiously concerned about the rights of homosexuals' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 599). And as late as 1985 he turned down a request to attend the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras: in a letter to Jim Jenkins, White said, 'as a homosexual I have always detested the Gay Mardi Gras nonsense, particularly since so many non-gay trendies seem to have jumped on the wagon. The homosexual issue is an increasingly serious one. We shall be persecuted more and more since AIDS came to stay. A lot of screaming queens in Oxford Street will not help the cause for which we shall have to fight. I can't give you any message beyond: Come to your senses and call off the piffling Mardi Gras.'[20] White's reference to the 'non-gay trendies' is also a cause for concern amongst queer activists who feel that 'queer straights' in academia are sabotaging gay studies, and preserving the status quo in the process.[21]

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19. David Marr, *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 245. In a letter to Randolph Stowe (24.viii.80), White says: 'I'm nearing the end of a second version of my self-portrait *Flaws in the Glass*, and so am pretty edgy at the moment. God knows what *they* will think of it ... Manoly and I have been together for nearly forty years, which is one of the reasons I wanted to do this self-portrait - show those censorious heteros that some homosexuals can beat them at their own game.' *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 535. Italics in the original.
20. Patrick White to Jim Jenkins (28. xii. 84), *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 600.
21. See Donald Morton, 'The Politics of Queer Theory in the (Post)Modern Moment', *Genders*, 17 (1993):121-50. Morton argues that 'Only in that historical moment when Queer Theory abandons ludic "undecidability" and the focus on "experience" and commits itself to the goal of radical social transformation will its narrative of "break" and "break-through" finally acquire a socially (collectively) productive, not merely a professionally and personally advantageous, meaning' (p. 138). See also, David Van Leer, 'The Beast of the Closet: Homosociality and the Pathology of Manhood', *Critical Inquiry*, 15: 1 (1989): 587-605; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Critical Response I:

For White, sexuality is not understood or theorized simply by reference to the sex of one's partner. Although he claimed to be 'sceptical of Freud', only taking from him the conviction that 'an imperious mother and diffident father were central to him being a homosexual' - an opinion that runs counter to his 'essentialist' assertions regarding his sexuality - White shares with Freud an understanding of the complex vicissitudes of sexual desire.[22] Charting what is essentially a dynamic relationship between sexuality and the social, White's fiction demonstrates what Freud saw as the pattern of adult sexuality, that is, how it emerges by 'a series of developments, combinations, divisions and suppressions which are scarcely ever achieved with ideal perfection'.[23] This is so partly because homosexuality will always be positioned variously according to the registers of class, nation, race, culture, religion, history, etc.[24] The contrasting effects of such influences on gay men's perception of their sexual identity makes it difficult to speak of sexual sameness as a unifying experience. Then there is the instability of desire itself, its tendency to exceed social regulation and conscious choice (as when White claims to have been 'too passive to resist' his homosexuality), and its tendency to vary in terms of object choice. In the end, however, to argue with White that homosexual desire will always exceed classification according to sexuality is not to diminish the importance of this bonding principle, but to suggest that an acknowledgement and exploration of differences will lay a stronger, non-reductive, basis for an identity politics and for collective resistance. In the end, to group gay men together purely on the basis of sexuality is merely to repeat the homophobic classification of them as wholly determined by their sexuality.[25]

Tide and Trust', *Critical Inquiry*, 15: 2 (1989): 745-57; and David Van Leer, 'Critical Response II: Trust and Trade', *Critical Inquiry*, 15: 2 (1989): 758-63.

22. David Marr, *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 151.

23. Sigmund Freud (1913), 'The claims of psychoanalysis to scientific interest', *Standard Edition*, 19, trans. and ed. James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-73), p. 180. Cited in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis:A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), p. 154.

24. White felt that Australians had yet to acquire 'a firm identity' of their own, apart from England; and that such an identity would have to be inclusive of the many different cultural and racial backgrounds of the people of Australia. See, 'Patriotism' (1984), and 'Imagining the Real' (1986), in *Patrick White Speaks*, pp. 139-43, 177-81.

25. Denise Riley argues similarly regarding the feminist movement when she says: 'an active scepticism about the integrity of the sacred category "women" would be no

The impossibility of articulating the intersection of sexuality and identity in any complete, wholly comprehensible, and generally applicable way propels the psychic drama of White's fiction, and produces its enigmatic effects. For White, homoeroticism can be elicited for a man by a woman, and for a woman by a man, so that the sexual body as the basis for gender identification is problematized. Male homosexuality does not presume a self-evident affiliation with one or the other gender. In *The Aunt's Story*, Theodora Goodman functions simultaneously as a spinster and as a figure of a male homosexual. Likewise, in *Memoirs of Many in One*, White is both Alexandra Xenophon Demirjian Gray and, in his pose as editor, himself. In this way, White's homosexual characters occupy neither the masculine nor feminine poles of the gender order and, by obfuscating this categorization, lay the foundations for a critique of the ideologies underpinning the normative construction of the sex-gender system, and underscore its historical and cultural contingency.

As the debate amongst queer theorists and queer activists indicate, the meanings attached to homosexuality in the periods covered by the novels have been heavily contested, and have undergone many important changes. In addition, the contestation of representations of homosexuality has had a significant impact on how we think about issues of gender and sexuality in general. In Australia, challenges have come from such organisations as the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP Inc., formed 1970), and Sydney Gay Liberation (formed 1972).[26] In relation to the Australian context, Garry Wotherspoon notes how 'previously it had largely been the major institutions of society that had ordained how homosexuality was seen (and it was clearly portrayed negatively by the law, the churches, and the medical profession)' whereas in the 1970s, 'the initiative in this matter was increasingly taken up by these new gay groups and by other homosexuals' (p. 173). What emerged was a concept of a 'new identity, a "gay" identity', which incorporated a 'belief in the absolute validity of one's sexual orientation' and an

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merely philosophical doubt to be stifled in the name of effective political action in the world. On the contrary, it would be a condition *for* the latter.' *'Am I That Name': Feminism and the Category of 'Woman' in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 113. Italics in the original.

26. Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain:History of a Gay Subculture* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1991), pp. 174, 176. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

emphasis on 'coming out' (p. 177). Encompassing key historical periods in the history of homosexuality, White's novels are important records of these shifts: instead of a trans-historical essence, they show sexuality in a dynamic relation with society as it both reproduces and questions its regulatory mechanisms. And although White's characterizations of homosexuals reflect his own understanding of his sexuality as having been chosen for him, the lived experience of homosexuality in the novels always reflects its social constitution by dominant and hostile ideologies, and also, its resistance to them.

In as far as abstract categories can ever encompass individual experience, the term 'homosexuality' is used in place of 'gay' or 'queer' throughout the thesis as a way of historically classifying White's own representations. I am aware that it carries negative connotations in the history of sexual epistemology, but to use either of the other terms in relation to White would be anachronistic. Currently, queer theorists are addressing the psychic, social and political implications behind such systems of sexual classification. Simon Watney, for instance, argues that 'to describe oneself as "a homosexual" is immediately to inhabit a pseudo-scientific theory of sexuality which more properly belongs to the age of the steam engine than to the late twentieth century. The most that "homosexuals" can (politely) ask for is "tolerance", since the homosexual has already accepted marginalisation in his or her core gender identity. Homosexual identity should thus be understood as *a strategic position which privileges heterosexuality*.'[27] This statement relates to White in as much as 'homosexual' was one of the dominant descriptive terms circulating at the time he became aware of, and began exploring, his sexuality - the 1920s and 1930s in Australia and England.[28] White's perceptions were conditioned by ideas and theories of sexuality which, although progressive and diplomatic in themselves, were kept firmly in check by deeply heterosexist and homophobic societies. As this historical period provides important background material for this issues covered by

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27. Simon Watney, 'Queer epistemology', pp. 16-17. Italics in the original.
28. Garry Wotherspoon notes that '"gay" antedates "homosexual" by several centuries, being used with its homosexual implications on and off since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.' *City of the Plain*, p. 16. 'Homosexuality' was invented in 1869 by the Swiss doctor Karoly Maria Benkert, and entered the English language in the 1890s. Other terms circulating at this time include 'inversion', and the concept of an 'intermediate' or 'third sex'. See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out:Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet, 1977), p. 3.

the thesis, I turn to it now.

Medical views of homosexuality, and those provided by the sexologists, were dominant by the 1920s. The works of Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud were well known, and disseminated more widely than they had been at the beginning of the century. Ellis's notion that homosexuality was congenital was shared by other key figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century such as John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter, Karl Ulrichs, and Magnus Hirschfeld. One effect of congenital theories was to represent homosexuality as a sickness, a theory which Jeffrey Weeks argues 'was to have profound social resonance from the 1930s onwards, but even earlier many homosexuals themselves had a deeply rooted belief that they were sick.'[29] He also notes (following Foucault) that 'the existence of a medical model was profoundly to shape the individualisation of homosexuality, and to contribute to the construction of the notion of a distinct homosexual person' (p. 105). White came to England in the midst of this sexual debate, in 1925. He was just thirteen when he went to board at Cheltenham College, and spent the next four years there. According to Marr, White knew about his homosexuality by the time he was fourteen, so the years spent at Cheltenham 'marked him for life [and] fashioned his sexuality.'[30] Whilst there, White lived under the rule of his housemaster, Arthur Bishop, 'dangerous, unknowable and in the grip of a malign obsession to stamp out filth in Southwood.' Since the 'scandal of 1924 ... all friendships were now suspect. Bishop burst through doors expecting, and failing, to find boys *in flagrante*. He seemed to assume that every child was a liar, an idler, a potential drunkard, a bugger and a thief. His beatings were cruel even by the standards of English public schools' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 70).[31] Given this experience it is little wonder that White's awareness of his sexuality was accompanied by feelings of 'fear and self-disgust' (p. 74). Ultimately, he became 'a foreigner anywhere, a stranger at heart' (p. 76).

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29. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society:The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (New York and London: Longman, 1981), p. 105. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically. See also Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1:An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 43.
30. *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 4.
31. Stephen has similar school experiences in James Joyce's, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Paladin, 1988).

In this White was no different from many others. As Weeks claims, while Ellis, Carpenter and Symonds introduced a new approach to homosexuality by theorizing it in terms of biologism instead of criminality, 'none of them, in the last resort, was able to sustain a challenge to conventional views of gender and social roles. They attempted to fit homosexuality into existing concepts. In so doing they failed to develop a radical critique of sexual oppression.'[32] Thus, homosexuality remained an anomaly at best, a perversion at worst.

Because White understood his homosexuality in terms of a dual gender, the persistence of traditional gender and social roles had a significant effect on his life and his self-image. In *Flaws in the Glass* (which in private he jokingly called *The Poof's Progress*), he admits that what disturbed him most 'was the scorn of other boys, not for my sexuality, which they accepted and in some cases enjoyed, but for a feminine sensibility which they despised because they mistrusted.'[33] The same distrust, and often abhorrence, of a feminine sensibility and appearance in some of his homosexual characters occurs in *The Solid Mandala*, in *The Twyborn Affair*, in *Memoirs of Many in One*, and most provocatively in Theodora Goodman in *The Aunt's Story*, the spinster heroine who invites interpretation as an enigmatic homosexual hero. Characters' sexual and/or gender liminality highlights the difficulties of trying to fit into the paradigms of masculinity and femininity and show, as Freud did, that sexuality is 'a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact'.[34] Further, in '"Civilized" Sexuality and Modern Nervousness', Freud highlighted how 'normal' sexuality was attained only at great cost to the individual by stressing the pressure to 'submit to the demands of civilisation' when such demands are clearly making the individual ill.[35] If the path to heterosexuality is thus fraught with difficulties despite being the culturally approved form of sexuality, then

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32. Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp. 49-50.
33. Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass*, p. 34.
34. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Fourth Edition, trans. James Strachey (1905; London: Imago Publishing, 1952), p. 24.
35. Freud claims that 'the more strictly a wife has been brought up, the more earnestly she has submitted to the demands of civilisation, the more does she fear this way of escape [i.e., unfaithfulness], and in conflict between her desires and her sense of duty she again will seek refuge in a neurosis. Nothing protects her virtue so securely as an illness.' '"Civilized" Sexuality and Modern Nervousness' cited in Elizabeth Janeway, 'On "Female Sexuality"', in *Women and Analysis:Dialogues on Psychoanalytic Views of Femininity*, ed. Jean Strouse (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974), p. 66.

that to homosexuality is even more difficult because of the negativity surrounding it. The psychic anguish attendant on what is for White's homosexual protagonists, an always already futile struggle to adhere to the imposition of sexual norms, is dominant in *The Solid Mandala* and *The Twyborn Affair*.

White's time at Cambridge (1932-35), where he studied French and German, was distinguished by anxiety arising from his position as a sexually stigmatized individual. His tutor in French was Donald Beves, himself a homosexual, whose posthumous fame centred on unfounded accusations of treason, specifically 'of recruiting Kim Philby, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean to work for Russia' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 121). Whilst there, White was in the midst of famous homosexuals like E. M. Forster, and A. E. Housman, whose brother Laurence was a member of the Order of Chaeronea (set up by George Cecil Ives in the mid 1890s to combat the persecution of homosexuals), and chairman of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology (founded in 1914; became the British Sexological Society in the 1920s).[36] E. M. Forster became a member of the BSS in the 1930s, and visited White at Kings.[37] Although Weeks contends that it is doubtful 'whether the society greatly extended its own natural audience, and it certainly could never claim to have revolutionized attitudes ... [nor] government policy', it is still remarkable that White insulated himself so effectively from its ideas and publications. But Marr claims that at this time White was

> politically illiterate, an Australian, and out of touch with those Cambridge circles in which this intellectual elite moved. All the time he was at Cambridge he was unaware of the Apostles, that secret society that nurtured the traitors. He once met Anthony Blunt at a dinner where the wine was good and the conversation was about painting. "I kept quiet." (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 122)[38]

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36. Other members included Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Stella Brown, Margaret Sanger, and Norman Haire. See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, chps. 10 and 11.
37. Discussing Kings, Patrick Higgins identifies Oscar Browning as a major homosexual figure: 'Browning graduated to King's College Cambridge, where he became a Fellow. There he was one of the architects of possibly the most remarkably homosexual society since fifth-century Athens. Today King's can count among its distinguished old boys E. M. Forster, J. M. Keynes, Rupert Brooke, Hugh Dalton, Patrick White, Alan Turing and Simon Raven. Browning helped nurture an atmosphere sympathetic to homosexuality in a college which has exercised an important influence on modern culture and society.' *A Queer Reader*, p. 100.
38. Regarding the Apostles, Jane Marcus notes that 'papers [were] delivered by young men at the meetings of the Cambridge University secret society, the Apostles, where a serious philosophical or moral issue was debated with humour in simple language but

Reticence and evasion are key characteristics of White's writing style. If he was illiterate with regard to European politics, he was all too aware of the danger of exposing his sexuality to a climate culturally and legally inclement. Hence, he remained detached, '"too frightened ... to be flamboyantly outrageous"' (*Patrick White: A Life*, p. 143). In *Flaws in the Glass* he acknowledges that

> I had resumed a more or less solitary existence.... But I expected more, and the fact that I did not find it I blamed wrongly on my homosexual temperament, forced at that period anyway to surround itself with secrecy, rather than on the instinctive need to protect my creative core from intrusion and abuse.
>
> The repression society demands of homosexuals obviously reduces them to some extent as members of that society ... (p. 80)

When Joyce Whitycombe's (White's cousin) husband was 'charged with soliciting young men in a Hampshire village and sent to prison ... the scandal cast a shadow of fear over White's life' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 143).

To over emphasize this aspect of White's life would be a distortion: he did have his love affairs, one with a heterosexual, called simply 'R' in the biography, and another with the painter Roy de Maistre, whose portrait 'The Aunt' was to be a significant influence on *The Aunt's Story*.[39] But outside the intimacy of these affairs and, during the war, the relative safety of the 'secret society [of homosexuals] which convention forced us [i.e., he and Manoly Lascaris] to join' (*Flaws in the Glass*, p. 100), sexual secrecy dominated his life. The early literary influence of A. E. Housman is thus noteworthy: an 'important lesson' learned from him was 'the need for absolute discretion. The homosexual impulse of Housman's poetry was hidden in its resonant vagueness' (*Patrick White: A Life*, p. 118). Looking at the homosexual thematics of *The Living and the Dead* (1941), *The Aunt's Story*, *The Tree of Man* (1955), and *Voss* , it is not difficult to see just how influential Housman's 'resonant vagueness' was to become, both as a closeting effect, and as a pleasurable thing-in-

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according to G. E. Moore's rigourous philosophy of truth-telling'. The Apostles also idealized Greek homosexuality, and the 'Greek view of life'. See, 'Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny', in *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, ed. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 64, 86.

39. This point is discussed in chapter two.

itself.[40]

As the epigraphs at the beginning of the chapter suggest, presence and absence are two sides of the same coin for White. There is a constant interchange between concealment and expression, surface and depth, and it is this interchange which critics have ignored, preferring clear to muddy waters, and opting to discuss White in terms of bipolar oppositions where, in a paradoxical contradiction of terminology, depth and reality always come out on top, and surface and disguise are relegated to unseen depths. No critic has ever examined why the so-called depths are so easily articulated and reached in White's fiction, and why the disguises prove so unfathomable. Yet if we re-view this, the closet becomes the perfect trope for White's imagination in relation to the majority of his fiction, condensing the disguises and silences, the politics of what is to be revealed and what is to be concealed. Equally, the closet generates the paradox of critical commentary. The relationship between writer, closet, and audience is complicated because it is enmeshed in disguise: the boundaries between reality and surface, essence and artifice are blurred, forcing readers into a confusion bound up in those categories whose distinctiveness is held to be clear-cut - the female body/ the male body, feminine/ masculine, heterosexual/ homosexual. The presence of female characters who look like men and vice versa, of male characters who are effeminate and female characters who are butch, and of male and female characters who engage in both homo- and heterosexual activities,

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40. *The Shropshire Lad* presents sexual secrecy in a tantilizing manner; it is simultaneously oppressive and pleasurable. For example:
'Oh many a peer of England brews
Livelier liquor than the Muse,
And malt does more than Milton can
To justify God's ways to man. ...
And carried halfway home, or near
Pints and quarts of Ludlow beer:
Then the world seemed none so bad,
And I myself a sterling lad;
And down in lovely muck I've lain,
Happy till I woke again.
Then I saw the morning sky.
Heigho, the tale was all a lie;
The world, it was the old world yet,
I was I, my things were wet,
And nothing now remained to do
But begin the game anew.'
The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Fourth Edition, Volume 2, pp. 1912-14.

makes White's novels particularly complex and insightful narratives of human sexuality.

White's skill in using language as a medium that obscures but does not erase was the focus of an article written in 1958 for the journal *Australian Letters*. In it he tells of 'a struggle to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks and words', so that writing will cease to be 'the practice of an art by a polished mind in civilised surroundings.'[41] Most of his writing exhibits a shrewd confrontation with linguistic civility which, if examined closely, does yield 'uncivilised' results. Not long before this acknowledgement took place, White himself had a more personal and tortured involvement with the 'rocks and sticks of words' during his time as an Intelligence Officer in World War II. One of his duties was as a censor, editing unsuitable information from airmen's letters.[42] Shortly after he met Manoly Lascaris, the man with whom he was to spend the rest of his life, they began an epistolary love affair. Having spent a considerable amount of his active time in the war censoring others' intimate correspondence, White now found himself in the position of self-censor, and resentfully informs readers of *Flaws in the Glass*: 'We learned to accept separation, to avoid scorn by assuming a mask from which adulterous, even promiscuous heterosexual couples are exempt because they are "normal". We perfected the art of writing to each other in code' (p. 103). What White makes perfectly clear here is the coincidence, in his case, between a censorship imposed on letter-writing and a censorship imposed on living, an interchange which hinges on language. During the interval between the experience of writing in code to Manoly Lascaris and stating his wish to recreate language in 'The Prodigal Son', *The Aunt's Story* was written. It is significant that this narrative has a 'polished' allegorical structure, and depicts a heroine - Theodora Goodman - who, approached from the perspective of a queer reading, can be productively interpreted as a mask for a homosexual hero.[43]

While critics who analyse *The Aunt's Story* from Jungian, psychoanalytic, religious, moral, or New Critical perspectives sometimes

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41. 'The Prodigal Son', in *Patrick White Speaks*, p. 16.
42. See *Flaws in the Glass*, p. 103.
43. In *Practising Theory and Reading Literature:An Introduction* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), Raman Selden notes that 'Whenever censorship is in force allegory comes into its own as a method of reading and as a method of writing' (p. 138).

concede that Theodora Goodman's importance lies in her masculine qualities, they fail to notice the body from which these virtues issue.[44] By concentrating on her inner being, her transcendence from the (heterosexual) crowd, critics overlook her bodily surface, and hence the real impetus of the narrative. Also, the overwhelming masculine aspect of Theodora's body lends a philosophical harmony to the novel's allegorical structure and its theme of transcendence. To take Michelangelo's *David* as an example, one can see that, unlike the female body which is always steeped in matter and which may need cultural symbols such as scales to assure audiences that they really are looking at 'Justice', statues of male bodies signify a movement away from the corporeal to the spiritual, and need no signs to signify this.[45] Placed in this context, White's disclaimer at the beginning of *The Aunt's Story* which states, 'All the characters in this story are wholly imaginary and have no reference whatever to actual people', has a paranoiac ring to it. Ever before we read a line, the disguise has been set in place as a matter of fact.

Alongside the erotic duplicity of *The Aunt's Story* is a new symbolic manipulation of the Australian landscape, and this provides another reason why this work is an apposite starting point to an analysis of homosexual desire in White's fiction. In an insightful article on the body-landscape metaphor, Douglas Porteous argues for the importance of the relation between landscapes and bodies in *The Aunt's Story*.[46] He sees in the novel an obvious preference for and celebration of 'a landscape of bones lacking the flesh of soil and hair of vegetation. [White's characters] are suspicious of luxuriant, continuous vegetation cover, where a landscape may be said to be clothed' (p. 5). In chapter two, my reading advances the possibility of reading the novel's anthropomorphism (landscape as body) as a metaphor for the homosexual body which is figured as lying 'beneath' a more civilised, homely, surface. As Porteous claims, 'Deserts are the epitome of lean, bony landscapes. Patrick White's

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44. These critics are listed in chapter two.
45. For an extended analysis of the female body as allegory see, Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens:The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985).
46. Douglas Porteous, 'Bodyscape:The Body-Landscape Metaphor', *The Canadian Geographer*, 30: 1 (1986): 2-12. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

evocation of the Australian outback is built upon the bareness of the earth's skin, through which the bones may be readily discerned' (p. 5). Theodora's mind and body are always aligned symbolically with these hills, and the significance of this is underscored in the narrative itself when readers are told: 'There are certain landscapes in which you can see the bones of the earth. And this was one. You could touch your own bones, which is to come a little closer to the truth.'[47] Such anthropomorphism generates the possibility, till now never explored, of seeing the interaction between the heroine's conspicuously masculine body and the landscape as a code through which a homosexual subtext operates.[48]

White lived with a sense of cultural estrangement for most of his life. His Australianness made him a foreigner in England; his Englishness made him a foreigner in Australia; and his sexuality exacerbated his sense of cultural exile. In *Flaws in the Glass* he characterizes his Australianness as his 'deformity' (p. 13), recalling Proust's view of his homosexuality and Judaism as 'an incurable disease.'[49] In a passage in *Flaws in the Glass* that echoes the beginning of *The Solid Mandala*, where an aged Waldo and Arthur are walking hand in hand down Terminus Road, White depicts himself and Manoly as a couple

> creak[ing] round the slopes of Mount Meroo in days to come, joints locked, vision increasingly blurred, the voyeur may see us as papier mâché versions of monsters left over from the pre-historic landscape - or with the brutality of half-knowledge, that bloody pair of poofs. (p. 256)

Clearly, there is little respite from his sense of being sexually and culturally disfigured, and, if anything, the latter intensifies the former. The admiration (which often translated into a feeling of cultural inferiority) of many Australians for 'Home' and the Empire has

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47. *The Aunt's Story* (1948; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 60. All references will be to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text by page number.
48. For an extended analysis of the treatment of the landscape in Australian fiction and painting, see Graeme Turner, *National Fictions:Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1985). Turner interprets White's use as falling into the '"metaphysical" strain', that is, utilizing nature to signify 'a withdrawal from the political, socio-economic realities of existence - into eventually the spiritual or metaphysical' (p. 36). But where Turner sees White's work as part of a tradition symbolizing a straightforward rejection of urbanity and critique of suburbia, I argue that the isolation and freedom afforded by the landscape in the novels is also employed in a uniquely sexual manner.
49. Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 2. trans. C. K. Scott-Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 639.

remained more or less a constant throughout their history. In the mid thirties the 'deference to the European, and specifically English ... was dubbed "the cultural cringe".'[50] Yet, the second decade of the twentieth century in Australia was distinguished by the 'suspicion of the disruption and disjunction which seemed rife in Europe - particularly in the various "isms" of art with their bizarre extremes - stifled artistic innovation in Australia' (p. 129). The successes in Australian literature were all written in popular genres - the documentary, the travel book, the children's book (p. 134). Those who took their art abroad to develop it were viewed with suspicion, so that 'Expatriatism became an issue in Australian culture, and one which could divide the artistic community. Where lay the artists' loyalty? To their country, their art, their careers?' (pp. 135-6). When White returned after the Second World War, it was not with a sense of entering a culturally and intellectually enlivened country. In addition to the hostility directed at 'new arrivals' there was the embarrassment of announcing his chosen career as a novelist: 'Though [friends of my parents] knew there were novelists in the world because their wives patronised libraries, what could possibly become of an Australian male of their class who set out to be a professional author?' (*Flaws in the Glass*, p. 129). When Manoly arrived from Egypt they had each other for support, 'he an expelled Greek, I not so much an Australian as a fake Pom and writer nobody had heard about, posing as a member of my own family' (*Flaws in the Glass*, p. 136). Like the British and American modernist women of the Left Bank, White's modernist style evolved from his estrangement from home, and from the new and productive experiences provided by his European education and involvement in the war.[51]

Much of White's artistic tastes were European and broadly modernist in influence. He had a large collection of the paintings of Roy de Maistre, whose cubist-inspired 'The Aunt' was used as the cover for the first edition of *The Aunt's Story*. He was an admirer of the early work of William Dobell, whose 'modernist' portrait of Joshua Smith for the

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50. John Rickard, *Australia:A Cultural History* (London and New York: Longman, 1988), p. 138. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

51. Shari Benstock discusses the conditions influencing the modernism of the women of the Left Bank in *Women of the Left Bank:Paris 1900-1940* (London: Virago, 1987). See also Bronte Adams and Trudi Tate, *That Kind of Woman:Stories from the Left Bank and Beyond* (London: Virago, 1991), pp. ix-xviii.

Art Gallery of New South Wales was the cause of a courtroom scandal when it won the Archibald Prize in 1944.[52] Francis Bacon's work was greatly admired, as was Sidney Nolan's whom White asked to do the jacket for *Voss*.[53] His literary tastes ran on similar lines: D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, George Moore, Proust, Christina Stead; and Chekhov, Ibsen, Rimbaud, and Pushkin also counted among his favourites.[54] White perceived his fictional subject matter and style as lying outside the conventions of Australian literature, but this became a stimulus to persevere rather than leave: 'we [i.e. he and Manoly] were not driven out by our failures any more than Australian critics in those early days succeeded in killing the creative necessity of one they saw as an intruder, a breaker of rules, a threat to the tradition of Australian literature' (*Flaws in the Glass*, p. 139).

White brought to Australian literature a brand of modernism more akin to Lawrence than to Joyce or Woolf.[55] Nearly all his novels contain characteristics of modernist literature, beginning, as I have discussed, with the 'fascination with inner consciousness, intense perception and the nature of individual vision ... as an exclusive centre of attention'.[56] Part II of *The Aunt's Story*, which adapts the myth of Odysseus, and isolated sections in almost all the fiction, stand out as obvious examples of the techniques of modernism: stream of consciousness, interior monologue, free indirect style, characterizing vocabulary (language which reflects the speech habits of characters), the disruption of chronology and of linear narrative time, the coexistence of past and present events, the use of mythology, and the simultaneous juxtaposition of several points of view. There is also a tangible influence of Freudian psychoanalysis on characterization and structure: Voss's homoeroticism is given expression only in his dreams; passages relating to Theodora Goodman's mysterious sexuality echo Freud's 'dark

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52. According to Rickard, 'outraged members of the Sydney Royal Art Society organised a legal challenge, on the grounds that Dobell's painting was not a portrait under the terms of the Prize but a caricature.' *Australia:A Cultural History*, pp. 251-2.
53. See *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 474; and *Patrick White:Letters*, White to Nolan (7.iii.57), pp. 112-3.
54. *Patrick White:A Life*, pp. 85, 123, 127, 317, 480, 487.
55. Henry James' use of obscurity also suggests itself as an interesting comparison to White. This point is taken up in chapter two in relation to *The Turn of the Screw* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966).
56. Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction:An Introduction*, p. 21. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

continent'; Waldo Brown's homosexuality is expressed through his voyeurism and transvestism; and Eddie Twyborn's homosexuality is almost a case book illustration of Freud's theories of melancholy.[57]

In general, however, it would be fair to say that compared with 'high' modernism, White's novels are more conventional in technique. The presence of an omniscient narrator guiding the reader through the labyrinthine minds of the protagonists, and the detailed attention paid to characters' clothes, appearance, class and background, are traits which reflect what Randall Stevenson sees as a 'decline or redirection of modernism's innovative strategies' (p. 203). There is also an implicit emphasis on socio-cultural and political matters, an offshoot of White's war years and of prejudiced reactions to his sexuality. The peculiarities of his class position (born into one of Australia's wealthiest grazier families), his nationality, general background, and personality all contributed to the strong moral tone that runs through his novels. And although White shares a modernist sensitivity to the workings of language, his emphasis is clearly more on linguistic censorship than innovation. Never part of a group of writers, White developed his art in solitude. As Marr contends: 'His house was never a homosexual enclave and he scorned those who lived in a coterie of queens. Yet for all this he and Manoly Lascaris were the best-known homosexual couple in the country. Australians took it on the chin' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 527). White's class, his literary fame, and his social refinement as regards his sexuality, made the situation tolerable for most.

I noted that White's covert yet highly imaginative and unusual treatment of homoeroticism in the works before *The Twyborn Affair* had the effect of rendering it invisible to (largely traditional) critical commentary. In part this is due to those elements in White's work which align it with modernism and which generate readings that focus on the modernist crisis of identity and representation. Discussing this problem in relation to critiques of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Eve Sedgwick argues that the modernist critical framework constructs interpretations which

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57. Despite these similarities, Marr relates that White was 'sceptical of Freud'. All he took from him was the conviction that 'an imperious mother and diffident father were central to him being a homosexual [an opinion that runs counter to his more 'essentialist' assertions regarding his sexuality].... But he could not be a disciple.' *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 151.

favour a stress on 'structure at the expense of thematics.'[58] Patricia Waugh maintains likewise when she says that the work of women writers 'cannot ... be read in terms of the literary canon, for it presents a fundamental challenge to both its institutionalised reification of "form" as the "essence" of the work and its liberal heritage of "expressive realism": literature as the expression of a universal unity which is "human nature". For these reasons, among others, it is vitally important that feminist critics refuse the reading of twentieth-century writing by women in terms of a narrow (but dominant) "modernist" or "postmodernist" aesthetics of impersonality, autonomy, and dehumanization.'[59] A similar case is made here for *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss*. The most provocative aspects of these narratives lie in their departures from the realist genre, in the way they utilize madness, dreams and inexplicable behaviour as ways of figuring eroticism. Hence, this study explores how structure and theme interact in White's novels.

One final point regarding critiques of White needs to be mentioned, and it concerns those that use his sexuality to condemn his work. The commendation to the 1992 Penguin edition of *Patrick White Speaks* praises him as someone who 'set out single-handedly to create the Australian novel', and who 'today ... is widely regarded as the keeper of the national conscience ...'. Yet Marr notes that 'As soon as schools began to set White's own books for study, a campaign began and still continues to keep them out of the hands of the innocent' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 504). White's literary reputation has never been a complete safeguard against homophobia. But, as we will see in chapter four, *The Solid Mandala* parodies this type of censorship when it shows Waldo and Arthur deriving precarious sexual pleasure from precisely those books which have passed the censor's tests - library books. And, as chapter six illustrates, the denouncing of literary homosexuality is the very subject matter of *Memoirs of Many in One*. In general, one finds that criticism that incorporates homophobic attitudes is more common in relation to *The Twyborn Affair*, which preceded White's 'outing' in *Flaws in the Glass*, and *Memoirs of Many in One*, which followed the autobiography

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58. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 165. This point is explored in detail in chapter two.
59. Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions:Revisiting the Postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 21

five years later. In these novels the obscurity of a modernist structure gives way to a direct treatment of homosexuality, and a challenge to the inherent prejudices of the reading public and to traditions of critical thought.

Ultimately, what is equivocal in White's fiction is as significant as what is distinct; what is not stated as meaningful as what is declared. Michel Foucault's understanding of silences as an integral part of the communicative process is productive when analyzing a writer such as White, as it stresses the necessity of an astute awareness of the power structures intrinsic to the workings of language:

> There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say ; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying things.... There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.[60]

In *Flaws in the Glass* White claims that 'truth is the property of silence - at any rate the silences filling the space between words, and over those I sometimes have control' (p. 42). And in *Epistemology of the Closet,* Eve Sedgwick argues that what can be said to masquerade as ignorances play a part in the creation of knowledges and uphold specific regimes of truth, one of those 'truths' being the implicit assumption or assertion that a writer's homosexuality does not have interpretative consequences.[61]

It is on the subject of truth that White can be said to depart from one of modernism's central tenets. Unlike Nietzsche who saw 'man's truths' as '*irrefutable* errors', White confesses in *Flaws in the Glass* that '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. So much for aspiration' (p. 100).[62] And in a letter to Tom Maschler (2.i.81) White writes: 'I hope you are not going to say that *Flaws in the Glass* will destroy my literary reputation. Any literary reputation that can't stand up to the truth isn't worth having' (*Patrick White:Letters*, p. 542). The often self-destructive lies and masquerades of the protagonists in *The Solid Mandala, The Twyborn Affair* and, to a lesser extent, *Voss*, attest to the importance of being true to oneself in the face of pressures from

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60. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, p. 27.
61. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 8.
62. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 44. Italics in the original.

dominant ideologies. And this point is reiterated in *Memoirs of Many in One* through the depiction of a closet gay, Hilary Gray, disastrously marrying for the sake of convention, and committing suicide as the only way out.[63]

The moral stance in White's fiction is rooted in the belief that the repression and persecution of homosexuals is the product of religious, medical, legal, and sexual intolerance and discrimination throughout history. Nonetheless, simplistic divisions between a closeted or private homosexuality and one that is 'out' find no place in White's novels: their drama hinges on the more or less successful ways the protagonists mediate the influences of dominant power structures and their own opposition to them. Opposing boundaries are thus dramatized as 'apertures', so that 'norms are neither repressively imposed from without, not dutifully internalized from within, but produced by the ever-active combination and recombination of only temporarily dominant and always contestatory discourses.'[64] Obviously, not everyone has equal access to the crossing of boundaries, and in the novels examined here, all the protagonists are either middle or upper class, well educated, and white. Hence, to the extent that homosexuality is figured, it is highly class-inflected. Although all the characters are, more or less, in the closet, their travels and explorations of other cultures bestow on them an anonymity, and a freedom from provincial restrictions. The overlap of themes of travel and nonconformist sexuality found in many modernist writers (Thomas Mann, Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Edith Wharton, Ernest Hemingway, Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence) is thus also a prominent aspect of White's fiction, and influences the interaction of

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63. In a letter to Richard Howard, André Gide also emphasizes the importance of truth as a protection against a stifling and discriminatory conventionality:

'I am getting to the point of no longer really knowing to what to apply my ardour and allegiance. On the other hand, I know ever more clearly what I do not want, what I cannot accept, and against what my whole being revolts: falsehood. Whether it comes from the right or the left, whether it be political or religious, falsehood tends to suppress human personality by depriving it of the right to free enquiry. It is the stifling of the individual with the hope of an illusory advantage to the herd. Each of us is asked to abdicate his critical spirit in order to make it easier to strangle himself.' Cited in Richard Howard, 'Preface: Considerations of a Transfuge', in *Homosexualities and French Literature:Cultural Contexts/ Critical Texts*, ed. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 13.

64. Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety:Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 15.

sexuality and society.

The majority of White's novels communicate by negative example. In those discussed here, all the heroes and heroines who obliquely or distinctly figure homosexual desire are either killed off, or incarcerated in mental institutions. Such endings reflect in part how, at certain historical periods, the polarization of the gender system is more extreme that at others: in instances of the former, the characters who fail to slot neatly into one gender or the other ultimately find that society holds no promise for them. Moreover, the fact that gender conflict often takes place against a background of war (*The Aunt's Story, The Solid Mandala, The Twyborn Affair*) is a symbolic commentary on the social implications of the rigidity of the opposition of masculinity and femininity, and a dramatization of the often intense anxieties arising from the interrogation of 'the association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural "attraction" to the opposing sex/gender'.[65]

Male homosexual characters who are labelled effeminate and/or those who perceive themselves as such, foreground the process whereby femininity is devalued in the scheme of sexual difference. Often this is countered in the novels by an overvaluation of the positive and more passive aspects of femininity such as caring and nurturing, a situation that weakens White's critique of the gender system. Sometimes the 'feminine' is divided and dispersed, its higher qualities attributed to men, its lower qualities reserved for women, in a framework designed to elevate the male homosexual above the status of effeminancy, and thereby short circuit its inferior placement vis-à-vis masculinity and femininity. However, it is significant that many of the negative and sometimes misogynistic representations of women derive from the viewpoint of a tormented and oppressed homosexual character who is railing against his sexual and social impotence. The presence of madness in so many of the novels examined here is related to this. The self-destructiveness of Waldo Brown in *The Solid Mandala,* for instance, represents some of the effects of the denigration of femininity in a macho-obsessed and war-torn Australian culture. A closet homosexual, Waldo unquestioningly accepts the medical and wider cultural labelling

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65. Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal,* 40: 4 (1988), p. 524.

of him as effeminate: by collaborating with such oppressive and denigratory representations, Waldo succeeds in devaluing himself by devaluing women in general. In this way, White's representations of homosexuality act as a catalyst for a critique of the workings of the entire gender system.

The analyses of the novels presented in the following pages employ a critical apparatus that combines gay and queer theories, feminist theory and psychoanalysis. This is in response to the complexity of White's depictions of homosexual desire. Chapter two approaches *The Aunt's Story* from the perspective of queer theory, focusing on the ambiguity of the language, and on the dissonance between the narrative's use of allegory and modernist techniques and the elaborate characterization of its heroine. My reading opens up a space for the homoerotic content of the novel to emerge, resulting in a radically different interpretation. Chapter two thus poses a challenge to critical approaches that deny a writer's sexuality has interpretative consequences, and by placing the novel in its historical and cultural contexts, engages with the ways White offers the sexual body as a challenge to the overdetermining effects of the gender system.

Having examined White's narrative techniques in *The Aunt's Story* and penetrated their complexity, chapter three looks at *Voss*, in which the exploration of the Australian interior is read as an allegory for the discovery of homosexuality. The terms of the love affair between Voss and Laura Trevelyan are shown to pivot on a homoerotics not a heteroerotics. Connections are made between Laura's masculine delineation and Theodora Goodman's, and the role of dreams and hallucinations are stressed as a means of figuring a 'darker' and less 'civilized' sexuality in nineteenth-century Australia. As this was also the time when homosexuality began to be theorized in Europe, it is suggested that the combination of this historical background and the discovery of new worlds is utilized in *Voss* to symbolize the charting of new sexual terrains in both Australian history and literature.

Chapter four argues that with *The Solid Mandala*, White instigates a more overtly political approach to the subject of homosexuality. This novel focuses on the pain of sexual secrecy, the torment of living with the knowledge that society despises and fears you out of ignorance. The period which it covers is, like *Voss*, significant: implicit references are

made to the Oscar Wilde trials, and to the scandalous media coverage of homosexuality during the early years of the twentieth century. Because it incorporates a closet homosexual author in its narrative, it proposes links with White himself. In a letter to Ingmar Björkstén, White claimed that he felt 'very close to *The Solid Mandala* because it conveys a certain nightmarish quality of life which I have experienced.'[66] *The Solid Mandala* is thus also read as being a latent and ironic commentary on the literary restrictions White faced at this time.

Chapter five argues that *The Twyborn Affair* represents male homosexuality in psychoanalytic terms as a melancholic sexual position. It examines Freud's theories of melancholia and the role it plays in the process of gender acquisition, and also draws on Judith Butler's discussion of melancholia and homosexuality. As it, like *The Solid Mandala*, concentrates on the psychic and socially injurious effects of homophobia on both homosexuals and women, it represents White's strongest endorsement of a break with contemporary constructions of homosexuality and gender acquisition.

The final novel examined, *Memoirs of Many in One* is, in effect, a retaliation to readings that deny the duplicity of White's work and consequently, the duplicitious presence of homosexual desire in it. The multi-talented Alexandra Xenophon Demirjian Gray is White's alter ego, and takes delight in traversing gender and sexual boundaries. Her senility protects her from the effects of public opprobrium, enabling her to demonstrate what Judith Butler argues in relation to gender performativity, that although there is 'no position outside power', one can occupy 'zones of legitimacy ... to dismantle them, or to exploit them as sites of intervention.'[67] As a revisionist text, *Memoirs of Many in One* effectively contextualizes almost all the themes of White's fiction, opposing the formal constraints of genre and the wider cultural containment of homosexuality.

Throughout the discussions of these novels, general thematic comparisons are made with Wilde, Gide, Malouf, Proust and others in order to suggest interesting and provocative comparisons, rather than to place White in a tradition of gay literature. Having said that, such an approach would be productive, and would effect important developments

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66. Patrick White to Ingmar Björkstén (21.i.73), *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 410.
67. Judith Butler, 'The Body You Want', *Art Forum*, 31: 3 (1992), pp. 84, 89.

in the field of gay studies. By suggesting continuities between White's fiction and that of other gay and modernist writers, my intention here is to extend the influence of his work beyond that of Australian literature: as his novels span the last four decades of the twentieth century, they help map the impact of nation, class, and race on shifting definitions of sexuality and gender in both England and Australia, thereby enriching our understanding of their social, historical and literary construction and regulation. In addition, they chart the influence of Empire of the construction of homosexualities. Finally, White's pre-emptive involvement with many of the central tenets of gay, queer, and gender studies instigates a rewarding interaction between theory and literature which penetrates many of their on-going controversies: it demonstrates, for example, how a recognition of the complex and sometimes contradictory issues surrounding inequality between sexualities need not be a stumbling block to the collective opposition to homophobia and heterosexism. Indeed, by incorporating an equally stringent critique of heterosexual relations in his novels, White highlights how, if the campaign against homophobia is to be successful, homosexuality needs fully to analyse and critique its position vis-à-vis heterosexuality. Because sexuality is an essential aspect of all subjectivities, it is important that all sexual relations be reconceptualized in the light of the challenge homosexual desire asserts to normative sexuality. As particularly consistent and comprehensive critiques of sexual regulation, White's novels offer new ways of analyzing and resisting hegemonic control over the multiplicity of sexual and gender roles struggling for legitimation in modern society.

Chapter 2

The Aunt's Story: *more than a woman*

> When the 'Mona Lisa' was stolen from the Louvre in Paris in 1911 and was missing for two years, more people went to stare at the blank space than had gone to look at the masterpiece in the twelve previous years.
> - *Book of Useless Information*[1]

The Aunt's Story is White's most compelling and enigmatic novel, and is, therefore, an apt starting point for an investigation into his figurations of homosexual desire. As this and the following chapter will illustrate, such a focus incorporates the equivocal presence and absence of what the novels designate (or refuses to designate) as homosexuality, necessitating an engagement with vagueness, with a liminality that destabilizes the epistemological poles of absence and presence without dismantling them.[2] In *The Aunt's Story* specifically, homosexual desire operates on the interface between absence and presence, providing a clear example of the lack of textual focus that is its very mark in White's early fiction.[3]

A painting entitled *Figure in a Garden (The Aunt)* (1945) by White's friend Roy de Maistre, was an important influence on *The Aunt's Story*.[4] Its significance resides primarily in the way it challenges

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1. Barbara Cartland cited in Susan Gubar, '"The Blank Page" and the Issues of Female Creativity', in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986), p. 292.
2. Likewise, with regard to the concept of the 'open secret', D. A. Miller notes that 'the phenomenon of the "open secret" does not, as one might think, bring about the collapse of those binarisms [i.e., private-public, inside-outside, subject-object] and their ideological effects, but rather attests to their fantasmatic recovery.' *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 207.
3. Of White's first novel, *The Living and the Dead* (1941; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), David Marr comments that although the character of Elyot Standish 'was homosexual, that fact would be resolutely disguised from readers.' *Patrick White: Letters*, p. 21.
4. In a letter to Sidney Nolan (7.vi.58) White says:
   'It is exciting to think you might do some paintings from *Voss* .... Visually, *The Aunt's Story* is a kind of Klee. Long before it was written I was seeing it in terms of Klee, and after the War, when I began to write it in London, there was a tremendous exhibition of Klee's paintings which poured oil on my flames. At the same time I was also much influenced by a painting by Roy de Maistre which I bought then, still own,

the interpretative process (see **fig. 1**). White met de Maistre in London in the 1930s, and in *Flaws in the Glass* he claims that de Maistre 'was one of the more important influences on my life.'[5] Returning to London after the war, White found that de Maistre had fallen from prominence and bought *Figure in a Garden (The Aunt)* in an attempt at financial assistance. According to Marr's biography, it was painted 'after Roy visited the ruins of Chelsea barracks where one of his relatives was killed by a buzz-bomb late in the war. On a heap of rubble he found a photograph of the dead woman's mother and from this grim souvenir he painted a portrait of a woman in full Edwardian dress but with a face entirely blank, as if her clothes were on a tailor's dummy.' Marr continues: 'The image of "The Aunt" fused in White's mind with a long-planned novel about a wandering spinster going mad in a world on the brink of violence' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 237).

There are several evocative aspects to this anecdote, not least of which concerns the ghoulish circumstances which gave birth to the painting. But what is most interesting in relation to *The Aunt's Story* is the way it organizes itself around enigmas similar to those suggested by the portrait. The split between head and body produces the mannequin effect remarked on by Marr - as if her clothes were on a tailor's dummy. The figure's angularity, the absence of a face, and the conspicuous feminine clothing all combine to make this less a painting of de Maistre's first cousin, Camilla Keogh, and more a study in illusion. Defying the laws of reason, *Figure in a Garden (The Aunt)* and *The Aunt's Story*

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and of which Roy painted a second version on reading *The Aunt's Story*.' *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 139.

Caption details of the painting are as follows:

Figure in a Garden (The Aunt) 1945

Oil on hardboard

90.5 x 63.5 cm

Gift of Patrick White 1974

Art Gallery of New South Wales

For a detailed discussion of the painting see Heather Johnson, *Roy de Maistre.The English Years 1930-1968* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1995), pp. 30-37. Johnson also looks at the close relationship between painting and White's fiction in 'The Collection of Patrick White', *Art and Australia*, 29: 1 (1991): 68-74.

5. *Flaws in the Glass*, p. 24. White and de Maistre were lovers in the 1930s. See *Patrick White:Letters*, pp. 8, 139. Artistic connections are also present in relation to 'The Ham Funeral', *The Vivisector* and *The Twyborn Affair*.

Top
48.1974

generate similar interpretative consequences as *The Turn of the Screw*; that is, they give us the 'shadow of a shadow', and execute a 'tone of tragic, yet of exquisite, mystification.'[6] Responding to this feature of *The Turn of the Screw*, Shoshana Felman characterizes it as a text that '*actively* "won't tell"', that will not '*overcome* the difficulty of ambiguity', and because of this produces an '*invitation* to *interpretation*'.[7] In that they achieve a similar outcome, *Figure in a Garden (The Aunt)* and *The Aunt's Story* are less extreme, but equally fascinating versions of the blank space that became the *Mona Lisa*.

The invitation to interpretation posed by *The Aunt's Story* is one which requires we take as our starting point the fact that it is nothing less than representation itself which is at stake in this narrative. Hence this chapter takes a different interpretative route to most critical accounts which insist on reading Theodora either as a mystic (mad)woman or as Everyman.[8] It argues that, like the aunt in the painting, Theodora Goodman occupies a position of liminality between the literal and the metaphorical, death and life, male and female, masculine and feminine.

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6. Henry James, The New York Preface to *The Turn of the Screw*, in the Norton Edition, pp. 118, 120.
7. Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness:Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 153, 154, 163. Italics in the original.
8. For the former perspective see Peter Wolfe, *Laden Choirs:The Fiction of Patrick White* (Kentucky: Kentucky University Press, 1983), pp. 66-85. For the latter see, Thomas L. Warren, 'Patrick White:The Early Novels', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 27: 1 (1981): 121-41. Similar approaches include Mark Williams, *Patrick White* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 39-51; Alan Lawson, 'Bound to Dis-Integrate:Narrative and Interpretation in *The Aunt's Story*', *Antipodes*, 6: 1 (1992): 9-15; Peter Quartermain, 'Home-Ground-Foreign-Territory:Living with Australia', *Australian Literary Studies*, 15: 2 (1991): 45-54; Laurence Steven, *Dissociation and Wholeness in Patrick White's Fiction* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), pp. 13-56; David Tacey, *Patrick White:Fiction and the Unconscious* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 18-47; A. P. Riemer, 'Back to the Abyss:Patrick White's Early Novels', *Southerly*, 47: 4 (1987): 347-69; Carolyn Bliss, *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 35-49; Ian Reid, 'The Landscape of Narration in *The Aunt's Story*', in *Mapped But Not Known:The Australian Landscape of the Imagination*, ed. P. R. Eaden and F. H. Mores (Netley, S. Australia: Wakefield Press, 1986), pp. 210-18; Veronica Brady, 'Patrick White and the Question of Woman', in *Who Is She?*, ed. Shirley Walker (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), pp. 178-90; several essays in the collection *Patrick White:A Critical Symposium*, ed. R. Shepherd and K. Singh (Adelaide: The Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978); William Walsh, *Patrick White's Fiction* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977), pp. 18-30.

As death permeates the imaginative background of the painting, so it infiltrates the narrative of *The Aunt's Story* in a manner which draws on its power to conceal, to lay to rest. The question which leads on from this is: what is the novel trying to hide?

Approached in this light a very different narrative emerges from the one spoken of in critical accounts to date: it is one, moreover, that has sexuality at its centre. But this sexual presence speaks by indirection; it is not explicit and, furthermore, is not determined by Theodora's apparently female sex. The novel's representation of its heroine is so equivocal as to furnish material to enable us to read her as a disguised male homosexual figure and, possibly, as a lesbian spinster. An almost unrelenting focus on her body, and the deliberate use of connotation in place of denotation, signal that *The Aunt's Story* contains a repressed sexual meaning, a meaning located in a blank space, a space where the language of the text fails, or refuses, to name her desires.

In his essay 'Anal Rope', D. A. Miller reads the ambiguous presence of male homosexuality in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* in terms of connotation, which he defines as entailing 'a certain semiotic insufficiency.'[9] Connotation, he claims, 'can't help appearing doubtful, debatable, possibly a mere effluvium of rumination ... fond of discovering in what must be read what need not be read into it' (p. 124). In contrast, he defines denotation as immediately self-evident, 'however on reflection deconstructible' (p. 123). The sophistry intrinsic to *The Aunt's Story* works in a like manner. Additionally, such dubiety locates the novel historically and culturally. Although 1948 saw the publication of Alfred Kinsey's influential *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, and homoeroticism and homosexuality in Australia were brought 'increasingly into the public eye', it remained 'in such a way as to portray any people with homoerotic desires as perverts, freaks, or child-molesters.'[10] Hence the exodus of many of Australia's homosexual artistic

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9. D. A. Miller uses these concepts of connotation and denotation to discuss the liminal presence of male homosexuality in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*. See, 'Anal Rope', pp. 119-41. Subsequent referenes to this essay will be incorporated parentethically in the text by page number. Another homosexual author known for his circumspect treatment of homosexuality is Tennessee Williams. John M. Clum examines this in '"Something Cloudy, Something Clear":Homophobic Discourse in Tennessee Williams', in *Displacing Homophobia:Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture*, pp. 149-67.
10. Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p. 86.

community in the late 1940s.[11] On the one hand, therefore, we could say that White choose connotation over denotation in order to circumvent public opprobrium. On the other hand, a refusal of the conventional representations of homosexual desire could imply a rejection of derogative associations, a re-creation of homoeroticism along different lines, and in other words.

Before moving directly to *The Aunt's Story*, I want to introduce another fascinating piece of intertextuality, this time concerning a novel. *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* (1895/1903) is by the Australian author Vivian Cory who wrote under the pseudonym 'Victoria Crosse', and its relevance to this discussion resides in the thematic similarities it shares with *The Aunt's Story*.[12] These two novels have never been considered together before, and while there is, to my knowledge, no evidence to suggest White read Crosse's novel, the thematic parallels are so striking that they deserve attention. Both novels contain gender-ambigious heroines called Theodora, and both contstruct complicated sexual liaisons around this gender ambiguity. In her essay on Crosse, Virginia Blain summarizes *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* thus: it is 'a novel written by a woman from a man's point of view about a man who falls in love with a woman who looks like a man ...' (pp. 148-9; ellipsis in the original). In fact, Crosse's Theodora, like White's, has a moustache, and this is her main identifying feature. Just as the effect of the gender ambiguity in *The Aunt's Story* is to suggest that Theodora Goodman's central function in the novel is as a figure for a man, and more importantly, a man who loves other men, so, the Theodora of *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* looks like a man, and puts into play transgressive desires that 'disturb the rigid boundaries polarising the two sexes and opens up the socially constructed hierarchisation of sexuality to a new form of critique' (p. 151). This

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11. See, Garry Wotherspoon, 'The Flight of the "Exiles of the Spirit":Male Homosexual Artists and the Onset of the Cold War in Sydney', in *Sydney Minorities*, ed. Shirley Fitzgerald and Garry Wotherspoon (Sydney: Pluto Press, forthcoming).
12. Information regarding Vivian Cory is taken from Virginia Blain's article, 'Cross-dressing in fiction:literary history and the cultural construction of sexuality', in *Feminine, Masculine and Representation*, ed. Terry Threadgold and Ann Cranny-Francis (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), pp. 140-153. Subsequent references to this essay will be incorporated parenthetically in the text by page number. All quotations from *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* are taken from this essay and are included parenthetically in the text by page number.

fascinating interrelationship between two novels fifty years apart will be taken up again in what follows.

The Aunt's Story has a tripartite structure which it shares with White's penultimate novel, *The Twyborn Affair*. Part I, entitled 'Meroë', treats of Theodora's life up to the time of her mother's death; Part II, 'Jardin Exotique', is obviously modernist in theme and structure and is taken up with charting the workings of Theodora's psyche; Part III, 'Holstius', briefly sees the middle-aged heroine in America where she ends the novel about to be taken away to an anonymous mental institution. Overall, Theodora's eccentric behaviour is interpreted loosely as madness by other characters in the novel (critics tend to interpret it as a distinguishing feature of genius). More often than not narrative point of view undercuts the opinions of such characters by implying that they are driven by a herd mentality, incapable of rising above the stifling (heterosexual) conventionality of the crowd.[13] Thus, when Theodora's childhood friend Violet is taken out of school '"to help with the housekeeping and do the flowers"' the text comments: 'The settled nature of it all made Violet's voice flat and matter of fact. But of course it would happen like this. The answer could have been found at the back of a book' (p. 59). Still, references to Theodora's madness occur throughout the narrative, and the fact that she quits it about to be incarcerated needs to be taken seriously: such information amounts to more than a portrait of a misunderstood eccentric genius. In this light, the theories circulating in Europe and Australia in the early- to mid twentieth-century regarding homosexuality are of particular relevance to this discussion.

From the very first pages of *The Aunt's Story* White takes great pains to ensure readers notice that Theodora's is no ordinary female body. Apart from what Douglas Porteous has termed the heroine's geomorphism, there is an emphasis on her intellectual difference, reflected by her body and in her 'ugly mug, that was always about to ask you something you could not answer' (p. 15):

> Black had yellowed her skin. She was dry, and leathery, and yellow. A woman of

13. For an analysis of the morality and opinions of crowds see, Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1947). See also Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (London: Gollancz, 1962).

> fifty, or not yet, whose eyes burned still, under the black hair ... You could not have noticed Theodora Goodman. Her expression did not tell. Nor did she love her own face. Her eyes were shy of mirrors.... This thing a spinster, she sometimes mused, considering her set mouth; this thing a spinster which, at best, becomes that institution an aunt. (p. 12)

This account renders Theodora simultaneously distinct and obscure in that it hinges both on the passive nature of appearing in accordance with one's physique (her yellowness and dryness), and the active nature of adopting an appearance which attempts to conceal (her blank expression). This is also one of the dramas enacted by *Figure in a Garden (The Aunt)* in its contrast between an unsexed and ungendered head, and a body draped in Elizabethan feminine dress. The apparent dichotomy in both is between mind and body, which can also be read as inner versus outer, as the psychological being somehow in discordance with the physiological. In the end the antithesis is masked by Theodora's official position in society as an aunt, as someone who is directly related to the dominant institution of heterosexuality, and to the privilege of positive identity bestowed therein.

However, even this respected position is employed in an unconventional manner by the novel when it represents it as one 'of importance, dashing, almost rakish' (p. 13). Why rakish? What is dissolute or debauched about being an aunt? The narrative never provides an explanation; instead it resumes its focus on Theodora's body, highlighting her moustache and her unique physical relationship with her niece Lou: 'It was Lou, whose eyes could read a silence ... Theodora loved Lou.... It was too intimate, physical, to express. Lou had no obvious connection either with Frank or Fanny. She was like some dark and secret place in one's own body' (p. 13). Nuances such as the 'dark and secret place' are as close as the novel comes to breaking its silence on Theodora's erotic position.

If we, like Lou, are to 'read a silence', we must be reconciled to the double sense inherent in connotation. Commenting on analyses of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Eve Sedgwick notes how 'thoroughly the elements of even this novel can be read doubly or equivocally, can be read either as having a thematically empty "modernist" meaning or as having a thematically full "homosexual" meaning.'[14] Whatever 'homosexual'

14. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, pp. 165-66.

meaning we attribute to *The Aunt's Story*, it can never be full: the connotative homosexual thematics of this novel are such that they allow 'homosexual meaning to be elided even as it is also being elaborated ... [reinforcing] the undecidability that keeps suspicion just that, a thing never substantiated, never cleared.'[15] Indirection is, however, inevitable in a novel taken up with disguise. As chapter 1 ends, the narrative begins the story of Theodora's life, a life distinguished as one in which 'the human body had disguised its actual mission of love and hate', and in which to 'tell the story of Meroë was to listen also to her own blood' (p. 19). Formulating a type of internal body map to convey a complexity occluded by appearances, *The Aunt's Story* guides us toward a different method of reading.

Just as Theodora is no ordinary adult, chapters 2-4 demonstrate quite clearly that she was no ordinary child. Like Stephen in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, she is differentiated from her sister (and mother) by her closeness to her father.[16] This bond manifests itself on several levels - intellectual, emotive, and physical. Distinguishing her from her sister, Theodora's father 'once said to Mother that Fanny would always ask the questions that have answers' (p. 40). Unlike Fanny, Theodora is invited to read the 'old books, foreign books' (p. 22) in her father's library. In one particularly significant passage, a dark, romantic connection between Theodora's physical and emotive states and the Meroë after which their home is named, is made apparent:

> "There is another Meroë," said father, "a dead place, in the black country of Ethiopia."
>
> Her hands were cold on the old spotted paper of the complicated books, because she could not, she did not wish to, believe in the second Meroë....
>
> "I shall go outside now," Theodora said.
>
> Because she wanted to escape from this dead place with the suffocating cinder breath. She looked with caution at the yellow face of the house, at the white shells in its placid, pocked stone. Even in sunlight the hills surrounding Meroë were black. Her own shadow was a rather conspicuous rag, so that from what she saw and sensed, the legendary landscape became a fact, and she could not break loose from an expanding terror.
>
> Only in time the second Meroë became a dim and accepted apprehension lying quietly at the back of her mind. She was free to love the first. (p. 24)

The adjectives used to describe Theodora's colouring in chapter 1 are repeated here, making her characterization almost geomorphic. The

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15. D. A. Miller, 'Anal Rope', p. 124.
16. Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Virago, 1982).

colours also echo those in de Maistre's painting, notably the predominance of black and grey, with the conspicuous dots of yellow. The depiction of such a stark and barren lansdscape is typically Australian, but White's artistic representation of Meroë registers a notable alliance with the Heidelberg School whose melancholic depictions of the Australian landscape were criticized for their romanticism. In 1876 Marcus Clarke, for example, characterized it thus:

> What is the dominant note of Australian scenery? That which is the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry - Weird Melancholy ...
>
> The Australian mountain forests are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation.... The lonely horseman riding between the moonlight and the day sees vast shadows creeping across the shelterless and silent plains, hears strange noises in the primeval forest, where flourishes a vegetation long dead in other lands ...[17]

Kay Schaffer notes how Francis Adams, a journalist whose travel guide was published in London in 1893, characterized the Bush in a similar vein, as 'a mysterious presence which calls to men for the purposes of exploration and discovery, but it is also a monstrous place in which men may either perish or be absorbed.'[18] As an artistic genre, this type of representation fell out of favour in the 1890s when it was 'held up as typical of a negative, alienated "English" view of the Australian landscape, and compared unfavourably with the cheerful, sunlit vision of the 1890s generation.'[19] However, Sidney Nolan's *Central Australia* (1950) (**fig. 2**), *Carron Plains* (1948) (**fig. 3**), and *Dry Jungle* (1949) (**fig. 4**) pick up on analogous themes of emptiness, and the vast, silent, foreboding quality of the Australian expanse.[20]

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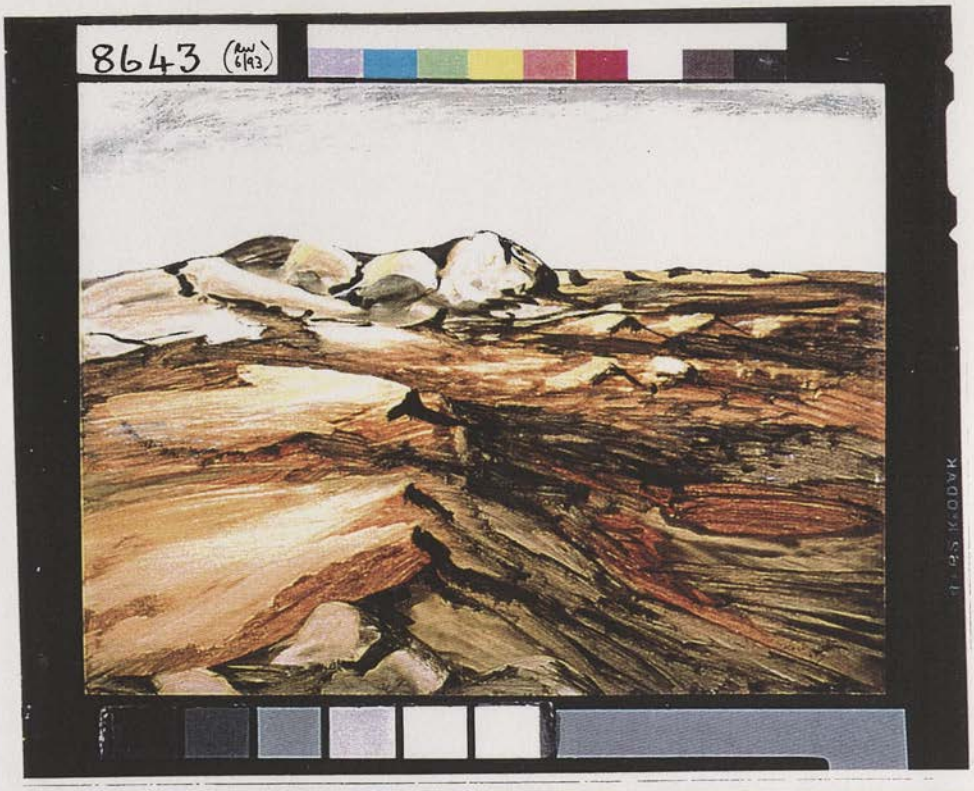
17. See, *The Australian Dream:A Collection of Anticipations about Australia from Captain Cook to the Present Day*, ed. Ian Turner (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1968), pp. 101-102. Cited in Richard White, *Inventing Australia:Images and Identity 1688-1980* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 105.
18. Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush:Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 52.
19. Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, pp. 105-6.
20. Sidney Nolan (1917-1992). Caption details of these paintings are as follows:
    Central Australia 1950
    Synthetic polymer paint (acrylic) on hardboard
    44.8 x 60.9 cm
    Purchased 1952
    Art Gallery of New South Wales.
    Carron Plains 1948


8643 (Aug 6/93)

8168 (JUNE '87)
ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
© COPYRIGHT
NEON

White has clearly called upon an old artistic genre to dramatize the unique relationship his heroine has with the landscape.[21] His method refutes what Kay Schaffer has claimed as the dominant Australian landscape and national identity tradition namely, the 'land-as-woman', whereby the land is 'a metaphor for feminine otherness through which man attains a (precarious) identity'.[22] The relationship between Theodora and Meroë shares the Romantic understanding of nature as a stimulus to meditation, and it has explicit parallels with the Gothic novel's exploitation of extreme landscapes to signify sexual terror and mystery.[23] The landscape thus operates as a projection of Theodora's unconscious fears, a mirror that reflects what lies beneath the civilized surface of her mind, and the civilized surface of the language of the novel.

The terror this landscape evokes in Theodora can perhaps be linked with modernist writers of World War I fiction and, to a certain extent, to White's own experiences in World War II. In his study, Klaus Theweleite notes the parallels *Freikorps* soldiers made between 'the earth's interior and 'the man's own interior'; and in her investigation into how landscape is figured in relation to the soldier's body in novels of the First World War, Trudi Tate argues that the earth 'indirectly represents the men's *own* bodies as targets of extreme violence.'[24] While this passage

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Synthetic polymer paint (acrylic) on hardboard
91.7 x 122 cm
Purchased 1949
Art Gallery of New South Wales.
Dry Jungle 1949
Enamel on hardboard
91.8 x 122.2 cm
Purchased 1950
Art Gallery of New South Wales.

21. White saw the landscape as providing him with his primary inspiration: 'The ideal Australia I visualised during my exile and which drew me back, was always, I realise, a landscape without figures.' *Flaws in the Glass*, p. 49. While the freedom such an colonialist imagination allows is vast, it is also exclusionary in the extreme.
22. Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, p. 81.
23. For example, Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe, *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897). Also, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Christabel* (1816) and Lord Byron, *Manfred* (1817).
24. Klaus Theweleite, *Male Fantasies, Vol. 1:Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans, Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 240. Trudi Tate, *Modernist Fiction and the First World War*: Ph.D. University of Cambridge, 1994, p. 56. Italics in the original.

shares images of death and claustrophobia associated with the earth in war novels, it seems to be reaching toward something else: less an explicit reference to death and more a trope for repression.

The suggestive signifying proximity between the 'dead place in the black country of Ethiopia', the 'complicated books', the 'suffocating cinder breath', Theodora's own shadow as a 'conspicuous rag', and the overwhelming terror of legend becoming fact, is arresting in a psychoanalytic vein. Clearly for Theodora, Meroë represents the possibility of something 'dead' coming to life. According to Freud, '*the essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness.*'[25] However, a trait peculiar to instinct-repression is that 'it develops in a more unchecked and luxuriant fashion if it is withdrawn by repression from conscious influence. It ramifies like a fungus, so to speak, in the dark and takes on extreme forms' (p. 87). The language and imagery which focus Theodora's expanding terror appear consistent with Freud's delineation of repression. Also, the movement forward in narrative time to her 'acceptance' of the situation signals a return to 'successful' repression: but, as Freud argues, and as *The Aunt's Story* itself bears out, 'flight is of no avail, for the ego cannot escape from itself' (p. 84). This fact is underscored in the narrative's selective deployment of the Gothic: for instance, Theodora's double, Lou, is called 'the gothic child' (p. 114), and at the end of chapter 2, a Gothic atmosphere is evoked to portray Theodora's character:

> But she knew already that he would not come. In all that she did not know there was this certainty. She began to feel that knowing this might be the answer to many of the mysteries. And she felt afraid for what was prepared. The magpies sang cold in the warm air of Meroë. (p. 46)

This foreboding atmosphere 'speaks' Theodora's intuitive certainty that she is part of a realm of mysteries whose terrible revelation is inevitable ('prepared'). The pathetic song of the magpies reinforces the Gothic tone of mystery, and allusions to the sexual become more tangible and frequent. Concomitantly, an atmosphere bordering on paranoia comes to be associated with the protagonist as she gets older: significantly,

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25. Sigmund Freud (1915), 'Repression', in *Collected Papers*, Volume 4, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. Ernest Jones (London: The Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 86. Italics in the original. Subsequent references to this work are incorporated in the text by page number.

this runs parallel with that time of her life when she is expected to woo members of the opposite sex. The early references to Theodora's 'unseemly' rifle (p. 32) now begin to take on a significance far beyond straightforward gender rebellion.

The bond between Theodora and her father is set up along masculine lines. Almost an honorary boy, Theodora is granted indirect access to her father's money problems. Julia Goodman is deemed ultimately responsible for these, having forced George to sell off most of their land to finance her foreign trips. There are several occasions in Part I when Theodora and George join forces to defy Julia, so that the overall picture we get of her is as a tyrant. One such occasion concerns the issue of mateship.

Kay Schaffer discusses the concept of mateship in her work on the ideological prejudices of Australian literary and cultural criticism in relation to issues of gender and nationalism. For her, mateship excludes women as it 'parallels the loathing and fear of the feminized landscape'. This loathing 'creates the condition and possibility of mateship.'[26] However, as we have seen, *The Aunt's Story's* formulation of the landscape is not so clear-cut and, given that, neither is its manipulation of mateship. One basic premise to Australian masculine gender codes which Schaffer fails to appreciate is their grounding in what Eve Sedgwick has called male homosocial desire.[27] While emphasizing the importance of mateship to the formation of masculinity, Schaffer overlooks the intercourse between identification and desire which is constitutive of mateship, and which would complicate her sketchy notion of homophobia. Sedgwick's contention that it is 'the inextricability of identification from desire that makes male homosexuality a necessary structuring term for male heterosexual empowerment' (p. 105) is acted out in *The Aunt's Story* in the relationship between the 'Man who was Given his Dinner' (p. 43), and George and Julia Goodman. Here, both senses of homosocial desire are exemplified - bonding that incorporates but is not limited to what constitutes the homosexual. Further, this scene

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26. Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, p. 101.
27. Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men:English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Subsequent references to this work incorporated in the text by page number. This point is taken up again in chapter three in more detail in relation to the representation of mateship in *Voss*.

exemplifies Theodora's dual purpose in the narrative.

The Man is an old mate of George's who comes to Meroë looking for food. They used to go gold prospecting together before George married the despotic Julia. The former's allegorical function is announced by the first description we have of him: young Theodora says he has 'a beard, like a prophet, greyer than Father's, thick and big' (p. 40). (Note also the abstractive, almost God-like, quality of his name - the Man - something which identifies him with Theodora whose name means 'Gift of God'). Theodora tells the Man how she had nearly been killed by lightning and then 'decided to sit down, because something warm and close had been established' (p. 41). After this, the narrative proceeds to make overt value judgements concerning the honourable quality of male social contracts as opposed to the moral (and sexual) depravity of male-female associations. As the Man is hungry Theodora suggests that perhaps her mother and father will ask him to stay to dinner, but he replies that he is not so sure as '"Sometimes it's different when they settle down"'. Nonetheless he hopes that '"your Father, for sentimental reasons, will tell them to dish me up some dinner. My belly's hollow. And your Father's taking a hell of a time"' (p. 42). The first clue we have of the homosocial bond between the two is the use of the adverb 'sentimental' to describe their relationship. Also, the remainder of this story is taken up with demonstrating that it is very different after marriage, as a wife usurps the position of the mate. Predictably then, Julia does not want to give the Man any food, and a vicious row develops, with Theodora taking her father's side: 'Then you knew that Mother had won, in spite of Father breathing hard. It was terrible, the strength of Mother. All your own weakness came flowing back. Mother was more terrible than lightning that had struck the tree.' Eventually a compromise is reached when Theodora suggests they give him dinner on the veranda. While eating, the Man nostalgically remembers the old days of homosocial desire with his mate:

> "You're more like your father," the man said to her. "More like your father used to be. We was mates. We went prospecting down Kiandra way. I remember once we got lost, one Easter, in the mountains, when the snow came. There was the ghost of a man in the mountains, they said, who got lost in a snow drift driving his sheep. We sat all night, your father and I, under the shelter of a big dead tree, listening to the dingoes howl, waiting for the ghost. Cripes it was cold up there. We had a fire each side. But it was cold. We sat with our arms round each other, and then your father fell asleep." (p. 43).

George's partnership here is shown as companionable and respectful, in stark contrast to the present one with his wife. The homoerotic undertones are evident when the Man tells Theodora of how they held each other (like a traditional heterosexual couple), and how George - the more 'feminized' of the two - falls asleep without separating himself from his friend. Given the Man's blatant expression of his opinions concerning the negative influence women have on men, it is to be assumed that he only discusses this intensely personal and erotic occasion with Theodora because he believes her to be more like 'one of the blokes', or more to the point, like her Father. Consequently, when Fanny butts into the conversation, the Man becomes silent. Fanny acts as a substitute for Julia: just as Julia was the intruder who severed (or closeted) the social and physical bond between George and the Man all those years ago, Fanny is the unwelcome interloper who interrupts the Man and Theodora. Fanny and Julia represent lives that are spent shut up in houses, whereas male homosocial desire (with which Theodora is associated) expresses itself as physical freedom, a healthy life in close contact with nature, and a prophet-like mentality. That Theodora instinctively knows the Man will never return whereas Fanny thinks he will, demonstrates again White's persistent aligning of his heroine with masculine intuition and qualities, underscoring her dual function in the narrative.

Interestingly, because of her dual role, the character of Theodora Goodman serves to unsettle Sedgwick's categories of homosociality. In creating a female character who conforms to the qualities associated with mateship, White proposes that this Australian tradition is less restricted by sex than is usually accepted. In *The Aunt's Story*, like *The Twyborn Affair*, 'male' homosocial desire pivots on gender attributes, and hence on *masculine* bonding rather than *male* bonding. The triangulation of masculine homosocial desire through women need not imply a paradigm which consists of two men and one woman: women can wield other women as mediators of so-called 'male' transactions.

Through George and the Man, the Australian tradition of mateship becomes exemplary of independence, respect and loyalty and (given its roots in the notion of the Aussie battler), promotes an appreciation of the sublimity of nature. These mateship traits form the qualitative part of George's characterization but, by making him a miserable and

unsuccessful husband and father (Meroë has become a '"Rack-an'-Ruin Hollow"' (p. 25)), *The Aunt's Story* appears to condemn George for abdicating his duty to mateship or homosocial desire.[28] Hence, his (only half-successful) struggle with Julia to feed his mate. Looked at this way, instead of being empowered by heterosexual object choice as Sedgwick argues in relation to her choice of texts, White depicts George as more feminized in his status as husband and father. He is pathetic in relation to Julia who is pictured in George's dying words as monstrous for depriving him of his life-long desire to see Greece (p. 85).[29] Following in the footsteps of Irving Bieber and other Freudians in the fifties and sixties who said that non-conforming mothers are to be 'blamed' for causing their sons' homosexuality, Douglas Loney construes Mr and Mrs Goodman as the original 'ineffectual poetic man and the rapacious emasculating woman.'[30] Thus, although not quite empowered by heterosexuality, George still emerges as superior to Julia.

An important component of Theodora's relationship with her father is their shooting trips. Fanny never accompanies them, happy to amuse herself in the 'feminine' sphere of the home. Theodora's rifle is a significant source of contention between her mother and father as Julia despises it and George sees it as an essential part of his bond with his daughter. Significantly, Theodora takes her rifle and leaves the house whenever women come to visit who cannot but remark on her strangeness, on the chasm she highlights between her sex and her gender. The narrative represents it thus: 'Theo should have been a boy, they said, the more obliging ones, hoping to make the best' (p. 32). Shielding his daughter from such reactions, George takes her out shooting:

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28. A similar denouncement occurs in Henry Lawson's 'Mitchell on the "Sex" and other "Problems' (1898-9), where Mitchell blames men for allowing women to gain the upper hand. See Kay Schaffer's discussion in *Women and the Bush*, pp. 124-8.
29. In relation to the body, the connections between Greece and art (reaching its apotheosis in Michelangelo's 'David', a body which has likewise 'acted in so many scenes') are noticeable in *The Aunt's Story*: the books her father reads are by Greek authors, Meroë has its corollary in Greece, the pianist Moraïtis with whom Theodora feels a secret bond is Greek. No women have been to Greece or are indirectly associated with it. As Karen Hansson notes, '"Bone", "art" and "Greece" become interrelated with "truth" [clearly a masculine concept], and work as signals henceforth, whether concerning people or places.' *The Warped Universe* (Lund Studies in English 69), p. 181.
30. Douglas Loney, 'Theodora Goodman And The Minds Of Mortals:Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story*', *English Studies in Canada*, 8: 4 (1982), p. 495.

> Whenever [Mrs Parrott] came to the house, Father usually left. Father said, "Come on, Theo. You and I shall go out and shoot."
>
> She had a small rifle which she took on these occasions, and which was the cause of many arguments. Because mother hated and despised Theodora's rifle. She said it was unseemly for a girl to traipse about the country with a gun. But Father stood firm. This was something, he said, that Mother would not understand. It was wrong and unreasonable, Mother said. It was something, said Father, that he could not very well explain. Anyway, Theodora kept her rifle. (pp. 31-2)

It would appear that this rifle functions in a manner that is like the 'unspeakable' in the nineteenth century Gothic novel. That is to say, it functions as a signifier for a cluster of meanings, sexual and scandalous. Its metaphoric connections are phallic, masculine, ejaculatory; hence Mrs Goodman's accusation regarding the unseemly nature of a girl owning and using a gun. That Theo functions as the son George never had is clear from this passage: the language which describes his insistence that she keep the gun is intentionally phallic (he 'stood firm'), even though he, unlike Stephen's father in *The Well of Loneliness*, cannot consciously explain why he wants her to. Could it be that without it, she would not be 'Theo' but simply Theodora (and in Freudian terms 'castrated')? Could it be that her function in the text necessitates that she have a rifle which represents something more that a rifle? As a metaphor it challenges us to exploit the relationship between gun and penis; and metonymically, Theodora is related to her gun. What cannot be spoken except through a metaphoric screen is that Theodora Goodman's role in the novel is as a figure for a man who desires other men.'Theodora Goodman' is thus an ingenious characterization of a male homosexual, but one which embraces a homophobic attitude to male homosexuals, that is, that their sexuality should be closeted. Nonetheless, the persistent resurgence of Theodora's shooting at key moments involving sexual encounters visibly emphasizes her masculine virility and potency, demonstrating the paradox of the closet - a construction or concept that is designed to contain something that is, by definition, already 'out', already identifiable, albeit 'only as a structure of occultation.'[31]

This contention that male homosexual desire is the unspoken in *The Aunt's Story* acquires greater plausibility as the story progresses. In

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31. D. A. Miller, 'Anal Rope', p. 132.

particular, the rifle continues to make conspicuous appearances in incidents relating to sexual attraction or display. Two of them concern Frank Parrott and Huntly Clarkson. I turn to these now.

The occasion when Theodora finally gets to 'go out with' Frank is on a shoot. Fanny, however, also goes and her presence serves to highlight Theodora's unfeminine disposition. There is to be a competition between Theodora and Frank to see who can kill the most rabbits. This competition is described in cryptic sexual terms. Frank's face gets red, but not from the cold; he 'slapped the butt of his gun with a large hand' (p. 69). Suppressing her masculine adeptness at shooting, Theodora allows him to kill more rabbits because 'she did not altogether like her power. So she listened to his breathing dominate her silence, and this was better' (p. 70). In all this, despite her obvious discordance with femininity, Theodora tries to be the weaker of the two, the more feminine in relative terms, in the hope that Frank will not feel threatened by her 'unnatural' potency, and be attracted to her. Things go as well as can be expected until Frank sees a little hawk, tries to kill it, but misses.[32] Theodora does not miss, and realizes too late that she has expressed herself to Frank in a typically masculine form. Following his bemused reaction she regrets this act of self-exposure, thinking that to betray one's true feelings in a world where certain desires are not permissible is self-destructive. She is proved correct. In an elusive style reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence, the narrative reports that after

> the shooting and before the ball, Frank Parrott spoke perhaps half a dozen words to Theodora Goodman. She made him uncomfortable. He would have hated her for the incident of the hawk, hated her out of his vanity, but *because there was something that he did not understand, he remained instead uneasy, almost a little bit afraid* . (p. 71; my italics)

This presentation of Theodora's sexualized competition with Frank in

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32. Earlier in the novel, the hawk was used as a metaphor for the will to act on one's own impulses, irrespective of the risk of a situation: Theodora had watched a hawk with a reddish-golden eye tear at the carcass of a sheep and it continued to devour, regardless of her potentially menacing presence. She was mesmerised, half by his defiance and half by what she saw in his red eye: 'worlds that were brief and fierce' (p. 33). With Frank there, Theodora seems to briefly become what the hawk represented: she passes from the state of being concerned with how, as a female, she should behave in a mating ritual with a male, to the state of what I am proposing 'Meroë' presents as her 'male' self.

imagery that is explicitly phallic and ejaculatory, in addition to her curious physique, further unsettles her position as exclusively a female character

Victoria Crosse's *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* employs similar devices to unsettle the polarized constitution of the sex-gender system. It describes its heroine's physique and mentality in ways strikingly analogous to those employed by *The Aunt's Story*. Here is a description of Crosse's Theodora:

> The mouth was a delicate curve of the brightest scarlet, and above, on the upper lip, was the sign I looked for, a narrow, glossy, black line. It was a handsome face, of course, but that alone would not have excited my particular attention.... But such a tremendous force of intellect sat on the brow ... such a curious fire shone in the scintillating eyes, and such a peculiar half-male character invested the whole countenance, that I felt violently attracted to it merely from its peculiarity.[33]

This description is proffered by Cecil, the narrator. Note how both here and in *The Aunt's Story* a comparable intelligence is idenfitied with a blazing animation: where Crosse's Theodora's eyes flash, White informs us that 'Theodora Goodman's face often burned with what could not be expressed. She felt the sweat on the palm of her hands' (pp. 33-4). Both characters appear like dormant volcanoes about to erupt. Significantly, the most obvious difference between the two novels is in how *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* foregrounds Theodora's role as a manly woman who attracts men with homoerotic tendencies, whereas *The Aunt's Story* disguises it. The reason for this is that *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* consciously placed itself in the midst of a radical literary debate in Australia in the 1890s about the 'New Woman'. In the forefront of this debate was the concern that the New Woman might really be a man. Consequently, the threat to masculinity was the pivot around which the debate revolved.

Responding to the blatant gender-bending in Crosse's narrative, Virginia Blain rhetorically asks if the novel 'might be a serious social critique of the fixity of sexual desire in those value-laden representations which never transgress the man-made barriers of masculinity and femininity?' (p. 150). Offering the possibility of reading the novel as 'a disguised representation of male homosexual desire masking a

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33. Virginia Blain, 'Cross-dressing in fiction', p. 149. Subsequent referenes to this essay will be incorporated parentethically in the text by page number.

disavowed lesbian desire' (p. 151), Blain sees its importance in its disturbance of the rigid boundaries of male and female, the way it 'blurs the presumed opposition between masculine and feminine and inverts the hierarchical privilege of masculinity' (p. 153).

White's coverture - a response to the political and cultural climates of the time, as well as an indication of his own personal stance on the subject - prevents us from claiming such an incontrovertible political enterprise for *The Aunt's Story*. This, in its turn, enables the critical blindness which refuses to interrogate the reasons for the unfolding of Theodora's character along masculine lines. Still, critics have been unconsciously guided by Theodora's masculine delineation in their analyses, as it is in the criticism that the tension, always implicit in the novel, becomes explicit: the protagonist's status as woman cannot be made to coincide with the elevated values she represents. As a result, critics who focus on her intellectual superiority, on her position as spiritual quester, always side-step her madness or manipulate it as a metaphor for genius.[34] Madness is either inconsistent with the genius they claim for Theodora (because it is a genius gendered masculine) or it is metaphorical, not literal.

Discussing other critical anxieties in relation to Australian texts, Kay Schaffer has examined how they are rooted in ideas concerning the identity of Australia as a land which has forged Anglo-Saxon people (mostly men) of courage, pride and honesty who live their lives according to basic, universal principles of what is good and true.[35] She further notes how such principles are exclusive of anything which does not fall in with the norms of a 'masculine, White ... and heterosexual' culture (p. 12). Given this, it is not surprising that the 'untoward' sexual content of *The Aunt's Story* has not been enlisted in a critical tradition which is, overall, committed to identifying only those values which it sees as appropriate to the representation of Australia, or to literary criticism. And it would appear that in *The Aunt's Story*, Patrick White colludes with the idea of Australia as a country built on white, colonial, masculinist principles,

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34. See, for example, Brian Kiernan, 'The Novels of Patrick White', in *The Literature of Australia*, Second Edition, ed. Geoffry Dutton (Harmonsdworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 461-84. Also those mentioned in note 8 above.
35. Kay Schaffer,*Women and the Bush*, pp. 1-27. Subsequent references incorporated in the text by page number.

even though this involves a significant degree of self-exclusion. But it is precisely this oscillation between complicity with and critique of conservatism which motivates *The Aunt's Story*, and which distinguishes it from *Six Chapters of a Man's Life*. Like her creator, Theodora Goodman is excluded in varying degrees on the basis of her gender, her sex, her intellect, her body, but most of all, her half-revealed sexuality; and she is included because of her class position, her Australian characteristic of mateship and, for characters like Huntly Clarkson who collect 'unusual objects' (p. 102), because of her eccentricity. As the ending of the book illuminates, however, class or national character traits provide no refuge from the dominant urge to eradicate or contain difference. While it could be argued that White's (selective) misogyny and his exclusion of the Aborigines from his 'ideal landscape' fixes him within that nationalistic tradition, his sexuality and that of his heroine compels him to confront, however partially, the pain of exclusionary politics. Because of this, *The Aunt's Story* does, I think, force its readers to re-assess representations of Australian masculinity and sexuality rather than merely repeat or surpass them, as much critical interpretation contends.

Although Theodora clearly has masculine traits, these cannot be said to be commensurate with those of Frank Parrott, George Goodman, Huntly Clarkson, or any of the male characters in the novel. As such, *The Aunt's Story* is volunteering a different type of masculinity, one which takes its cue from using a female character to 'portray' a male homosexual. This interconnection of masculine and feminine suggests a link with Edward Carpenter's formula for male homosexuals as 'the intermediate sex', a paradigm that found fictional expression in E. M. Forster's *Maurice*.[36] Insofar as Theodora Goodman can be said to repeat this type of portrayal, she represents an inversion of the expressly macho type of masculinity promoted by the dominant heterosexual Australian culture, and by those groups of male homosexuals (Australian and otherwise) who are opposed to gay transvestites, or any gays who err on

36. See John Fletcher, 'Forster's self-erasure: *Maurice* and the scene of masculine love', in *Sexual Sameness*, pp. 64-90. Even though Carpenter promoted this conceptualization of homosexuals to emphasize their almost pure 'manliness' (because it privileged the 'active' as opposed to the 'passive' role), it has the paradoxical homophobic effect of exacerbating the denigration of so-called effeminate queers.

the side of effeminancy. Given this, the misogyny in *The Aunt's Story* is focused specifically on heterosexual women, rather than on women *per se*.

The final incident in the 'Meroë' section of the novel I want to look at concerns the intrusion of Theodora's adeptness at shooting into her relationship with Huntly Clarkson. As previously, this episode demonstrates the efficacy of shooting as a metaphor for socially forbidden, hence destructive, sexual desires, and the linguistic closeting which the subject matter necessitates. Huntly (again, the significance of the name speaks for itself) and Theodora have been 'courting' for some time, and they go along with friends to an Agricultural Show. There is a shooting gallery and the men decide to have a go: 'Ralph Neville began to jingle the coins in his pocket, and to gather his audience excitedly, for what febrile exhibition he could not quite suggest, but it had to take place, some primitive, dimly apprehended tail-spreading by the red cock' (p. 118). Predictably, the men are unimpressive and, in order to sooth their egos, the owner of the stall asks the women if they would like to try. All except Theodora decline this unfeminine exhibitionism and, as in the incident with Frank, she embarrasses the men. The language describing her decision to shoot is tellingly fatalistic:

> She stood already in the canvas landscape against which the ducks jerked, her canvas arms animated by some emotion that was scarcely hers. Because the canvas moments will come to life of their own accord, whether it is watching the water flow beneath a bridge, or listening to hands strike music out of wood. (p. 119)

The painting metaphor which propels this passage is modeled along psychoanalytic lines. Theodora's innate difference cannot be submerged as it emanates from her body - it will 'come to life of its own accord' dictating the chaotic pattern which her conscious life must take. In fact the image of the canvas aptly represents Theodora's function in the text as a woman: she is a figure onto which is etched an idea of homoerotic masculinity, erupting as vibrantly from the body of the text as from her own body. Notably, the reaction to this and other related incidents is figured as an inadequacy of words, an inability to flesh out language in order to articulate something beyond traditional, rigidly fixed boundaries: 'It was something mysterious, shameful, and grotesque. What can we say now? they felt' (p. 119). These characters' suspension of

meaning defines Theodora's relation to this and other similar events: it also signals her overall position in the novel as a figure whose meaning, in the terms of the novel, 'eludes the skeletons of words' (p. 110).

In chapter 3, the narrative's already complicated sexual signifying system is extended to include a reference to spinsterhood. As recent research has shown, the status of the spinster was a complex one which carried homoerotic undertones, a fate also shared by the New Woman. With the intervention of the writings of the sexologists in the 1920s, close relationships between unmarried women which would have been deemed sexually pure now ran the risk of being stigimatized as lesbian.[37] Contemplating the type of girl Theodora appears to be, Miss Spofforth characterizes her in terms reserved for spinsters. She says that Theodora is not the type to marry because she 'will not say the things [men] want to hear, flattering their vanity and their strength' (p. 63). Further, Miss Spofforth believes that Theodora 'will grow up probably ugly, and walk through life in sensible shoes. Because you are honest, and because you are barren, you will be both honoured and despised.' Such stereotypical characteristics partially echo those of the so-called 'bachelor girls' of Australia in the 1920s and 1930s: but, as Catriona Elder points out, women who chose careers (especially nursing and teaching) over marriage were in danger of being labelled 'abnormal'.[38] Given these connotations, it is important that Miss Spofforth depicts Theodora's difference in physical terms, as when she relates bodily tropes to true knowledge. In fact, White here shares E. M. Forster's understanding of the body as 'the seat of intuition and the feelings, which gives it ... an inarticulate wisdom that can outflank the intellect even as it depends on it for self-recognition and

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37. See Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies:Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1985), and Catriona Elder, '"The Question of the Unmarried":Some Meanings of Being Single in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 18: 2 (1993): 151-73. Also Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men:Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Women's Press, 1991). In *The Aunt's Story*, as in most of the novels analyzed in this thesis, White uses ideas which often do not coincide with the historical period in which the book is set. According to the time span of the novel, Theodora would be attending school some time before the outbreak of World War I, but his representation of spinsterhood clearly draws on ideas from the 1920s and 30s in Australia, and elsewhere.

38. Catriona Elder, '"The Question of the Unmarried"', pp. 157, 159.

expression.'[39] Given this, Theodora's 'barren' body speaks volumes: it also complements the refusal of 'normality' in Crosse's *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* which, as Virginia Blain argues, prevents the repression of 'the expanded desires conjured up by the rendering ambiguous of the woman's sexual role.'[40]

Part II, 'Jardin Exotique', begins with Theodora in the Hôtel du Midi in France. Thelma Herring's discussion of the thematic and symbolic connections between *The Aunt's Story* and the *Odyssey* deals largely with this section of the novel.[41] Her analysis places Theodora's character and travels within the Odyssean context of the quest or spiritual discovery, and as such, it offers a good example of the way *The Aunt's Story* encourages a masculine appraisal of its heroine.

Two consequences of Herring's identification of Theodora with Odysseus are that Theodora's female sex is obscured and, in order to establish unproblematic corollaries between her and Odysseus, her madness must be read as a figurative expression of genius. Associating Theodora with a male figure like Odysseus is, in fact, commensurate with the novel's alignment of her individualism with male characters such as the Syrian, the Man who was Given his Dinner, Mr Lestrange, and Holstius. White is thus distancing her from the amorphous group of heterosexual wives and mothers who largely make up the female cast of the novel. But while my analysis shares with Herring's an awareness of the necessity of reading Theodora as a masculinized figure, we differ on two related points: the reason why she is masculinized, and what the concept of Ithaca means within the cognitive hierarchy of the novel.

Herring reads Ithaca purely in terms of its analogy with the mythological narrative of an individualist, essential self in search of his home, surviving adversity to gain his authentic place in society. Hence, she consciously aligns Theodora with a *heterosexual* male figure. But it seems to me that White is using this mythological narrative to explore a

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39. John Fletcher, 'Forster's self-erasure', p. 78.
40. Virginia Blain, 'Cross-dressing in fiction', p. 151.
41. Thelma Herring, 'Odyssey of a Spinster:A Study of *The Aunt's Story* ', in *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, ed. G. A. Wilkes (Adelaide: Angus and Robertson, 1970), pp. 3-20. Subsequent references incorporated in the text by page number. See also James McAuley's review in *Quadrant*, 12 (1959): 91; Marjorie Barnard, 'The Four Novels of Patrick White', *Meanjin*, XV (1956): 165; and H. P. Heseltine, 'Patrick White's Style,' *Quadrant*, 27 (1963): 61-74.

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rather different type of quest: Ithaca signifies home, but it is a home Theodora never reaches and, more importantly, is never meant to reach because unlike Odysseus, home for her cannot be bound up with returning to the fold of the nuclear family (Odysseus-Penelope-Telemachos). In this heterosexual configuration (for Freud and others, the central principal of social organization) Theodora is conspicuously absent. As Herring acknowledges, 'the end of Theodora's quest is to make her independent of places as of people' (p. 16). This is a crucial point and we must therefore acknowledge the possibility that White is manipulating this myth for a quite different purpose, one which remains bound up with Theodora's position as a masculinized sexual outcast.

Instead of seeing Theodora as akin to Odysseus, it may be a more fruitful exercise in intertextuality to explore the qualities she shares with Athena who, in the *Odyssey* enables Odysseus's return to Ithaca. Like Athena in her travels, Theodora in 'Jardin Exotique' assumes many different guises, male and female, as she imaginatively travels around Europe. In Homer's text, Athena does not reveal herself until she has accomplished Odysseus's homecoming, but Theodora never reaches home, and her revelation is thereby rendered partial. That said, her intention is to return to Abyssinia/Meroë/Ithaca, that is clearly the goal of her journey (p. 256). Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged that Athena is a masculinized figure, being the goddess of justice, wisdom and warfare.[42] Although not explicitly associated with warfare, Theodora, in her deployment in Part II as a madwoman with a chaotic mind, allegorically depicts an equally chaotic and insane Europe on the brink of war.[43] Her analogy with Athena in terms of her representative position in relation to the qualities of wisdom and justice are exploited through her status as outcast; she is a Tieresias figure, signifying an acute and painful awareness of the one-sidedness of (sexual) justice in Western society. As the masculine qualities which characterize Athena make her a safe and

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42. See ed. Carolyne Larrington, *The Feminist Companion to Mythology* (London: Pandora, 1992), p. 68. Also Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 110.

43. This represents another instance of the male modernist appropriation of the madwoman as muse. Elaine Showalter writes of the use of the madwoman 'as the symbol of linguistic, religious and sexual breakdown and rebellion.... psychotic women become the artist's muse, and speak for a revolutionary potential repressed in society at large.' See *The Female Malady:Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 204.

appropriate goddess for a patriarchal society like Athens, likewise Theodora's masculine constitution and appearance are fundamental to the (homosexual) individualist's quest for authenticity above and beyond the (heterosexual) herd.

In her extreme mental isolation from the guests at the Hôtel du Midi, Theodora is evocative of the telegraphist in Henry James' *In the Cage*.[44] In his analysis of the book, Philip Sicker characterizes her as 'the most extreme version ... of an all-absorbing mind seeking to define its own limits through an imaginative love'.[45] The method the telegraphist adopts to achieve this resembles Theodora's in 'Jardin Exotique'. The telegraphist's fantasies, the love affairs she creates in her mind stem, like Theodora's, from snatches of conversation and an intensely personalized relationship with the outside world. In the end, the telegraphist ends up in a 'little home' in ways as personally and physically restrictive as the 'home' Theodora is taken to. In both narratives marriage represents, in Sicker's words, 'the reduction of a free, spontaneous spirit to a constricting social form' (p. 83). That Theodora escapes this fate for one that involves a more autocratic indoctrination in social norms, makes White's critique of the institution of heterosexual marriage the more persuasive and more urgent of the two.

The balance between the literal and figurative levels of madness negotiated in Parts I and II without obtrusive discordance, begins to disintegrate somewhat in Part Three. The scales are tipped in favour of the literal as we find Theodora at the end of her journey in the land of pioneers, America. Apart from the obvious analogies between America as the land of individualism, self-reliance, initiative, and Theodora's own quest for a new life, America is also a country whose obsession with materialism White viewed with extreme distaste. Hence, the allegorical and literal levels co-exist: a straightforward distinction is established contemporarily between her and the multitudes even as a comparison is formed historically between her and the 'founding fathers'.[46] In a move

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44. Henry James, *In the Cage* (New York: Norton, 1958).
45. Philip Sicker, *Love and the Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Henry James* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 78. Subsequent references incorporated in the text by page number.
46. See White's talk given in 1972, 'Mad Hatter's Tea Party', in which he condemns the mindless concrete expansion of Sydney by comparing it to the United States. *Patrick White Speaks*, pp. 31-33

coincident with her allegorical significance, Theodora leaves the train before she reaches a city because she 'did not fit the houses' as, 'In the bland corn song, in the theme of days, Theodora Goodman was a discord' (p. 260). In the tradition of great American pioneering heroes she quits 'civilization' and goes back to nature, following a mountain road which symbolizes her brute determination to live life on her terms:

> She was rigid with determination and purpose as she walked ... between pines, or firs, anyway some kind of small coniferous tree, stunted and dark, which possessed that part of the earth.... She could smell the expanding odour of her own body, which was no longer the sour, mean smell of the human body in enclosed spaces, but the unashamed flesh on which dust and sun have lain. She walked. She smiled for this discovery of freedom. (p. 263)

It is as if Theodora has not only released her true self from the restraints of society, but better still, has found the place in which it can live freely. The presence of the pines echoes those at home in Meroë, and Gothic symbolism continues to exert its influence in the final chapters, most obviously in the guise of the Johnson boy, Zack. With this 'dark boy' (p. 267) Theodora establishes a 'rare alliance' (p. 268) akin to the one she has with her equally dark niece, Lou. Like Lou, Zack's main characteristic is his silence and, thus, his distrust of language. This symbolic Trinity knows that it is not possible 'to tell all things always in words' (p. 271). But for Theodora freedom remains an illusion, and once again she becomes trapped in enclosed spaces. Before she is taken to the mental hospital, she 'meets' with a mentor, Holstius, who highlights how Theodora has always lived several lives: 'I shall continue to destroy myself, right down to the last of my several lives' (p. 71); '"How many of us," said Theodora, "lead more than one of our several lives?"' (p. 166); 'She could explain nothing, least of all her several lives. She could not explain that where there is more than one it is inevitable always to betray' (p. 213); '"... there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality. Each of your several lives is evidence of this"' (p. 278); '... there was no end to the lives of Theodora Goodman. These met and parted, met and parted, movingly' (p. 284).

That the trope of disguise is endemic to White's novel suggests an important corollary with other homosexual authors, most obviously Oscar Wilde. The maxims of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* likewise emphasize disguise as an instinct on

a par with the survival instinct: 'A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is obviously fatal'; 'In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing'; 'Insincerity ... is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities.'[47] But Theodora's multiple personalities do not produce the light-heartedness associated with Wilde and his creations before his imprisonment. Instead they resemble the pathos of 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' as the speaker announces: 'And all the woe that moved him so/That he gave a bitter cry,/And the wild regrets, and the bloody sweats,/None knew so well as I:/For he that lives more lives than one/More deaths than one must die.'[48]

Theodora's imprisonment is the key ingredient of Part III, in addition to being integral to the narrative as a whole. Given this, it is worth bearing in mind that the beginning of World War Two brings Part II to a close, so that by the end of the novel itself Nazi killings of homosexuals would have been going on for quite some time.[49] This, coupled with the fact that White wrote the novel in the context of revelations of those killings, puts a disturbing perspective on Theodora's incarceration. Furthermore, the post-war years in Australia saw an increase in the imprisonment of homosexuals but with one difference; instead of being a crime, homosexuality was now considered an illness. Garry Wotherspoon notes that by the end of 1948 'newspapers were noting "a police war on this nest of perverts", and quoted police sources as showing a sharp increase in homosexuality and sex perversion over Australia ... generating much public hysteria.'[50] The result was a move to segregate homosexuals from both the public and the sexually 'normal' prison population. Placing Theodora's imprisonment in this historical context makes it more difficult to interpret it symbolically as a

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47. From respectively, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Artist as Critic:Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. R. Ellmann (London: W. H. Allen, 1970), p. 393; *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act III, in *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems: Oscar Wilde*, ed. Ernest Rhys (1895; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1940); *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 175.
48. 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol', in *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems: Oscar Wilde.*
49. 30 June 1934 was the Night of the Long Knives when Heines was discovered in bed with an 18-year-old SA Obertruppfûhrer by Hitler himself. See ed. Patrick Higgins, *A Queer Reader*, pp. 155-6. The persecution of German Jews during and after the Second World War is the subject-matter of *Riders in the Chariot.*
50. Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p. 113.

containment of 'genius'.

Reading *The Aunt's Story* as the tale of 'some bloke in skirts' (p. 67) suffering through a 'rakish' body, brings a narrative to light which represents an early treatment of the significance of sexuality in and for White's writing. Even though its connotative homoerotic thematics has partially enabled critical interpretations to ignore the import of Theodora's 'several lives', this closeting would in all likelihood have occured anyway. It remains the case that the critical direction taken at any one time will reflect the politics of interpretation rather than the thematic ambiguity of White's language. Directing readers to the tensions inherent in ambivalence, *The Aunt's Story* advises us to take nothing for granted, for what is on display in Patrick White's novels is representation itself.

The following chapter looks at *Voss*, the narrative of a love affair between the explorer Voss and the niece of one of his patrons, Laura Trevelyan. Like Theodora, Laura is figured in masculine terms in the many dream texts that make up the narrative, and the chapter takes as its main focus the interplay between her role as a nineteenth-century woman and as a figure of masculine eroticism for Voss. Hence*Voss*, like *The Aunt's Story*, complicates the question of desire by blurring the demarcation lines of the gender system. The compelling interaction between the realist and fantasy levels of the novel, and between hetero- and homosexual desire, are signs of the power of the erotic to resist social regulations, and to enable characters to renegotiate their roles in society.

Chapter 3

Voss: *a 'queer courtship'*

> The one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties.
> - *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Set in the middle of the nineteenth century, *Voss* is the story of the exploration of the Australian interior by its eponymous hero and his expedition, and of his 'love affair' with Laura Trevelyan.[1] In a letter to Ben Huebsch (11.ix.56), White says that he 'got the idea for a book about a megalomaniac explorer' some years ago, but as 'Australia is the only country I really know in my bones, it had to be set in Australia, and as there is practically nothing left to explore, I had to go back to the middle of the last century.'[2]

Voss is primarily, as White himself claims more than once, the story of a '*grand passion*'.[3] It is this love affair, more than any other aspect of the book, that critics have found difficult to pin down in terms familiar to them - terms which depend on concepts of heterosexual romance and realist narrative form.[4] Of them all, Mark Williams's recent description is the most promising. Although also confined by a heterosexual paradigm, the language of his analysis of Voss and Laura's relationship manages to unconsciously override its own conventionality by classifying it 'queer'.[5]

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1. Patrick White, *Voss* (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin 1960). All references will be to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text by page number.
2. *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 107.
3. In addition to this italicized description of the Laura-Voss relationship in his letter to Huebsch, White refers to it in the same way in a letter to Sidney Nolan (7.iii.57) when he is requesting him to design the jacket. *Patrick White:Letters*, pp. 112-3.
4. A. A. Philips finds Laura and Voss's relationship annoying, claiming that 'that ghostly love-affair won't get off the page, won't acquire the flavour of an experience' (p. 457). See, 'Patrick White and the Algebraic Symbol', *Meanjin*, XXIV: 103 (1965): 455-61. In *The Mystery of Unity:Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), Patricia Morley considers their relationship 'odd', 'extreme' and 'extraordinary' (p. 106).
5. The title of this chapter is taken from Mark Williams, *Patrick White*, p. 69. The context in which the phrase 'queer courtship' appears is as follows: 'While merchants like Bonner set up stone monuments to an unattainable permanence on the fertile periphery of the country, Voss is determined to pit the vastness and ugliness of his own nature (Laura describes him thus in the course of their queer courtship) against the

Clearly, the passion of *Voss* is registered in a way that disturbs the expectations of conventional heterosexual romance, and is rendered invisible - or at least 'ghostly' - by constructing it solely along these lines.

Because of this *Voss* is, like *The Aunt's Story*, a highly provocative text, and explores erotic desires not usually found within the framework of male-female relationships. In addition to hindering our expectations of heterosexual romance, *Voss* requires that we step beyond the parameters of realism in order to engage with the complexities of the Voss-Laura relationship. David Malouf, the author of the libretto for the 1986 opera of *Voss*, found the portrayal of their relationship 'one of the book's most daring moves ... because it is, in fictional terms, non-realistic and challenging of the normative narrative conventions'.[6] One aim of this chapter is to show how the several dreams, visions and hallucinations present in the novel connect with erotic relations, and how they function to shape the narrative. Freud's accounts of dream work offer useful ways of interpreting the dreams and will be employed throughout the chapter. In fact, the novel itself can be read as a double text of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, realism and fantasy, with the one constantly infiltrating the other.[7] Because it is primarily through dreams, visions and hallucinations that readers come to know of the desires that structure the

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identical qualities he expects to find in the central deserts.' It is clear from this context, and from Williams' overall discussion of *Voss*, that he intends 'queer' as a sexually innocent synonym for 'strange' or 'unusual', with no conscious reference to erotic or sexual direction. I, on the other hand, want to exploit the term's full semantic possibilities, especially with regard to matters sexual.

6. David Malouf cited in Michael Ewans, '*Voss*: White, Malouf, Meale', *Meanjin*, 48: 1 (1989), p. 513. One interesting point is that Malouf did not expand on why he thought the novel is thus constructed. A possible reason is that he was never asked. Another reason relates to his meeting with White in 1975 whereupon, as David Marr relates, White 'complimented him on finding the "only way" to write a book [*Johnno*] about the love of two men for one another'. Marr goes on to say that when he interviewed Malouf on 25 February 1988 - before the article by Ewans was published - Malouf told him that 'he took [White's comment] to mean that he had the emotions right in *Johnno* but saved everyone from the difficulties: the special pleading of homosexuality and the messy business of writing about sex between men. Malouf saw in White a genuine aesthetic reluctance to tackle the theme' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 583). However, as my readings demonstrate, this is not actually the case.

Ewans' article also addresses the content of Malouf's adaptation, and the critical reception of the opera in both Australia and England.

7. Of course, in his essay on the uncanny, Freud points out that a firm distinction between the two terms is difficult to maintain as the 'uncanny in reality is nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (p. 241). See, Sigmund Freud (1919), 'The "Uncanny"', *Standard Edition*, 17, pp. 219-53.

relations between Frank, Voss and Laura, *Voss* appears to be both constructed by, and the subject of, repression. The flow of information to the reader, then, will necessarily run against linear narrative form and the demands of 'coherent' meaning.

White's use of telepathic communication also means that Frank, Laura and Voss know of catastrophic events long before they happen, but remain powerless to prevent them, so that the logic of cause and effect is distorted. The best examples of this visionary power are Frank's poems, *Childhood* and *Conclusion*, wherein Frank prefigures the contents of Voss's dreams, identifies his power as a delusion, describes the form Palfryman's death will take, and pin-points the position Voss will occupy within Aboriginal mythology:

> We do not meet but in distances, and dreams are the distance brought close.... The rescue rope turns to hair....(p. 295)
> I am looking at my heart, which is the centre. My blood will water the earth and make it green.... (p. 296)
> Then I am not God, but Man. I am God with a spear in his side.... (p. 297)
> They chase this kangaroo, and when they have cut off his pride, and gnawed his charred bones, they honour him in ochre on a wall. Where is his spirit? They say: It has gone out, it has gone away, it is everywhere. (p. 297)

The text adds:

> During the reading of the poem, Voss hated and resented it. As mad people will turn in the street, and stare, and enter into a second mind, and mingle with the most personal thoughts, and understand, so this poem turned upon the reader, and he was biting his nails to find himself accused. (pp. 295-6)

In this way *Voss* is structurally akin to the 'internalized theatre' Mary Jacobus identifies as the narrative strategy of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, where the 'real becomes spectral, the past alien, the familiar strange'.[8] In its articulation of bodily desires, *Voss* enacts this same movement from *heimlich* to *unheimlich*. In one of Voss's visions, Laura appears to him 'quite strong and admirable in her thick, man's boots beneath the muddied habit. Her hands were taking his weakness from him, into her own, supple, extraordinary muscular ones. Yet ... her face was unmistakably the face of a woman' (p. 285). This rhetorical strategy merges the *heimlich* (feminine) and the *unheimlich* (masculine) Laura,

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8. Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman:Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 47.

producing a movement across gender boundaries normally understood as separate. The uncanny effect emerges in the *Unsicherheit*, or jolt to reason provoked by this subversion of margins. The upset to interpretations that want to read Voss and Laura solely as a *heimlich* heterosexual couple is inevitable, as the estrangement produced by this movement across margins is effected on both functional and figurative levels of the text: Voss is estranged from Laura by the desert *and* by his feelings for her which produce an uncanny effect.[9] The language of dreams, as Freud discovered, 'had to be seen against the backdrop of a body that was also saying something, in another mode, about itself and its needs and desires'.[10] The dream texts within the text of *Voss* disclose a problematization of sexual identity by introducing a homosexual desire that is bound up in fantasy. By attending to these different angles of seeing, this chapter focuses on *Voss's* negotiation of homo- and heterosexual desire, and the ways in which they become the springboard for its treatment of social identity, personal subjectivity, self-invention, and the exploration of the Australian interior. All these issues are neatly encapsulated in Voss's claim: '"I do meet scarcely a man here," he said, "who does not suspect he will be unmade by his country. Instead of knowing that he will make it into what he wishes"' (p. 40). Focusing on

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9. In addition to the studies already mentioned, the reading offered here either builds on or contrasts with the following: Joan L. Dolphin, 'The Rhetoric of Painting in Patrick White's Novels', *Ariel*, 24: 3 (1993): 33-52; Marion Spies, '"Affecting Godhead": Religious Language and Thinking in *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*', *Antipodes*, 6: 1 (1992): 17-23; Dorothy Jones, 'Matters of Geography and Countries of the Mind:*Voss* and *Badlands* Compared', *New Literature Review*, 23 (1992): 73-84; Angela Smith, 'Is Phallocentricity a Sin? or a Peccadillo? Comedy and Gender in Ethel Anderson's *At Parramatta* and Patrick White's *Voss*', in *Contemporary Essays on Australian Literature*, ed. Giovanna Capone (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1991), pp. 149-61; Shirley Paolini, 'Desert Metaphors and Self-Enlightenment in Patrick White's *Voss*', *Antipodes*, 4: 2 (1990): 87-91; Dorothy Seaton, 'Land and History:Inter-Discursive Conflict in *Voss*', *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada*, 4: 3 (1990): 1-14; George W. Lyon, 'The Ordinary Bread of Words:The Dissonant Unity of *Voss*', *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada*, 4: 3 (1990): 15-26; Jeffrey Robinson, 'The Aboriginal Enigma:*Heart of Darkness*, *Voss* and *Palace of the Peacock*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 20: 1 (1985): 148-55; David J. Tacey, 'Patrick White's *Voss*: The Teller and the Tale', *Southern Review*, 18: 3 (1985): 251-71; Norbert H. Platz, 'The Western Consciousness of Novel Writing and the Image of Australia in Patrick White's *Voss*', *World Literature Written in English*, 24: 1 (1984): 170-77; Noel Macainsh, 'Voss and his Communications:A Structural Contrast', *Australian Literary Studies*, 10: 4 (1982): 437-47; Susan A. Wood, 'The Power and Failure of "Vision" in Patrick White's *Voss*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 27: 1 (1981): 141-58.

10. Juliet Flower Maccannell, in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Elizabeth Wright, p. 211. See also, Sigmund Freud (1900), *Interpretation of Dreams*, *Standard Edition* 4-5.

the dynamic interaction between these levels of the novel, I hope to illuminate the extraordinary ways that Voss's and Laura's '*grand passion*' orchestrate the novel.

Situated in the Australian desert in an all-male community, *Voss* recalls homoerotic narratives like Melville's *Moby Dick* and *Billy Budd*, and Jean Genet's *Querelle*. It also builds on a tradition of literature given over to the celebration of intense male bonds, most notably the literature of the two World Wars.[11] The most obvious homoerotic link, documented by Noel Macainsh, is with Alec H. Chisholm's *Strange New World-The Adventures of John Gilbert and Ludwig Leichhardt* (rev. ed., 1955).[12] In it, Chisholm charts the homoerotic bond between Leichhardt and John Nicholson, and although White did not claim to be motivated by this relationship, his figurations of the bonds between Voss and Frank and Harry Robarts remain an interesting coincidence. Then there is Voss's 'marriage' to Laura which works in various ingenious ways in the narrative. For the purposes of my present argument, I suggest that it enables White to engage in a type of Wildean Bunburying, causing the deception of a marriage to wreak havoc on critical interpretations - which it did, quite successfully.[13] However, it also works to unsettle masculine-feminine and heteroerotic-homoerotic binarisms. With concepts such as the New Woman, the dandy, and the homosexual circulating towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Laura-Voss dyad can be interpreted as occupying a liminal position between the sexual boundaries. As this aspect of the novel occupies a large part of the chapter and is best understood within the context of the more obvious homoerotic representations which I examine first, I will return to it later.

On a symbolic level, Voss's foreignness acts as a metaphor for the 'alien' status of homosexual desire within the 'native' heterosexual

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11. Mark Lilly, *Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century* looks at the love poetry of the First World War.
12. Noel Macainsh, 'The Character of Voss', *Quadrant*, 26 (1982): 38-43. Macainsh mentions the Leichhardt-Nicholson relationship in parentheses and in the form of a denial: 'It might be noted here that White has no use for the close friendship Leichhardt is said to have formed with the well-to-do English clergyman, John Nicholson, as a model for Voss's friendships' (p. 39).
13. In her discussion of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Eve Sedgwick notes that 'bunbury' also refers to anal sex as 'burying the bun'. See, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 67.

environment of Sydney. Thus, the quest to map the Australian interior is bound up in a variety of erotic discourses - incest and homo-/ heteroerotics. Voss's journey is a simultaneous representation of colonial expansion and of eroticized relations: analogies between the interior and hidden love, and the discovery of a different landscape and a different kind of love suggest themselves. Concerned with beginnings,*Voss* is also a novel of possibilities. Richard White notes how between 1830 and 1850, 'Hell was turned into Paradise.... [migrants] were lured by a new image of Australia as a land of opportunity for all-comers'.[14] *Voss* likewise represents Australia as offering endless potential for invention, both personal and cultural, and, in various ways, all those involved in the expedition interpret it as a means of re-inventing themselves. Judd announces in desperation: '"Oh, sir, I have nothing to lose, and everything to find"' (p. 149), and Voss says in reply to his patron Mr Bonner when asked if he has studied the map, 'The map?' repeated the German. 'I will first make it' (p. 23).

What is perhaps most striking in this respect is that the expedition fails. The discovery that the Aborigines already inhabit the interior, have named it, and claimed it for themselves prefigures the ill-fated nature of the desires represented in *Voss*: although made possible by, and given articulation through the vast expanse of the interior, the desert was not empty; meanings and maps already existed. (In this respect, *Voss* can be interpreted as an allegory of failed colonialism). The clash between the different languages spoken by the characters on the expedition and their different nationalities relate to the restrictions imposed on sexual meaning and expression, and their historical and cultural relativity. The most obvious representative of linguistic restriction is Voss himself. The narrator tells us he mistrusted all that was external to himself, and 'was happiest in silence' (p. 21). In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva characterizes the position of the foreigner as one embalmed in silence: 'Bearing within oneself like a secret vault, or like a handicapped child - cherished and useless - that language of the past that withers without ever leaving you.... Thus, between the languages of the present and the past, your realm is silence'.[15] The pervasiveness of states of exile in the

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14. Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, p. 29.
15. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 15.

book indicate that there is no optimistic or easy conclusion to this novel: states of desire are encoded in an overall thematics of exile, and this raises difficult and challenging questions about the positions and possibilities of gender, sexuality and subjectivity both in White's novel and in our time.

On a functional level, the isolation of the desert removes Voss from most of the social, cultural and historical proscriptions on behaviour. Specifically, the novel shows how the expedition distances him from the homosexual panic which began manifesting itself in the nineteenth century with the emergence of specialist, medical and legal discourses on the homosexual as a specific type.[16] As Michel Foucault has pointed out, the nineteenth century saw 'a new *specification of individuals*.... [the] homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality'.[17] In chapter 5 of *Voss*, male heterosexual anxieties in the face of the emergence of the homosexual 'type' are constituted in the clash between the hyper-heterosexual Lieutenant Tom Radclyffe and Voss at the moment of the latter's departure from Sydney:

> "Good-bye, Tom," [Voss] continued, grasping the Lieutenant, who had bent down from his horse, and offered his hand with rather aggressive manliness to preclude all possible sentiment; one never knew with foreigners.
>
> "Good-bye, old Voss," Tom Radclyffe said. "We shall plan some suitable debauchery against your return. In five years' time."
>
> He was forced to shout the last words, because his big horse had begun to plunge and strain, as the horses of Tom Radclyffe did, whenever their master took the centre of the stage.
>
> "In five years' time," his strong teeth flashed.
>
> Foam was flying. (p. 117)[18]

This scene establishes the sexual phobia of middle class Sydney society by

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16. This panic is apparent in W. T. Stead's comment to Edward Carpenter in response to the Wilde trials: 'A few more cases like Oscar Wilde's and we should find the freedom of comradeship now possible to men seriously impaired to the permanent detriment of the race'. Cited in Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 21.
17. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, p. 43. Italics in the original.
18. This scene bears a striking resemblance to one in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (London: Heinemann, 1971), where Gerald's horse is frightened by a train. Both White and Lawrence use horses as symbolic extensions of the characters' heterosexual virility, but where White makes Tom Radclyffe look ludicrous, Lawrence's depiction of Gerald is much more violent. Blood replaces foam in the latter; and Lawrence's description of Gerald's brutality and the mare's terror as 'a repulsive sight' (chp. 9), is a much more trenchant disparagement of the extremes employed by Gerald to display his heterosexual masculinity.

way of a superb comic send-up of Tom's gender insecurities. His simultaneous and self-contradictory display of excessive manliness and sexualized communication ('debauchery') to Voss highlight, if anything, his precarious position in the gender orders, and not Voss's. As I have noted, White seems to be led here more by European history than Australian insofar as this episode is focusing on the challenge to the gender system put into place by the theorization of (male) homosexuality in Britain and Germany in the nineteenth century.[19] Eve Sedgwick argues that the dividing line between male homosocial bonds and homosexuality became blurred then with the result that 'an endemic and ineradicable state of ... male homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement.'[20] Tom's less than secure position on his horse (which notably 'plunge[s]' and 'strain[s]') highlights this shift in power structures. But yet another historical shift underlies Voss's own reaction: writing in the late 1950s gives White a different perspective on the subject of homosexual panic than is found in the eariler works analyzed by Sedgwick; and it is this which accounts for the fact that Voss, the one suspected of unmanly sentiment, does not panic. Finally, the descriptive contiguity between Tom's teeth and his horse's foam settles the argument in favour of Voss, who 'was smiling and watching, still rather pleased with that scene of horseplay in which he had acted a minor but agreeably unexpected part' (p. 117). The *double entendre* on horseplay suggests that Tom's suspicions were well-founded: but the point is, I think, that Tom is the one who ends up with egg, or rather foam, on his face.

Once the group is situated away from Sydney the bonds between the men are structured explicitly along homoerotic lines. A site of struggle over the expression of desire is thus set up between Sydney and the bush, with the latter denoting a space of negotiation between mateship and concepts of homo- and heterosexual desire.[21] Mateship is

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19. In Australia, the nineteenth century was dominated by the convict trade and colonialism. Theories of homosexuality did not appear in print until well into the 1930s. See, Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, chapters 2 and 3, and Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, chapter 1.

20. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 185. Sedgwick looks at William M. Thackeray, James M. Barrie, and Henry James in relation to the writing of homosexual panic.

21. It may be useful to bear in mind that during the years White was writing *Voss* (1954-56), the official attitude in Sydney to homosexuals was one of persecution. As a result,

popularly understood as a privileged signifier for bonds between male heterosexuals which are explicitly masculine, and devoid of implicit homosexual connotations. John Rickard however, argues that the 'ambiguity of mateship necessarily engendered a profound suspicion of overt homosexuality', noting that this was 'particularly evident in the competition between "mate" and woman for man's affections.'[22] Nonetheless, as *Voss* manages to straddle the divide between all-male erotic bonds and heterosexual ones without collapsing, the novel can avoid any suspicion of what would in 1950s Australia have been construed negatively as homosexuality. The episode in which Palfryman (/horseman/paltry man) falls off his horse and is taken to the Sandersons to be nursed demonstrates this.[23] We are told that 'a thick-set strong-looking individual appeared and took the body of the unconscious man, although nobody had asked him to do so' (p. 130). Readers are deliberately put on the wrong track as to who is going to nurse Palfryman as Mr Sanderson says, '"Take him to the corner room, if you will, so that my wife and I shall be near him, and able to give attention"', the implication being that Mrs Sanderson will be the nurse. But this is not the case, and the narrative teases readers for three pages before it announces that Judd (who is married with two sons) was the nurse:

> Regaining consciousness soon after in a strange room, Palfryman's chief concern was to find someone to whom he might apologize. At his pillow was standing rather a thick-set man, to whom he was preparing to speak, when the individual went away....
>
> Presently Palfryman appeared, walking frailly, his lips composed, but a dark yellow in colour. At his side was the thick-set man who had taken possession of him on arrival.
>
> "Do you think this is wise?" Sanderson asked.
>
> "Perfectly," smiled Palfryman. "It was a passing weakness. That is all. I have rested these two hours on a good bed, and Mr Judd has very kindly fed me with rum out of a spoon."
>
> So the thick-set individual was Judd.
>
> He was there now, not far from Palfryman's elbow. He seemed to have

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many artists and writers left Sydney, particularly members of the (largely homosexual) 'charm school', for more tolerant climates. See Garry Wotherspoon, 'The Flight of the "Exiles of the Spirit": Male Homosexual Artists and the Onset of the Cold War in Sydney'. Of course, Sydney is now a gay capital.

22. John Rickard, *Australia:A Cultural History*, pp. 178, 177.
23. Given his name, Palfryman's obvious unsuitability for this journey is another example of the risk inherent in assuming any simple one-to-one correspondence in White between words and their signification. Although the dictionary definition of 'Palfrey' is a saddle horse, White's characterization of Palfreymen subverts this by showing him to be an inept horseman.

appointed himself nurse, which the patient accepted as a natural arrangement. (pp. 130, 133)

The repetition of 'thick-set' is meant to emphasize Judd's masculinity, which is presented as balancing, and not countering, any feminine attitude which might be associated with his employment as nurse. Palfryman's complicity in viewing Judd ('who had taken possession of him on arrival') and his care in an elevated way, that is, as beyond gender binarisms, is essential to his positive representation here. Judd is neither wholly feminized nor virilized, but is instead, 'a union of strength and delicacy' (p. 133). This strategy allows White to instigate a fluid relationship between the genders that counters, by surpassing, homophobia and misogyny. If anything, Judd is the most positive character in the novel, for it is his balance of hardness and intuition that brings him back alive, whereas all the others perish.

Once Voss comes to know Judd, he feels threatened by him. Judd undermines Voss's notion of his unique infallibility because he cannot read Judd's mind like he can the others': 'Nobody here, he suspected, looking round, had explored his own mind to the extent that would enable him to bear such an experience. Except perhaps the convict, whose mind he could not read. The convict had been tempered in hell, and, as he had said, survived' (p. 137). There is a certain envy in Voss's resentment of Judd. Although it is Voss's unflinching determination to live life on his own terms which is emphasized again and again, he has not been tempered in the hell of a convict's life. This, coupled with his enormous ego, deludes him into thinking he can create his own world. He believes he is 'sufficient in himself' (p. 15); Laura says of him that Australia 'is his by right of vision' (p. 29); Voss believes that 'Your future is what you will make it. Future, is will' (p. 68); Laura recognizes that 'this expedition of yours is pure will' (p. 69); Le Mesurier refers to it as 'this infernal expedition' (p. 38); the narrator relates that it 'had become quite clear from the man's face that he accepted his own divinity' (p. 144), and says of Laura's contact with Voss, 'But she had crossed her fingers against the Devil' (p. 69). Voss's egotism is such that reality, and people, become inconveniences.

The narrator's perspective on Voss has been commented upon frequently because of its unusual ironic detachment. The sympathy that

exists between narrator and protagonist in most of White's novels is to a significant extent absent here. Statements such as 'But he had never allowed himself the luxury of other people's strength, preferring the illusion of his own' (p. 69) undercut the impressiveness of Voss's will, and remind us that White conceived him whilst still 'influenced by the arch-megalomaniac of the day' - Hitler.[24] Yet the pure will that Voss represents, and the means through which he sets out to achieve his dreams, are never denounced by the narrator: his ultra non-conformism is as attractive in its own way as that of the host of Romantic (anti-)heroes represented throughout literature. Take the novel's representation of his flight from conformity:

> Nothing could be safer than that gabled town, from which he would escape in all weathers, at night also, to tramp across the heath, running almost, bursting his lungs, while deformed trees in places snatched at his clothes ... Finally, he knew he must tread with his boot upon the trusting face of the old man, his father. He was forced to many measures of brutality in defence of himself. And his mother crying behind the stove ... Then, when he had wrung freedom out of his protesting parents, and the old people were giving him little parcels for the journey, not so much as presents as in reproach, and the green forests of Germany had begun to flow, and yellow plains unroll, he did wonder at the purpose and nature of that freedom.... Human behaviour is a series of lunges, of which, it is sometimes sensed, the direction is inevitable. (pp. 13-14)

The content and tone of this passage is dense with literary allusions to several Romantic (anti-) heroes, most obviously Byron's Manfred and Emily Brontë's Heathcliff. The wildness of these characters natural surroundings resounds in their physical and intellectual passion; but the power of their characterizations owes as much to the extreme forms taken by their sexualities as it does to their creators' ingenious use of pathetic fallacy. The questions Isabella asks of Heathcliff: 'Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?' apply equally to Voss.[25] The ferocity with which White represents Voss's turning against conventionalities, and the forms it takes, is also echoed in the works of Jean Genet and James Baldwin; in the former, brutality is transformed by construing it in religious terms, and in the latter, renunciation of societal

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24. Patrick White, 'The Prodigal Son' in, *Patrick White Speaks*, p. 15.
25. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), chapter 13. There are also distinct resonances of Goethë's *Faust* in the character of Voss. Marion Spies's article compares Milton and White in, '"Affecting Godhead" - Religious Language and Thinking in *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*'.

norms demands escape from the place(s) most closely associated with them. This pattern of violent repudiation of family life and other institutions bound up in heterosexuality is repeated in *The Aunt's Story* and *The Twyborn Affair*.[26]

Voss's stature with the men draws noticeably on the father-figure model of homoerotics, especially in respect of Harry Robarts. Harry 'is nothing except when near to Mr Voss' (p. 37), desperately hoping that Voss will give him the love he never received from his brutal father. Harry will do anything to obtain this, even asserting he will learn German despite the fact that he cannot read. While Alan Sinfield correctly emphasizes the class bias which generally predominates in such a configuration, as it is presented here it relies equally on the teacher-pupil relationship, characteristic of the Greek model.[27] Thus, responding to Voss's enquiries as to why he did not desert the expedition and go with Judd, Harry replies:

> "No, sir. If I had gone, I would not a known what to do when I got there. Not any more."
>
> "You would have learnt again very quickly."
>
> "I could have learnt to black your boots, if you had been there, sir. But you would not a been. And it would not be worth it. Not since you learnt me other things."
>
> "What things?" asked Voss quietly, whose mind shouted....
>
> "... I cannot say it. But I know. Why, sir, to live, I suppose." ...
>
> "Living?" laughed the German.
>
> He was shouting with laughter to hide his joy.
>
> "Then I have taught you something shameful. How they would accuse me!" (p. 360)

Harry's simple-minded devotion can obscure the power of this passage which centres on such a profound rejection of established culture that

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26. The centrality of images of escape, exile and travel can be found repeatedly in the writings of gay men and lesbians. For an overview of the prevalence of such images and themes in the works of gay men see Mark Lilly, *Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century*. For a similar treatment of lesbian literary themes see, *What Lesbians Do In Books*, ed. Elaine Hobby and Chris White (London: Women's Press, 1991).

27. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century:Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994), p. 150. Although David Halperin argues that homoerotic relations between adult male citizens and minors in classical Athens revolved around social and political status, and not age *per se*, I feel it is difficult to separate a minor's age from his social and political positions as they are often bound up in each other. See, 'Sex before Sexuality:Pederasty, Politics, and Power in Classical Athens', in *Hidden from History:Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Bauml Duberman et al. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 49.

Harry would rather die than face the prospect of living without its antithesis, Voss. The juxtaposition of 'shameful' and 'accuse' with 'laughter' and 'joy' designates ostracism as the positive option for those who refuse normative mandates. In an oxymoronic signification, the physical death Voss and Harry are about to face becomes life when compared with the 'death' which would ensue on their arrival back to Sydney. This life is also reflected in the freedom of expression that is characteristic of the group as a whole: 'At times the German was quite fatherly, too. This was a part strange enough for him to fancy ... [he] encouraged confidences, of a sort that most men would think twice about giving into the keeping of anyone else' (p. 141).

Frank Le Mesurier equals Voss in signifying, in a *fin de siècle* manner, a dangerous opposition to established values: he is even delineated as a recognisable figure from this period, the dandy. His surname associates him with the French dandy who, as Ellen Moers points out, 'could become an abstraction, a refinement of intellectual rebellion... [he was] not middle class and drab, not philistine and stupid, not buried in the tedious, undistinguished existence of those who merely lived out their time in the bourgeois century.'[28] Frank is the social, cultural and intellectual antithesis of Sydney society, and his arrival on the wharf looking, 'somewhat dandified, considering the circumstances, in nankeen trousers, and a blue coat with aggressive buttons' (p. 98), signals his contempt for the colonial appropriation of the expedition in the form of the Bonners and Colonel Featherstonhaugh. For Frank and Voss the expedition is a purely personal quest constructed along Pater's decadent contention that 'Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end.'[29] In contrast, the Bonners see it as 'an event of national significance' (p. 78). Although 'somewhat dandified', the colour most associated with Frank is black.[30] Voss knew him 'as he knew his own blacker thoughts' (p. 35). Their doubling in many respects recalls that

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28. Ellen Moers, *The Dandy:Brummell to Beerbohm* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), p. 13.
29. Cited in Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism:A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 19.
30. Frank may approximate more to the dandy style of Honoré Balzac who, Ellen Mores claims, 'would roam the streets one day in ragged, dirty disarray (when too absorbed by his latest novel or financial scheme to care about his appearance) and turn out the next showily *endimanché* ', *The Dandy*, p. 129. As such, Frank will sometimes don the dandy style to display contempt outwardly, while always retaining it inwardly.

between the narrator and the mysterious interloper in Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*: there the narrator talks of the establishment of a 'mysterious communication' between himself and the sharer, and frequently refers to him as his 'double' or his 'other', 'second self'.[31] Frank is 'dark, young, rather exquisite, but insolent' (p. 33), and the language describing Voss's attempts to persuade him to go on the expedition illustrates what amounts to a seduction: 'It was dark now. Tempted, the young man was, in fact, more than a little afraid - his throbbing body was deafening him - but as he was a vain young man, he was also flattered' (p. 35). Frank's cynicism is notorious, recalling the decadent tone of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but he is also, like Basil Hallward, genuinely searching for something perfect: '"I am always about to act positively ... There is some purpose in me, if only I can hit upon it. But my whole life has been an investigation, shall we say, of ways"' (p. 99). Frank is thus, like Dorian, a cross-breed between the decadence of the dandy and what Alan Sinfield has termed the intensity and sincerity of the anti-dandy, Basil Hallward.[32]

Frank's 'notebook that contained the most secret part of himself' (p. 175) can be read as analogous to Dorian's painting in the attic, as it too conceals secrets which Turner believes will 'destroy what you and I know' (p. 255). Linda Dowling notes how the late Victorians had identified the 'harbingers' of the 'apocalypse of Victorian civilization' as 'the decadent and the New Woman, whose quarrel with established culture ... was the first rebellious expression of that disenchantment of culture'.[33] Everyone's fear and suspicion of Frank - except, notably, Voss - underlines his iconoclastic presence. On the pretence of looking for Voss, Boyle comes across Frank writing in his notebook, which the latter immediately tries to hide: 'Boyle's suspicion increased. What was this young man trying to hide? Had he, perhaps, participated, or was he still participating in the German's crime?' (p. 175). That the 'crime' is never named is an essential part of its meaning, as in the famous post-Wilde

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31. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Fourth Edition, Volume 2, pp. 1879, 1880, 1889. Jeffrey Robinson compares *Voss* and *Heart of Darkness* in 'The Aboriginal Enigma:*Heart of Darkness*, *Voss*, and *Palace of the Peacock*'.
32. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 99.
33. Linda Dowling, 'The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890's', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 33: 4 (1979), p. 437.

trials formulation: 'the love that dare not speak its name'.

As the group moves further into the interior it is plagued by calamities. An intellectual division occurs between Voss and Frank and everyone else. Discussing this with Angus, Turner characterizes it as the distinction between '"oil and water"' (p. 254). Turner has read Frank's notebook which, he says, contains '"Mad things, to blow the world up; anyhow, the world that you and me knows. Poems and things"' (p. 255). Just before Frank contracts a fever he 'hears' Voss telling him that he 'is filled with the hallucinations of intellectual power' (p. 250). 'Hallucinations' is the key word, for although Frank and Voss represent pure will, this is so divorced from reality as to be self-destructive. The narrative continues, 'So like clings to like, and will be saved, or is damned'. Before both are damned, however, the influence they exert over Harry cannot be underestimated. Sharing Frank's tent and watching him write in his notebook, Harry 'who shared the same transparent womb, longed to burst out into a life he did not know, but sensed. He was throbbing with excitement ...' (p. 252). This metaphor of impending birth is located in the nexus of decadence, dandyism and homosexual desire.

When Frank falls seriously ill Voss takes it upon himself to nurse him. This move is especially significant because Voss abhors sickness, identifying it with weakness. This was the case with Palfryman, and it recurs in relation to Voss himself when he is hit in the stomach by a goat and nursed by Judd: 'Voss, who felt more exposed on some less physical occasions, despised all sickness' (p. 212). Frank's illness provides the opportunity for Voss's erotic attraction toward him to manifest itself. Feeding him some milk, we are told that 'Voss watched longingly, upon his hands and knees, on the tamped mud floor of the straining tent' (pp. 268-70). As they fall asleep, Voss's care of Frank precipitates a dream in which his thoughts of and feelings for Laura are mediated through his bond with Frank. In fact, the narrative takes this doubling to its ultimate; Frank becomes Laura and vice versa:

> But Voss was in some measure eased by the love he had dispensed; it had done more good to him than the patient. So, with its white salve, he continued to anoint. She was dressed on this occasion in a hooded robe, of full, warm, grey, rain, that clothed her completely, except for the face. He was able to diagnose from experience that her illness was that of celibate paralysis. Her stone form did not protest, however. Or expect. But awaited her implicit physician. At this stage of the sickness, he said, I will administer this small white pill, which will grow inside you to gigantic proportions.... Immediately he sensed the matter had

attained flesh-proportions, he was nauseated.... His trousers were not designed for parturition. (p. 269)

Perhaps this passage, more than any other in the novel, elucidates why commentators bent on applying realistic notions of character and a heteroerotic model to Voss and Laura ultimately come to grief. In opposition to these models, the text of this dream, and the fundamental role of dreams to the representations of Laura overall in the narrative, demands that we acknowledge her as heavily overdetermined. This is apparent in the associative links the dream sets up, and in the work of condensation. By partaking of the elements and being in the tent, Laura is positioned as one of the group and as that which has caused Frank's rain fever - accordingly, she is geomorphically masculine and dangerously feminine. The dream effects a partial displacement from Frank to Laura, so that she is doubled. Again, her function in this dream is dependant on her gender malleability, and hence on her capacity to act as a displacement figure for Voss's erotic attraction to Frank. This is highlighted in the reference to her 'stone form' which presents her in an allegorical mode; but this image is also part of the associative sexual chain - 'celibate paralysis'. Hence the abolition of difference between male and female bodies in the way Voss homoerotically conflates Laura and Frank, and imagines impregnating them without recourse to sexual intercourse. Two facts are indispensable to this uncanny move, and both revolve around the shared sexual positions of Laura and of homosexuality: one is Laura's position in the text as a nineteenth-century virgin - 'celibate paralysis' - and the other is an obviously closeted (as in non-sexually consummated) homosexuality - 'from experience'. The sexual chain continues in the metaphor of the pill which may represent a preconscious wish for a medical 'cure' for homoerotic celibacy; and significantly, this 'cure' is beyond the realm of sexual relations as they exist in the conscious world of Laura, Frank and Voss. The image of the pill is one whose significance extends beyond the dream and is something I will take up later in relation to Rose's child, Mercy. For now, however, 'the matter' assuming flesh signals the moment when the dream text becomes determined by a specifically heterosexual intercourse.[34] The latter is rejected by the blatant

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34. It is also possible to read the metaphor of the pill as allowing Voss to abstain from intercourse and yet father a child. The nausea could thus place him in the position of

reference to Voss's 'trousers' not being 'designed for parturition'. Voss's final action in the dream is to 'thr[o]w the pill upon the ground', an action which symbolizes a rejection of heterosexuality. The action which proceeds immediately from the dream displays it, finally, as an unconscious wish (-fulfilment?) for homosexual intercourse with Frank: upon waking Voss finds that Frank has 'lost control of his bowels' (p. 270) and cleans him. In this way, the dream can be interpreted as enacting in microcosm the personal nature of the expedition for Voss and Frank - 'to blow the world up; anyhow, the world that you and me knows'.

It should be noted that, in the condensation work of the dream, any sexual contact becomes anxiety-ridden. The dream reflects the non-sexual basis of the erotic relations between Voss, Frank and Laura: this in turn accords with the well-documented 'spirituality' of homoerotic relations in the nineteenth century.[35]

Frank too invokes Laura in his love of Voss. The novel's anti-realistic format in representing homoerotic relations is also apparent in the logical gap presented here; for Frank knows nothing of the attraction that Laura and Voss felt for each other in Sydney, let alone of Voss's 'marriage' to her. Yet in his musings on seeing Voss at the mouth of a cave (when Voss is actually thinking of Laura), Frank recalls her on the wharfside, and 'how she had been enclosed strictly in her iron habit'. Then: 'For some reason, obscurer still, the visionary felt carried closer to his leader, as the woman rode back into his life' (p. 285). The reference to the iron habit, signifying some sort of chastity belt, would appear to be the locus of Frank's identification with Laura and the link to his desire for Voss. As such, it is not a case of men's heterosexual relationships with women acting as the screen for male homosocial desire as Sedgwick

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the pregnant (wo)man, in addition to signifying his revulsion toward heterosexuality (given pregnancy's almost indissoluble link with it). As such, Voss does and does not take part in a traditionally female bodily experience which he nonetheless renders distasteful (as it was to many nineteenth-century women). The rejection of heterosexual intercourse is the touchstone of both interpretations.

35. For the predominance of non-sexual yet highly erotic bonds between women in the nineteenth century see Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, chapters 1-5. Partly as a response to the deep public antipathy toward male homosexuality, people like Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter sought to define homosexual love in spiritual terms: Wilde claimed his love was 'that deep spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect'; and Edward Carpenter, in a defence of *The Intermediate Sex*, advocated 'sincere attachment and warm friendship' not 'lust'. Both cited in Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp. 43, 81.

argues in *Between Men*: in *Voss* this screen is absent, being replaced by a subtle layering of homoeroticism that revolves more flexibly around gender attributes than around same-sex practice or desire.

I want now to turn to the ways in which Laura's life in Sydney interacts fantastically with the contents of Voss's dreams and visions, the centrality of her gender flexibility to this, and the specificity of her desire for Voss. This part of the narrative is almost wholly taken up with the implications and practicalities of the emancipist servant, Rose Portion's pregnancy.

Rose has received little or no critical attention, and yet an important aspect of Voss's and Laura's quests to locate themselves beyond sexual conventionality occurs through the appropriation of her body. By distancing itself from the practice, if not altogether from the theory, of conventional nineteenth-century sexual codes, *Voss* makes Rose's baby Mercy play the part, so to speak, of the pill in the dream analysed earlier. Rose is a pivotal figure in the text as her body becomes the means of negotiating masculine homoerotics and feminine heterosexual reproduction.

Descriptions of Rose throughout the novel turn upon her body. As a woman her physicality is emphasized in a way that displaces her mind and her feelings. The conflation of class and gender issues is contained in her position as servant, and is materially manifested in the Bonners' ownership of her body. This ownership is depicted quite explicitly: there is no part of Rose's body which escapes descriptive intrusion on the part of the narrator, Laura Trevelyan, or the Bonners, as she is 'portioned' off to them bit by bit. Rose is the first character we meet, and the terms of her introduction fix her as the inverse of Laura's intellectualism:

> "There is a man here, miss, asking for your uncle," said Rose.
> And stood breathing....
> Something had made this woman monotonous. Her big breasts moved dully as she spoke, or she would stand, and the weight of her silences impressed itself on strangers....
> "What will I do with this German gentleman?" asked the harelip, which moved most fearfully. (p. 7)

The negative homology presented here by the narrator between the status of the mind and the body is a characteristic of several nineteenth-century

sexual ideologies.[36] The novel's move to disengage gender from reproductive heterosexuality means that Rose is used only insofar as she can be safely rejected. The latter is accomplished by way of the emphasis on her class and sexual status. As an emancipist convict, originally deported to Australia for the murder of her first-born, Rose represents the culturally and economically backward convict image of 'Van Diemen's Land'. While the major preoccupation of nineteenth-century Australian social Darwinism was racial purity, *Voss* focuses on the problematics of class and sexuality which, alongside imperialist ideologies, were prevalent in America and Britain and imported to Australia via people like Richard Arthur.[37] The fervour with which White presents conventional, reproductive, lower class heterosexual femininity and masculinity as 'low' and 'mediocre' points to a strong emotional investment in their displacement, sexually and intellectually.

By including animal imagery in its construction of Rose, *Voss* finally inscribes her sexuality as innately inferior, and partaking of an excess of female biological functions:

> One afternoon, just after Mrs Bonner and the young ladies had finished a luncheon ... Rose simply fell down. In her brown gown she looked a full sack, except that she was stirring and moaning, even retching....
>
> But Rose was not crying, not exactly; it was an animal mumbling, and biting of the harelip. (pp.50-51)

The consequences of Rose's 'desire' for the handiman, Jack Slipper, have inflicted a type of social contagion on the Bonners, so that her pregnancy is figured almost as a contagious disease necessitating containment. Mrs Bonner, who comes out in a rash because of Rose (p. 220), suggests 'a Mrs Lauderdale, who has founded some institution to

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36. In her study on the history of female madness, Elaine Showalter states: 'the prevailing view among Victorian psychiatrists was that the statistics proved what they had suspected all along: that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control.' See *The Female Malady*, p. 55.

37. Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, p. 116. While *Voss's* depiction of Rose does stem mostly from class prejudice, the novel's transportation of a Europe-centred theory of social Darwinism in its depiction of Rose's pregnancy is notable. The hierarchical distinction present in some eugenicist arguments between fertility and mediocrity on the one hand, and low/infertility and high morality and intelligence on the other, is congruent with Rose's role: that is to say, the same ideological division is upheld between mind and matter in the way her life is wholly bound up in her two unwanted, yet 'inevitable', pregnancies.

provide for women in that condition, during, or perhaps it is for afterwards, the unfortunate children, I do not know, but must consult Mrs Pringle, and think' (p. 159). Whereas in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century disease was located in women as sexual *beings*, White locates it in their class and heterosexual practice.[38] *Voss* thus sets up a hierarchical value system between an inferior class of heterosexuality and a superior homoeroticism (via the complex identification and projection processes we saw at work in Frank-Laura-Voss trio). With Laura's appropriation of Rose's baby for herself and Voss, the novel separates biological parenthood from an ability to parent successfully and responsibly.

Within this split homoerotic-heterosexual framework Laura's body is highlighted as 'flawless' (p. 7). Her repulsion toward 'the bodies of the servants' (p. 53), and her obvious intellectual abilities (she works 'fanatically at some mathematical problem, even now, just for the excitement of it, to solve and to know', but 'there was no evidence of intellectual kinship in any of her small circle of acquaintance' (p. 9)) situate her on the positive side of the polarity of immanence and transcendence. The repeated endorsement of this polarity can be held to have its epistemological roots in what Patricia Yaeger terms *somatophobia*, or a 'fear of the body's fleshiness and mutability'.[39] In addition, Elaine Scarry has claimed that 'to be intensely embodied is the equivalent of being unrepresented and ... is almost always the condition of those without power.'[40] Femininity is essentially an embodied condition, but pregnancy is the ultimate in intense embodiment, and critical reactions to Rose underline this by echoing the phobia which characterizes her position in the text. Here is Carolyn Bliss:

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38. Unlike, for example, the inherent phallocentric anxiety of women as found in some modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot (*The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*), D. H. Lawrence (*Sons and Lovers*) and Robert Graves (*The White Goddess*), the issue in *Voss* appears to be more a conflict of sexual practices and genders. For an analysis of the sexual ideology of the late eighteenth century in relation to Wollstonecraft and Rousseau see Cora Kaplan, 'Wild nights:pleasure/sexuality/feminism', in *The Ideology of Conduct:Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 160-84.

39. Patricia Yaeger, 'The Father's Breasts', in *Refiguring the Father:New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy*, ed. Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. 9.

40. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain:The Making and Unmaking of the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 207.

> Rose Portion, the Bonner maid, embodies *all the unsavoury aspects of the flesh....* But in the course of Rose's pregnancy and the birth of her bastard daughter Mercy, Laura overcomes *the revulsion her maid's bovine body arouses* to the extent that the *body and its burden* become her own. (my italics)[41]

Although her language points in an obvious way toward what amounts to a colonial seizure on Laura's part, Bliss never takes this up because she is intent on establishing dichotomies between 'higher' and 'lower' characters, a trend symptomatic of White criticism.[42] And, although perceptive of the timing of Laura's 'conversion' to Rose's body, Bliss never explores its ideological significance. In fact, Laura begins to take a deep interest in Rose immediately after Voss has written to her proposing marriage, and she has replied, accepting. The language in which the novel describes Laura's new-found interest in the body of her maid is explicitly physical, as if to suggest a 'consummation' of her 'marriage' to Voss through Rose. Responding to her aunt's distress at what is euphemistically termed '*Rose's illness*' (p. 220; White's italics), Laura is described as being 'quite pregnant with some idea waiting to be born' (p. 223); and later we are told that once 'she felt the child kick inside her, and she bit her lip for the certainty, the shape her love had taken' (p. 227). This usurpation of Rose's body directly mirrors Voss's intended conquest of the interior. (On another level it enacts what Laura cannot do - have Voss's child). Both characters are possessed by a will that appears independent of human limitations, so that although married only in spirit, and separated by a vast desert, Voss and Laura have managed to 'bear' a child, Mercy. Thus the boundaries dividing homoerotic and heterosexual relations become blurred when the novel appropriates Mercy for Laura and Voss. In itself, this 'take-over' renders any sexually unequivocal discussion of these characters highly problematic and, moreover, maps the discourses and actions of nineteenth-century colonialism directly on to the body.

The uncanny reading effect produced by this 'miraculous

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41. Carolyn Bliss, *Patrick White's Fiction*, p. 76.
42. Compare Bliss's politically unaware language with Penny Boumelha's insightful reference to Rochester's treatment of his 'mad' Creole wife, Bertha, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* : '... not only madwoman in the attic, after all, but also skeleton in the closet, the "dark" secret, the maddening burden of imperialism concealed in the heart of every English gentleman's house of the time'. *Charlotte Brontë* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 61.

conception' resides in the novel's subversion of gender boundaries, enabled by *Voss's* synthesis of realism and fantasy. The subversion is especially startling in *Voss* due to its historical time frame. The character of Laura provides White with the opportunity to document a culture and a period particularly obsessed with sexual and gender norms; to then extend this to the treatment of and attitudes to homosexuality; and finally, to display the repressive effects of this on the individual. Tennyson's Lady of Shalott is a enlightening analogy for Laura's position in Sydney. Like his beautiful and enigmatic Lady, Laura leads a stagnant life: stranded in 'that remote colony' (p. 9) as the spectral Lady is on her 'silent isle', Laura's life evokes an existence structured by severe notions of orthodox middle/upper class feminine role behaviour (such as its second place positionality vis-à-vis orthodox masculinity, and its assumed compatibility with heterosexuality and the family).[43] Her intellectualism highlights the indiscriminate imposition of orthodoxy on individual women, and the resulting 'living death' condition of their lives:

> The younger men laughed immoderately. Those of them with whom she was acquainted did not care for Laura Trevelyan, who was given to reading books. (p. 61)
> Though what she did want, Laura did not know, only that she did. She was pursued by a most lamentable, because so unreasonable, discontent. (p. 68)
> "Is it so difficult then, for a man, to imagine the lives of poor domesticated women? How very extraordinary!... I think that I can enter into the minds of most men," said the young woman, softly. "At times. An advantage we insect-women enjoy is that we have endless opportunity to indulge the imagination as we go backwards and forwards in the hive". (p. 86)
> "I liked to think I might visit foreign places, such as the one from which my present had come. I would dream about the Indies. Mauritius, Zanzibar.... But I did not succeed. Most probably I shall never travel. Oh, I am content, of course. Our life is full of simple diversions. Only I envy people who enjoy the freedom to make journeys". (p. 106)

The intense kinship between Laura and Voss allows us to extrapolate from the affective and physical restrictions on her life to those on his because of his closeted sexuality. As it is presented in *Voss* then, homosexual desire partly occupies a feminized (powerless, isolated) position within culture. However, through the mingling of realism and fantasy, White allows Laura and Voss to engage with those parts of their

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43. Alfred Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Fourth Edition, Volume 2, pp. 1099-1103.

lives which would otherwise remain wholly repressed: for Laura this involves an intellectual participation in exploration beyond the confines of nineteenth-century Australian femininity; for Voss it means (precarious) communication with his emotions, his humanity. Both 'come to life' through each other by a double act of displacement: Laura says to Voss, '"*You* are *my* desert!"' (p. 88; White's italics). The moment Voss's ship sails out of Sydney the narrative reports that 'It is Laura who will escape, by putting on canvas. She has sailed' (p. 120). Likewise for Voss '"true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind"' (p. 446). Before he is killed by the Aboriginal, Jackie, Voss realized that he

> has always been most abominably frightened, even at the height of his divine power, a frail god upon a rickety throne, afraid of opening letters, of making decisions, afraid of the instinctive knowledge in the eyes of mules, of the innocent eyes of good men, of the elastic nature of the passions, even of the devotions he had received from some men, one woman, and dogs. (p. 390)

For Laura and Voss, Australia and each other become the means through which they achieve the life and the knowledge which has so far been denied them. The narrative underlines this by not allowing the letter that Voss writes to Laura claiming her (with her permission) as his wife to reach her, for this would place limits on their fantastical union.

Unlike Sedgwick's contention, vis-à-vis Henry James and James Barrie, that in narratives of men working-out or denying their homosexual panic women become the psychological victims, Laura, precisely because of her liminal positionality between the genders, is in the end more empowered than Voss himself.[44] The conditions of her survival after his death show her the clear winner in the expedition for a life on one's own terms. Her telepathic bond with Voss means that she knows of his doom before the reader does (p. 325). She then begins (like Lucy Snowe once Paul Emmanuel leaves France) to take control over her future, irrespective of social proprieties. Her decision to keep Mercy as her own after Rose's death effectively destroys her chances of marriage, as her uncle points out: '"But consider the future, how such a step would damage your prospects"' (p. 308). However, as I have argued, the plot of conventional marriage has no place in the text of Voss and Laura's love

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44. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, pp. 195-96.

relationship, or in the terms through which they struggle to live their lives. In this way, Laura is New Woman to Frank's dandy; both represent the 'dangerous avatars of the "New," and were widely felt to oppose not each other but the values considered essential to the survival of established culture.'[45] By taking Mercy with her and becoming a teacher (and later inheriting the Academy for Young Ladies), Laura causes 'Mr Bonner's world of substance to quake' (p. 350).

Judd, the one character who survives the expedition, shares qualities with Laura that reveal him to be the most positive male character in the narrative. Judd spent twenty years living with the aborigines before he was 'rescued', a decision the text makes clear the intransigent Voss could never have made. Just before Judd is reintroduced into the narative, Belle holds a party which sets the moral tone for his reappearance. Belle's speech underscores the value White places on respect for and acceptance of diversity; how only an affirmation of an ethics of difference can lay the foundations for equality and harmony:

> Belle Radclyffe moved amongst her guests, and now, surprisingly, said to some, who were most resentful of it:
>
> "I have asked you all tonight because I value each of you for some particular quality. Is it not possible for each to discover, and appreciate, the same quality in his fellow-guests, so that we may be happy together in this lovely house?'
>
> It was most singular....
>
> Several kinder guests were murmuring how entertaining, how sweet, following upon the speech by their hostess, but most took refuge immediately in their own chatter and the destruction of their friends. (pp. 435-6)

The lovely house of Belle is, I think, meant to symbolize the beauty and promise of a largely uncharted Australia in the nineteenth century. The generosity of spirit she tries to encourage in her guests is of vital importance to the future discovery of this land, and to the people in it. The reaction of the guests indicates White's perspective on the direction Australian history took; specifically his views on the destruction of Aboriginal land, and the materialism of Australians.[46] Judd is presented in stark contrast to all this; he is one who is 'impressed ... by the great

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45. Linda Dowling, 'The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s', p. 436.
46. See, for example, Patrick White, 'A Letter to Humanity' (1982), 'In this World of Hypocrisy and Cynicism' (1984), and 'Imagining the Real' (1986), in *Patrick White Speaks*.

simplicity with which everything had happened' (p. 443). He echoes David Malouf's Ovid in *An Imaginary Life* who has also been exiled from civilization, and who believes that one begins 'as always, with what is simple.'[47] Ovid's realization that language can be a divisive instrument bestows upon him a similar knowledge to Judd's:

> When I think of my exile now it is from the universe. When I think of the tongue that has been taken away from me, it is some earlier and more universal language than our Latin, subtle as it undoubtly is. Latin is a language for distinctions, every ending defines and divides. The language I am speaking of now, that I am almost speaking, is a language whose every syllable is a gesture of reconcilation. We knew that language once. I spoke it in my childhood. We must discover it again. (p. 98)

When Judd is taken away from the ceremony Laura communicates her place in this philosophy by announcing to Colonel Hebden: '"All truths are particoloured"' (p. 444).

Voss makes it clear that although dead, its eponymous hero will never be forgotten. His image dominates Sydney in the form of his bronze statue, and he will be written about in its history books. His failure to 'rule' (p. 334) the Aborigines is significant, as any success would run counter to the novel's presentation of the validity (and inevitability) of differences of thought, and how they are structured along racial, cultural, erotic, gender, and historical lines. The Aborigines' fight against colonizing maps is as important as Voss's and Laura's fight against the pre-existing maps they encountered. And because of his failure, Voss acquires a place in Aborignial history commensurate with his aspirations - as part of the landscape which played such an essential role in creating him:

> "Voss left his mark on the country," [Judd] said....
>
> "Well, the trees, of course. He was cutting his initials in the trees. He was a queer beggar, Voss. The blacks talk about him to this day. He is still there - that is the honest opinion of many of them - he is in the country, and always will be." (p. 443)

Voss's place in Australian history brings together the two spheres which were separate at the beginning of the novel - Sydney and the bush.

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47. David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1978), p. 32. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

This action has significant bearing on the themes analyzed throughout this chapter as it represents a mediation of deeply opposing territories. In the final pages Laura uses this fracture in an established borderline to deflate Mr Ludlow, a representative of the Empire. As he complains about the banality and inferiority of Australians, Laura points out to him that the different races who now make up Australia means that '"we are in every way provided for, by God, nature, and consequently, must survive"' (p. 448).

The touchstone for this perspective was Laura's interaction with Voss, the positive development of her identity through their fantastical heter- and homoerotic exchanges. Through these complex interactions she gains a wisdom that exceeds the shackles imposed upon her by her society:

> "Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind." (p. 446)

By appropriating Mercy for Voss and Laura, the novel further expands the possibilties of desire beyond the physical: Mercy and the mystery surrounding her origins enables *Voss* to formulate a synthesis of homo- and heterosexual desire. It would seem that, ultimately, it is less a question of the novel clearly endorsing one form of desire over another, than of trying to step beyond the restrictions imposed on both by culture and history. In choosing an expedition into the Australian interior - an event of historical significance - as the setting for its grand passion, *Voss* means the redrawing of the map of Australia to find an echo in the redrawing of the maps of erotic, and indeed all interpersonal relations.

Chapter four looks at *The Solid Mandala*, a novel which focuses on the consequences of the failure to redraw these maps and conceptualize homosexual desire in terms other than homophobic. Waldo and Arthur Brown are the vehicles through which White charts the impact of homophobia on two closeted homosexuals. The novel's background is symptomatic as it covers periods in Australian history when homosexuality was highlighted by the media as scandalous. The narrative includes an implicit reference to the Oscar Wilde trials, and reflects on the impact of the two World Wars and the Cold War on the construction of,

and attitudes towards, male homosexuality. With *The Solid Mandala*, the emphasis shifts from oblique representations of homosexual desire to a startling exposure of the methods of homophobia, and the cost to those at whom it is directed.

Chapter 4

The Solid Mandala: *closet dynamics*

The Solid Mandala constitutes an important transfiguration in White's portrayal of homoeroticism, a 'coming out' which signals a restructuring of homosexual desire.[1] By inscribing the dynamics of the closet, *The Solid Mandala* positions itself in opposition to its enforcement of secrecy, and to its logic of criminality, disease, and alienation. Before I turn to it however, I want to review the strategies of signification employed in *Voss* and *The Aunt's Story* in terms of the wider political and cultural atmosphere in Australia during the late 1940s through to the mid 1960s. This will foreground the expressive radicalness of *The Solid Mandala*, and enable a more precise historical and political situating of the conceptual transformation which occurs in it.

The previous chapters have been focusing on what, from a perspective which sees the question of sexual direction as intrinsic to White's creative enterprise, has been essentially a form and thematics of the closet. Both *Voss* and *The Aunt's Story* are structured around a series of what Michel Foucault calls 'silences' which relate directly to questions about the gendered construction of identity and sexuality around binary oppositions.[2] The enigmatic, elusive, and sometimes fantastical representation of homosexual desire in these novels shows the closet to be, in Sedgwick's terms, a 'shaping presence' on language and hence on the construction of homoeroticism.[3] Structured as a silence that speaks by indirection, homosexual desire in *Voss* and *The Aunt's Story* maps a historical period of sexual repression in Australia: Marr relates how shortly after White arrived in Sydney in 1947, 'the police raided a bookshop in Martin Place and seized *All Quiet on the Western Front*, postcards of statues of naked women, birth control pamphlets by Marie Stopes, *The Decameron* and the complete works of Aristotle.... the police pressed the claim that ... their haul would have a tendency to deprave and

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1. *The Solid Mandala* (1966; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969). All references will be to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text by page number.
2. Michel Foucault,*The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1*, p. 27.
3. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 68.

corrupt Sydney's citizens.'[4] The late 1940s was also the period of what Garry Wotherspoon calls the exodus of the 'Exiles of the Spirit', when homosexual writers such as Sumner Locke Elliot left Sydney 'for the safer sexual climate of New York.' Other homosexual artists like William Dobell remained, acquiescing to the law of the closet by hiding his sexuality as far as the majority of the population of Sydney was concerned.[5] *Voss*, completed in December 1956, was created in the same sexually repressive climate: the New South Wales Attorney-General, Billy Sheahan, welcomed the two amendments (1951 and 1955) to the N.S.W. Crimes Act relating to homosexuality as a safeguard against 'the homosexual wave that threatens to engulf Australia.'[6] As Wotherspoon claims, the Cold War was a central factor in the significant increase in homophobia in Australia, with witch-hunts, similar to those of the McCarthy era in America, flourishing (pp. 114-6). And as Juliet O'Hea notes, 'Overtly homosexual novels weren't published' during this time.[7] The deft straddling of the divide between declaration and equivocation in *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss*, defining homosexual desire simultaneously as there/not there, had its roots in this intense homophobia which structured Australian society. So, although Theodora is clearly opposed to the life of wife and mother chosen by almost all the females around her, the text never commits itself to clarifying why; it is a case of 'By indirections find directions out.'[8] Likewise, the attraction between Laura and Voss is heavily overdetermined, and readers are apt to lose their way in seeking to discover the keys to the impetus of their passion.

This discretionary-revelatory approach to gender and sexual rebellion is, as we have seen, repeated in White's autobiography where he berates those who 'misappropriate' his novels while remaining silent about the supporting role his textual subterfuge plays in this. White talks about 'thesis writers' getting confused about *Voss*, and the 'guardians of

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4. *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 100.
5. See, *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 245. White knew Dobell, and in *Flaws in the Glass* he characterizes him as 'A simple provincial boy gifted with the lightening flashes of homosexual perception' (p. 135).
6. Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p. 113. The 1951 amendment increased the penalties for homosexual behaviour, while the 1955 amendment created new categories of homosexual crime. Subsequent references are incorporated parenthetically in the text.
7. Cited in *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 276.
8. *Hamlet*, Act II, Sc. 1, in *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Leichhardt' being angry with him because 'All demanded facts rather than a creative act' (p. 104). He 'resent[s] the misappropriation of a vision of flesh, blood, and spirit, for translation according to taste, into a mummy for the museum, or the terms of sentimental costume romance.' If anything, such impulsive cecity to the effects of his own evasive narrative strategies indicates a writer caught in a double bind - between his knowledge of the ideological limits, the lines which he could not then cross in his fictional exploration of sexually and socially tormented protagonists, and his conception of himself as a writer seeking 'truth': 'I have never disguised a belief that, as an artist, my face is many-faceted, my body protean, according to time, climate, and the demands of fiction' (p. 153); and, 'What to tell and what to leave out while conveying the truth remains the great question' (p. 134). White was all too aware that he was writing from the position of the closet, and was especially resentful of its varied interpretative consequences.[9]

The Solid Mandala dramatizes White's distance from the narrative techniques of the closet. It is the story of Waldo, the homophobic, closeted homosexual artist as a man, and of the sympathetic role his twin brother Arthur, the 'dill' (p. 231), performs to make Waldo's life halfway bearable. Written between the winter of 1964 and June 1965, *The Solid Mandala* signals White's rhetorical crossover from allegory and evasion to an explicit treatment of homosexuality and homophobia; a crossover, moreover, that echoed the wider contestation of hegemonic views in Australia in the 1960s by, for instance, the women's liberation movement, the Aboriginal rights movement, and what has come to be termed 'gay liberation'.[10] Read against this background, the absence of the literary trope of sexual equivocation in the novel suggests that although White opposed the activities of the 'gay liberation' movement he was, nonetheless, making his own imaginative contribution to the wave of cultural and social interrogation of so-called 'norms', and to the various

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9. Suzanne Raitt makes a similar point when she says that even though Vita Sackville-West's lesbian relationships were common knowledge, she was compelled to represent it as an 'open secret' in her fiction. Unlike White however, Sackville-West appears not to have resented the self-censorship, an attitude which is, more than likely, gender inflected. See, *Vita & Virginia:The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 79. See also Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 101.

10. Garry Wotherspoon, 'From Private Vice to Public History: Homosexuality in Australia', *Public History Review*, 1 (1992): 148-59.

'outings' which accompanied this.[11] He was clearly influenced by the infiltration of dissident ideas and theories into the wider cultural milieu, and his refusal to take a public stand on his sexuality is more a reflection of the value he placed on personal privacy. In particular, the subject matter of *The Solid Mandala* - a novel about a sexually closeted novelist - signals not only that White wanted this novel to be read in a different way, but that he, as a producer of texts, also wanted to be read differently.

It is in this sense that White is breaking the sentence, or the condemnation of the closet, the sentence of silence and secrecy. Although, as Sedgwick has pointed out, and as the texts of *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss* suggest, the closet only ever afforded an equivocal privacy, choosing Waldo, the 'veiled bride' (p. 218) as a protagonist is an important shift in White's *oeuvre*, a fictional 'coming out' that begins the process of deconstructing the literary closet.[12]

The emphasis on textuality in *The Solid Mandala* expands to include the figure of the author. In one sense the novel is an example of metafiction, of fiction about fiction: Waldo, the 'veiled bride' is also 'veiled' as a novelist; his life's work (notably called after the most famous classical transsexual figure), *Tiresias a Youngish Man*, is never finished, and never seen, much like Dorian Gray's truth-revealing portrait.[13] Marr records that in a conversation with White on 13 September 1989, White told him that the phrase 'veiled bride' meant 'closeted homosexual'; and on two separate occasions, in 1966 and 1969, White had used the phrase to refer to himself.[14] The symbol of the veil thus overlaps with that of the closet. Gendered feminine, the veil the bride wears on her wedding day signifies virginity: only after the ceremony, when the woman has been given over to the man as his property, can the veil which 'hides' her sexuality be lifted; she is acceptable as a sexual being only when that sexuality is safely contained within a patriarchal system. By calling himself a 'veiled bride' White is co-opting, and identifying himself with

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11. See, *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 526, and *Flaws in the Glass*, p. 80.
12. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 71.
13. I have drawn on Marjorie Garber's delineation of sexual anxiety or curiosity as an activity of reading in the literature produced during the period of the sexologists (Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis), and her discussion of the concept of the veil in relation to Freud's 'Wolf Man Case' for my analysis of the significance of reading, writing and the veil in *The Solid Mandala*. See, *Vested Interests:Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), chapters 6 and 13.
14. *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 686, note 14.

the inherently sexually ambiguous position of the woman in the wedding ceremony (and in patriarchal culture as a whole). Further, by placing himself in a feminized position, White comes to occupy the same enigmatic 'dark continent' of sexuality that Freud identified as female. Sarah Kofman's contention that 'The reasons women would have for veiling themselves and for wanting to be enigmatic would all link up with man's need for a certain fetishism, in which woman, her interests being at stake, would become an accomplice', can be expanded to apply to the need of heterosexist culture to have an Other whose own survival depends on becoming an accomplice, becoming closeted/enigmatic/feminized.[15] But, whereas Waldo and Arthur are figured (and figure themselves) as feminized in the homophobic society *The Solid Mandala* portrays, White-as-author is beginning to distance himself from this position by articulating the closet, lifting the veil.

Freud's 'Wolf Man Case' also brings up the subject of the veil in relation to sight.[16] The Wolf Man was born with a caul which, Freud says, 'was the veil which hid him from the world and the world from him' (p. 100). One of the Wolf Man's persistent problems was the inability to defecate, and he imagined this in terms of a veil: 'The veil was torn, strange to say, in one situation only; and that was at the moment when, as a result of an enema, he passed a motion through the anus. He then felt well again, and for a very short time he saw the world clearly' (p. 99). The activity of the anus articulates the world for the sexually tormented Wolf Man in terms of a renaissance: 'If this birth-veil was torn, then he saw the world and was re-born' (p. 100). By tearing the veil in *The Solid Mandala*, White is exposing and challenging the construction of male homosexuality in terms of the closet.[17] Precisely how he achieves this will take up the remainder of this chapter.

The narrative of *The Solid Mandala* spans the two World Wars, and abounds in scandals of one sort or another. Waldo and Arthur leave England for Australia with their parents shortly after the beginning of the

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15. Sarah Kofman, 'The Narcissistic Woman: Freud and Girard', in *French Feminist Thought:A Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 210.
16. Sigmund Freud (1918), 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis', *Standard Edition* 17, pp. 7-122. Subsequent references are incorporated parenthetically in the text.
17. In *The Vivisector* (1970; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), the misogynist Hurtle Duffield uses his own faeces to paint his self-portrait.

twentieth century, when they are young boys. It is more than likely no mere coincidence that White has their father, George Brown, meet the upper class Ann Quantrell at the Fabian Society. Associated with two of the most famous authors on homosexuality in Britain, Havelock Ellis, and Edward Carpenter, himself a homosexual, the socialist Fabian Society sought to transform all areas of life, not least of which were the areas of sexuality and gender.[18] However, the cross-class relationship between George and Ann causes a scandal because Ann had 'Married Beneath Her' (p. 35). (It was also the cross-class aspect of the Cleveland Street homosexual scandal of 1889-90 which caused the greatest outrage).[19] In order to escape the opprobrium they decide to move to Australia, believing it will be the land in which they can practise their 'Intellectual Enlightenment' (p. 145):

> "And our conscience is intact. We got out. No one can say it wasn't for the best."
> "Oh yes," said Mother. "They were intolerable. Beastly! What else could one expect from people so warped by tradition? My family!" ...
> "We are free, at least," said Dad, "here."
> "Oh, yes," said Mother.
> "Give the children a chance." (pp. 48-9)

Like the failure which characterized the implementation of the 'utopian' (and often self-contradictory) objectives of the Fabian Society, White's narrative demonstrates the fallacy of George's idealism. The image of urban Australia as the land of opportunity, of the free, is swiftly shattered to reveal a land of suffocating sexual, political, religious, economic and social conventionality.[20] This is symbolised by the microcosmic world of Terminus Road, the street in which the Browns live; by George's confined and confining job at the bank where he looks

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18. Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature:Essays on History, Sexuality and Identity* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1991), p. 173. It is also of some interest that Havelock Ellis lived in Australia from 1875-79, although there is no evidence to suggest White knew of this. Ken Goodwin, *A History of Australian Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 286.
19. Ed Cohen states that 'The sexual crimes, although very explicitly placed at the margins of the reporting ... provided indispensable atmospheric interest because they confirmed the "degeneracy" of the aristocracy who were perceived as getting away with them, while those less well off were punished.' See, 'Legislating the Norm: From Sodomy to Gross Indecency', in *Displacing Homophobia:Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture*, p. 197.
20. In D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* (London: Martin Secker, 1923), the protagonist Richard L. Somers leaves Europe to come to Australia because he too thinks that is the newest, youngest country, offering the greatest potential for rejuvenation and progress. Like the Browns, he is disappointed.

'out from the cage in which he stood' (p. 54); and by the self-imposed social isolation of each member of the Brown family, excepting Arthur.

Chapter 1, entitled 'In The Bus', pivots on perhaps the most famous epistemological dyad of nineteenth-century British society (as a colony, Australia was closely associated legally, culturally and politically) - that of decency-indecency. Combined with the reference to the Fabian Society, there is a strong suggestion here that White is drawing on the Labouchère amendment of 'gross indecency' passed in Britain in 1885, which created the scandal of Oscar Wilde, and which was 'the crucial moment in characterizing, and establishing, the concept of the male homosexual in British culture'.[21] Also, there is the biographical incident, which I noted in the Introduction, of White's cousin-in-law, Richard Ward, who was imprisoned, during White's time in London (c. 1935), for 'soliciting young men in a Hampshire village' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 143). The effects of this are imaginatively transported to *The Solid Mandala*, when Waldo and Arthur become the scandal which Mrs Dun and Mrs Poulter discuss on their bus journey into town.

The display of the decency-indecency taxonomy begins with a description of the two women being thrown physically together on the bus: Mrs Poulter enjoys the 'involuntary contact with her small, dry, decent friend' (p. 12), but silently acknowledges that 'It was so important to be decent'. Mrs Dun begins venting her fury at social indecency when discussing the relative virtues of verandas and payshows. Verandas are more respectable because they act as a screen, whereas payshows (as the pornographic undertones of the name suggest) are associated with people 'Exposin' themselves!'. Mrs Poulter then sights her husband and waves, but he does not respond, as 'It was against Bill Poulter's principles to acknowledge his wife in public' (p. 13). An atmosphere of physical and sexual repression is thus established when Mrs Poulter decides to tell Mrs Dun about the Brown twins: 'The private lives of other parties act as the cement of friendship. The Brothers Brown could be about to set the friendship of the friends' (pp. 14-15). Given the way the character of Mrs

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21. Joseph Bristow, 'Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, and gross indecency', in *Sexual Sameness*, p. 49. The influence of British law on Australian law and social practices can be gauged from the fact that in Sydney in July 1972, a march was held to commemorate the fifth anniversary of homosexual law reform in England. And Garry Wotherspoon claims that 'Australian law, even by the 1980s, still derived in many areas directly from English law'. See, *City of the Plain*, pp. 168, 21 and chapter 5.

Dun has been constructed thus far, these sentences hint that the introduction to male homosexuality will be suffused with irony. Being one of White's 'types', Mrs Dun is made to look idiotic by the use of stereotypical comic ploys: her false teeth coming unstuck; her neurotic obsession with outrageous incidents (fear of being murdered in broad daylight in her own home); her inability to cope with matters which fall outside her atrophied experience (her home, and bus rides into town). Thus, when Mrs Poulter begins by mentioning that the twins had educated parents, 'Mrs Dun shrivelled somewhat' (p. 15). Her response to their non-Australian nationality ('"All these foreigners," she said, "we are letting in nowadays. I admit the English is different"') evokes the 'White Australian' legislation of 1901 which was designed to prohibit non-Europeans from settling there, and lasted into the Cold War period as a deterrent to external threats such as communism, and 'undesirable' migrants generally. The English were acceptable only if they 'live[d] up to your British tradition and aspire[d] to emulate the Australian spirit of the Anzac.'[22] Mrs Dun also objects to Waldo's name: 'Mrs Dun's teeth snapped. Shut. She made a slight worrying sound. Then she said: "What sort of a name is that?"' (p. 17). Finally, when Mrs Poulter tells her that Waldo worked at the Library, 'Mrs Dun hissed. She was terrified. In the circumstances it did not occur to her to ask which ever library'. It is into this scene that Waldo and Arthur appear, in their sixties and walking hand-in-hand. Mrs Poulter catches sight of them suddenly:

> "Look!" Mrs Poulter almost shouted.
>
> Mrs Dun was so shaken her upper plate was prised from her jaw and lay for a moment with its mate.
>
> "What?" she protested.
>
> Looking stricken for the accident. Twice at least she had dreamt of being rammed by a removal van.
>
> "What we was talking about!" cried Mrs Poulter. "The two men! The retired brothers!" ...
>
> "Looks funny to me," [Mrs Dun] said, and with added disapproval: "I thought you was warning of an accident." ...
>
> "I never saw two grown men walkin' hand in hand," Mrs Dun murmured. (pp. 18-19)

This farcical presentation calls up the black humour of Samuel Beckett.

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22. *The New Australian (Official Organ of the Big Brother Movement)*, 1, 1 (February 1928), p. 7, cited in Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, pp. 159-60. See also John Rickard, *Australia:A Cultural History*, p. 117.

But here the narrator is eviscerating Mrs Dun: however indecent Waldo and Arthur appear to her, it is nothing to the humiliation she is subjected to by way of his derisory asides. When we are informed that the 'old men rose up again in Mrs Dun's mind, and she hated what she saw' (p. 20), she is fixed as a homophobic character. Mrs Poulter's mind, in contrast, is not immured in hatred. Where Mrs Dun is too narrow-minded to see anything but badness, and too cowardly to do anything other than insinuate the unspeakable ('"Only those old men of yours had a look, had a look of," Mrs Dun stumbled over what was too much for her' (p. 2)), Mrs Poulter is sympathetically portrayed as the one who sees only 'two respectable old gentlemen ... taking a walk to get their circulation going' - which, in this instance, is precisely what they are.

Writing the body, or delineating the sexual body as a new textual terrain, thus operates on two levels in *The Solid Mandala*, the serious and the parodic. Waldo's own novel is punningly referred to as his 'private papers' (p. 162), but when his mother inquires about his book, Waldo 'could feel the flesh shrivel on his bones.... Her question, her look had been practically indecent' (pp. 161-2). This swing from humour to a phobia of recognition marks the novel as a dramatization of the complex nexus between the closet, writing and male homosexuality. The parody voices White's defiance of the closet and thereby becomes a weapon; but equally, the fear bound up in 'coming out' remains as a condemnation of the rigid sexual politics of his audience. Elsewhere, White relates how the fictional anticipation of homophobic responses around which the narrative of *The Solid Mandala* revolves became fact when 'an Australian professor told a friend it was the most pornographic novel he? she? had ever read'. White adds, 'One wonders where he or she spent his or her literary life before *The Solid Mandala.*'[23] In a postmodernist move life mirrors art mirroring life.

The subversive way the novel illustrates the importance of human conversation as an interactive activity capable of providing the opportunity for the exploration of different (and similar) viewpoints by way of its failure, is but one example of the way it proceeds via parody. This ingredient makes the novel labyrinthine in its meaning by 'treat[ing] a joke as a serious thing and a serious thing as a joke.'[24] A related

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23. *Flaws in the Glass*, p. 145.
24. Seán O'Casey, 'The Shadow of a Gunman', Act I, in *Three Plays by Séan O'Casey*

example of the subversive power of this specific type of comedy is Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*.[25] Here, the chaos which comedy inserts into meaning via its destabilization and reversal of conventional hierarchies compels Jorge to murder. In Eco's text, comedy is intrinsic to the labyrinthine message contained in both the Adeficium and in the narrative itself. Believing that the 'lost' chapter on comedy in Aristotle's *Poetics* has the power to overturn the Word of God, and thus the order and the morality of the world, Jorge (a librarian like Waldo) destroys it, and the Abbey along with it.[26] The power of laughter is such that it can create the world anew by subversive reversal: '"... laughter would be defined as the new art, unknown even to Prometheus, for canceling fear.... But on that day when the Philosopher's word would justify the marginal jests of the debauched imagination, or when what has been marginal would leap to the center, every trace of the center would be lost"' (p. 475). The 'leap' that *The Solid Mandala* achieves for White is the transference of the marginal (male homosexuality) to the centre, using parody.

In her love of conversation which knows no bounds, Mrs Musto is wholly unlike Waldo and his mother. The latter two are almost so ashamed of living itself that they hardly breath a word to anyone, whereas talk was 'another of [Mrs Musto's] grand passions' (p. 84). The section in which Mrs Musto is talking to Mrs Brown advances her philosophy on words by yoking flesh and speech together. In this instance, White invokes the dictionary definition of 'conversation' from the root 'conversari' ('to live with'), so that it it signifies 'to have intercourse' and 'to talk familiarly':

> "What are mouths given us for? Yairs, I know - food. Lovely too.... Ooh, scrumptious!... As I said to the Archbishop, it doesn't pay, never ever, not even an evangelical, to neglect the flesh altogether. The Archbishop was of my opinion. But She - *She* - She's not only a poor doer, she's clearly starving 'erself to make sure of a comfy passage to the other side. As I didn't hesitate to tell 'er. But as I

(London: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 84.

25. *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980), pp. 474-5. My discussion of parody draws on Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (London: MIT Press 1968), and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbour, Michigan: Ardis, 1973).

26. Jorge's 'extreme syllogism' defines how he interprets the subversive power of comedy as the ultimate threat: 1st. premise = God is fear; 2nd. premise = laughter cancels fear; conclusion = laughter cancels God. *The Name of the Rose*, pp. 474-5. Subsequent references to this novel are incorporated parenthetically in the text.

was saying - what was I saying? Conversation is the prime purpose this little slit was given us for - to communicate in *words*. We are told: in the beginning was the Word. Which sort of proves, don't it?" (pp. 84-5; White's italics)

Mrs Musto's verbal sabotage refuses the mind-body binarism of the Word by impelling it to reside in the sensual, sexual body; consequently language is forced to articulate that body. All conventional libidinal organs achieve expression in the metaphorically resonant phrase 'this little slit'.[27] Starving oneself of words/of other meanings is presented as a neglect of the flesh; more specifically, of the erotically responsive body ('lovely', 'Ooh scrumptious!'). Overturning sanctioned or sacred language, Mrs Musto takes the Bible at its word, and sees language as a licence to express everything. In the mind of this rich eccentric, representation can be cut loose from the manacles of linguistic (hence social) proprieties, if only people would make communication one of their 'grand passions'.

Talk is also Arthur's passion. This 'wise fool' is the chief bearer of the novel's comic machinations, and the one who subverts the power of the word. Through Arthur and his marbles, linguistic instability centres on the novel's title. Arthur collects marbles compulsively. While on an errand to Mrs Musto's he discovers a dictionary which he opens at the word 'Mandala' by accident:

> *"The Mandala is a symbol of totality. It is believed to be the 'dwelling of the god'. Its protective circle is a pattern of order super - imposed on - psychic - chaos. Sometimes its geometric form is seen as a vision (either waking or in a dream) or - "*
> His voice had fallen to the most elaborate hush.
> *"Or danced,"* Arthur read. (p. 238; White's italics)

The claims made here by the dictionary, and by Jorge in Eco's text, share the principles of a divine order and a harmonious totality which are wholly opposed to chaos. But by having Arthur, the 'dill', who is 'off his marbles' rename his marbles 'mandalas', White creates his own 'extreme syllogism' which is parodic because illogical, and overturns the hierarchical or definitional logic thus: (i) mandalas equal marbles -> (ii)

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27. Conceptual comparisons suggest themselves with Luce Irigaray's 'two lips' which construct a specifically feminine sexual meaning by coupling the lips of the mouth with the auto-eroticism of the vaginal labia. See, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

marbles equal madness -> (iii) mandala is a symbol of order -> (iv) order equals madness. Through Arthur, the novel's system of signification unfixes the dictionary's claim to a fixed signified. And because the ascendency of the definitional word ('Mandala') is being subverted, so too is the traditional (definitional) ascendency titles of novels are deemed to have over their content. In this way, *The Solid Mandala* can be read as an onslaught on definitions which are enslaving, demeaning, and oppressive; it also, as we have seen, excavates the more subversive connotations of other words.[28]

The interweaving of sexuality and indecency extends, as I noted, to heterosexual relations. The incident which describes Waldo as a peeping Tom watching Bill Poulter surprise his wife bathing sets up an associational chain between heterosexual desire and voyeurism, and homosexual desire and indecency:

> He had never felt guiltier, but guilt will sometimes solidify; he could not have moved for a shotgun. There was no question of that, however, for the door was opening, and Bill Poulter was entering their room. *Ohhhh*, his wife seemed to be saying, dropping the flannel into the white porcelain cabbage. Mrs Poulter, too, it seemed, was overcome by guilt for her offence against modesty. Her fingers were almost sprouting webs to uphold decency, which was exactly what, in fact, they did, for her surprised nipples were perking up over her honestly-intentioned hands. While Bill Poulter advanced, into the room, into the lamplight. Waldo had never seen Mr Poulter look less scraggy, less glum. Because he was wanting something apparently unexpected, a straggly smile had begun to fit itself to the face so unaccustomed to it.
>
> Then the room was consumed by darkness - and was it mirth? was it Mrs Poulter's? (pp. 61-2)

This highly visual passage consolidates the imagistic base of seeing and looking in the novel. Structured as an interior monologue, the atmosphere is cinematic, almost like a silent film, and is organised around the presentation of Waldo's visual field as he looks through the

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28. Jungian critics, and those who incorporate Jungian symbols into their argument, take the novel's title at its word, and consequently overlook the reversal of hierarchies which structure it. See David Tacey , 'Patrick White:The Great Mother and Her Son', in *Critical Essays on Patrick White*, ed. Peter Wolfe (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall, 1990), pp. 122-40, and Carolyn Bliss, *Patrick White's Fiction*, pp. 99-114. Other critiques include, Ratnakar S. Sadawarte, 'Occult Symbolism in *The Solid Mandala*', *The Commonwealth Review*, 2 (1990-91): 36-42: Veena Noble, 'A Study of the Hermaphroditic Element in Patrick White's *The Solid Mandala*', *The Commonwealth Review*, 2 (1990-91): 30-35: V. Y. Kantak, '*The Solid Mandala*:A View Point', *The Literary Endeavour*, 7 (1985-86): 101-5: Vasant A. Shahane, 'Twin Consciousness in *The Solid Mandala*', *The Literary Endeavour*, 7 (1985-86): 106-12.

window. The reader sees the action through his eyes, which function as a camera. Traditionally, the camera has been analyzed as enciphering masculine and heterosexual desires, and situating the spectator within this libidinal economy. Freud interpreted scopophilia as both active and passive, with the active (masculine) form representing voyeurism, and the passive (feminine), exhibitionism.[29] Because this scene is constructed along the lines of a male homosexual gaze that shifts from active to passive without being straightforwardly 'feminine' or 'masculine' as Freud designates those terms, it is difficult to allot Waldo a place in either position. Dissociating Waldo from either a desire for Mrs Poulter or an exhibitionist identification with her, what the interior monologue reports is a documentation of Mrs Poulter's actions: 'there stood Mrs Poulter ... Her breasts two golden puddings, stirred to gentle activity. For Mrs Poulter was washing her armpits ... the flannel dribbled the water ... Mrs Poulter dipped ...' It is only when Bill enters that Waldo takes up an identificatory position concerning Mrs Poulter. However, it is important to note that this position is not a desiring one, but turns instead on Waldo's participation in Mrs Poulter's guilt about the unintended exposure of her body. Waldo's guilt is then compounded by taking part in a process whose sole objective is to make the private public - being a peeping Tom. The reference to 'the secret part of her thighs' underscores the equation with Waldo's secret sexuality. In thus 'exposing' the naked woman, turning the privacy of her home into a 'payshow', Waldo violates the sexual privacy he prizes so highly - indeed which is vital to his psychic and social stability. Being neither a masculine heterosexual voyeur nor a feminine homosexual exhibitionist, Waldo more accurately resembles a split subject occupying the homophobic surveillance position which threatens him the most.

That the Poulters' sexual act is consumed in darkness reiterates the designation of sexual desire as indecent, a corruption of the daylight world of public morals. Needless to say, the implication is that if heterosexual acts take place under cover of shame, how much more so those sexual acts which society outlaws? In this respect, the figure of Waldo looking in the window, a sexual outcast in the hegemonic world

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29. Sigmund Freud (1915), 'Instincts and their vicissitudes', *Collected Papers* 4, pp. 60-83. See also Elizabeth Grosz, in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Elizabeth Wright, pp. 447-50.

of heterosexuality, is reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster who, having realized to his horror the effect his appearance has on people, flees society. The monster's vision of the family inhabiting the cottage next to his hovel reproduces a similar sense of outsiderhood effected by White through Waldo's location: 'It was a lovely sight, even to me, poor wretch! who had never beheld aught beautiful before'.[30] Both passages stress the alienation that is inextricable from the characters' expulsion from the heterosexual unit or family.

Mrs Poulter's mirth, which breaks the silence, renders her sexually open in contrast to Waldo's sexual repression: '"Waldo had such peculiar vices they were kept locked up, behind a grille, in the library"' (p. 165). Yet her enjoyment is something her husband forces her to curb, as any sexual openness is shameful: 'She loved him. Oh my darling, she said between mouthfuls. His legs like a pair of scissors would cut her short' (p. 298). Moreover, Mrs Poulter was not a virgin when she married Bill: 'In the beginning there was Bill. It was of course a white wedding ... She was not happy, she was more than happy, knowing what she had got. Well, there was nothing wrong with it, was there? She lay back wondering about the laundry, but grew too tired to wonder long, and everyone knew about it anyway' (p. 297). Even though a general sexual conservatism impinges on her relationship with her husband, Mrs Poulter's choice of sexual object remains legitimate, which is where her situation parts company from Waldo's.

Bill, likewise, has a curious sexual background. Drafted into World War I, he never saw any action, but returned traumatized:

> Mrs Poulter told mother the War had got on Bill's nerves sort of, not that he had been gassed or shell-shocked, or gone overseas even, but from being in a camp. Afterwards he couldn't settle. That was one of several reasons why they had come to Sarsaparilla. (p. 141)

Such details emphasize the extent to which *The Solid Mandala* is rooted in historical events and issues. The variety of sexual activity amongst the troops during the wars has been well documented and, in particular, the homophobic attitude toward anyone suspected of being 'queer'.[31] The

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30. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1992), p. 104.
31. See Jonathan Dollimore, 'The Challenge of Sexuality', in *Society and Literature 1945-1970*, ed. Alan Sinfield (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 53. Also, George Chauncey, Jr., 'Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the

unmentionable reason for Bill's unsettled state in the passage above is probably linked to the ubiquitous presence of homosexual soldiers amongst their heterosexual counterparts: given the omnipresent concern with attitudes to sexualities in *The Solid Mandala*, what 'sort of' got on Bill's nerves in the camp does not take much speculation - and 'him such a manly man' (pp. 297-8).

Waldo's attempted seduction of Bill highlights the novel's preoccupation with reading as an avenue into ways of being which exist on the margins of respectability: 'But take Bill Poulter - virgin soil, so to speak. He might turn Bill into whatever he chose by cultivating his crude manliness for the best' (p. 142). Failing to attract Bill's attention with his 'virginal' walk, Waldo decides to 'take the bull by the horns ... lend him a book, something quite simple and primitive, Fenimore Cooper, say, they still had *The Deerslayer*', in order 'to influence their neighbour's mind and future.'[32] The attempt fails because Bill does not read; but also perhaps because the attempt is based on what Alan Sinfield calls 'the cross-sex gender grid' which, in the words of Quentin Crisp, involved homosexuals 'set[ting] out to win the love of a "real man". If they succeed, they fail. A man who "goes with" other men is not what they would call a "real man".'[33] Ever after (in what is yet another factually rooted reference) Waldo is forced 'to remember the day he had offered the books. It had become so sickeningly physical. It was as if he had been snubbed for making what they called in the papers an indecent proposition' (p. 144).

In such ways *The Solid Mandala* repeatedly represents reading and seeing as acts which reveal a sexual 'crime' or motive. When Arthur catches Waldo kissing himself in a mirror he exclaims, '"Fancy kissing a looking-glass!"' Waldo's instinctual response is to deny the action, but White produces the damning evidence on Waldo's body: '"I never did!" said Waldo, the moment already buried in his face' (p. 229). Reading becomes the expression of a sexual text (or, in Monique Wittig's phrase,

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Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era', in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, pp. 294-317.

32. This reference to James Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912) probably refers to the strong homosocial bonds between Nathaniel Bumppo and Chingachgook and, to a lesser extent, to those between Henry March and Tom Hutter.

33. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 139.

'sext'): Waldo 'would stand shivering for the daring of words, their sheer ejaculation' (p. 121). In fact, books become Waldo's primary sexually expressive outlet:

> He shut the book so quick, so tight, the explosion might have been heard by anyone coming to catch him at something forbidden, disgraceful and which he would never dare again until he could no longer resist. He looked round, but found nobody else in the stacks. Only books. A throbbing of books. He went to the lavatory to wash his hot and sticky hands.
>
> So the life had its compensations, an orgasm in dry places, a delicious guilt of the intellect. It made him superior to poor Dad, whose innocence from a previous age must have denied him even the vicarious sensuality of literature. (p. 122)

The sustained correlation between books and subversive or dangerous knowledge is maintained further by references to George Brown's burning of *The Brothers Karamazov*; and Arthur's (often refused) requests for 'erotological works!' (p. 196) in the library.[34] The novel thus contains the same tantalizing correspondence between writing and sexuality that impels the tragic narrative of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*.[35] The homosexual yearning that urges Gustave von Aschenbach to write in the presence of the exquisite Tadzio motivates Waldo to write *Tiresias a Youngish Man*. The title of Waldo's novel is, however, a key to what differentiates his outpourings from those of the genius, Aschenbach: *Tiresias a Youngish Man* fails in many ways to evoke the augustness of *Maia* and *The Abject*. In addition, while Aschenbach's works stimulate the narrator of *Death in Venice* to an eloquence worthy of his subject, Waldo's 'fragments' are never seen. Reflecting the law of the closet, Waldo's writing about his sexuality is hidden from view - but still suspect. Further, where Aschenbach longingly capitulates to the sensual love the figure of Tadzio evokes for him, Waldo, obsessed by social proprieties, yet despising them in others, is consumed by hatred

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34. A number of comparisons can be made with Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamozov* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976). These include rebellion against the status quo; the section on the beauty of Sodom (bk. 2, chp. 3); the qualities Waldo shares with Ivan; a strong element of comedy, and a general philosophical similarity summed up by Dostoevsky's famous quotation, 'if God does not exist, everything is permissible', which links in with the *The Solid Mandala's* own syllogism discussed above. V. Y. Kantak analyses the influence of Dostoevsky's novel in, 'Patrick White's Dostoevskian Idiot:The Idiot Theme in *The Solid Mandala*', in *The Twofold Voice: Essays in Honor of Ramesh Mohan*, ed. S. N. A. Rizvi (Salzburg: Inst. fur Anglistik & Amerikanistik, Univ. Salzburg, 1982), pp. 166-83.

35. Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971). Subsequent references are incorporated in the text.

and bitterness. Just before Waldo's death, Arthur perceives 'the hatred Waldo was directing, had always directed, at all living things' (p. 294). Where for Aschenbach, Tadzio 'should be in a sense his model, his style should follow the lines of this figure that seemed to him divine; he would snatch up this beauty into the realms of the mind' (p. 49), Waldo's writing is interpreted as 'an illness, or some frightening, more esoteric extension of cat's-cradle' (p. 29).

The narratives of *Death in Venice* and *The Solid Mandala* do coincide in their use of symbolism. The plague's position in the meaning of Mann's novel, and the repeated insistence on the closet as a living death condition in White's, share a depiction of sexual transgression as death-dealing. Such symbolizing cogently reflects, in Sedgwick's words, 'how problematical at present is the very concept of gay identity, as well as how intensely it is resisted and how far authority over its definition has been distanced from the gay subject her- or himself'.[36]

White attempts to expand on this alienation by the oblique use of historical reference, and through the delineation of Arthur's character. In relation to the former, he foregrounds the increasing elusiveness of safe hiding places in the wake of the intervention of psychotherapists, psychiatrists and sexologists into the field of male homosexuality in Australia. Additionally, the dissemination of Freudian ideas throughout academia and the popular press contributed to investigations into the 'causes', investigations that signalled 'an end to unknowing', and a disputation of stereotypes of perverts, freaks and child-molesters.[37] Such inquiries became, inevitably, a double-edged sword, one that could be manipulated for both liberal and reactionary opinions. Waldo is White's main vehicle for the effects of the latter:

> ... such an assault on his privacy, made Waldo realize the need to protect that part of him where nobody had ever been, the most secret, virgin heart of all the labyrinth. He began very seriously indeed to consider moving his private papers - the fragment of *Tiresias a Youngish Man*, the poems, the essays, most of which were still unpublished - out of the locked drawer in his desk to more of a hiding place, somewhere equal in subtlety to the papers it was expected to hide. Locks were too easily picked. He himself had succeeded in raping his desk, as an experiment, with one of the hairpins left by Mother. (p. 191)

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36. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 79.
37. Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, pp. 101-4.

Waldo's obsession with hiding places testifies to the resilience of the phobic stereotypes. The symbolism of where he finally stashes his papers literalizes the figure of the closet, lays bare the device, and plays on its multiple significations: 'In the end he decided on an old dress-box of Mother's, lying in the dust and dead moths on top of the wardrobe, in the narrow room originally theirs and finally hers' (p. 191). As 'the defining structure for gay oppression this century',[38] White's appropriation of the closet applies not only to the overall subject matter of the novel, but to the role of language, of representation itself: the figuration of Waldo's double closet inscribes the techniques of the literary closet, and the techniques of the material existence of a closeted homosexual. Placing his 'private papers' in his mother's dress box once again situates his veiled sexuality as feminine. But what occurs after this is more significant:

> To the great dress. Obsessed by it. Possessed. His breath went with him, through the tunnel along which he might have been running. Whereas he was again standing. Frozen by what he was about to undertake. His heart groaned, but settled back as soon as he began to wrench off his things, compelled. You could only call them things, the disguise he had chosen to hide the brilliant truth. The pathetic respect people had always paid him - Miss Glasson, Cornelius, Parslow, Mrs Poulter - and would continue to pay his wits and his familiar shell. As opposed to the shuddering of ice, or marrow of memory. (p. 193)

The gymnastic metaphorical and literal usages of the closet which White enacts throughout the novel tend at times to verge on the absurd: but then, this is partly the point. Constructed by a homophobic culture along the lines of a state prison designed to keep undesirables in and desirables safely out, the closet still serves those it was intended to hinder.[39] What is important here is that Waldo is depicted as an active agent, choosing his masquerade, and in the process making fools of others. Empowered by disguise, Waldo has the satisfaction of knowing that nobody else (except Arthur) knows him, knows that the heterosexuality which he is (always already) assumed to possess is absent. In this way, his 'wits and his familiar shell' are a performance exposing the constructedness of gender and the truth of his homosexuality, his resistance to the gender order. Foucault theorizes this dialectic of repression and resistance when he

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38. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 71.
39. D. A. Miller sees the closet as a paradox in as much as 'the term is understood to refer to a homophobic, heterosexual *desire* for homosexuality, and not merely a homophobic, heterosexual *place* for it.' 'Anal Rope', p. 132. Italics in the original.

states that 'there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised.'[40] In exposing normative masculinity as having no necessary relation to heterosexuality, White makes gender a free-floating signifier, reflecting the precariousness of cultural constraints. While Waldo's homosexuality is culturally created and lived as a prohibition, its very existence testifies to the subversive resistance it maintains towards social and sexual regulatory codes. The agency Waldo exhibits in choosing to hide the 'marrow' (equally, there were those who choose not to), makes it politically and analytically simplistic to construe him as having internalized heterosexist norms to the extent that the closet appears as wholly oppressive, and Waldo a mere puppet.

Through Waldo White presents relations between self and society as interactive, and therefore meaningless in terms of a one-dimensional model of oppressor versus oppressed. The workings of the closet are inherently ambivalent, providing a shelter which allows the sustenance of homosexuality on terms that, though weighted heavily in favour of heterosexism, are not immutably fixed, but shifting, because open to reformation via the registers of class, age, race, religion, ethnicity, historical time, culture - and outright defiance. Waldo's choice to remain steadfastly in the closet is something the novel as a whole refuses to advocate because such a stance is ultimately self-destructive.

The telling reference to the Sydney bars and hotels notorious as pick-up places for gays and heterosexuals alike during the war years emphasizes Waldo's self-imposed sexual isolation. Having gone to the trouble of sending for the brochures, Waldo tears them up and throws them out of the train window after reading them. Whether the names of some of the 'women' he imagines 'waiting in the foyers of the posh luxury hotels ... Clara Bow - or was it Marilyn Munroe? And Mrs Clare Booth Luce and Mary Macarthy' (p. 116), are allusions to the camp names adopted by camp and non-camp gays alike during the 1940s - for example, 'Lana' Turner, 'Rita' Hayworth, or 'Vivien' Leigh - is, in typically Whitean fashion, irreducibly speculative.[41]

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40. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge:Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. C. Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 142.
41. These examples are taken from Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p. 95.

Immediately following his discovery of the dress, Waldo enacts the camp joke about cross-dressers *literally* coming out of the closet:[42]

> When he was finally and fully arranged, bony, palpitating, plucked, it was no longer Waldo Brown, in spite of the birthmark above his left collarbone. Slowly the salt-cellars filled with icy sweat, his ribs shivery as satin, a tinkle of glass beads silenced the silence. Then Memory herself seated herself in her chair, tilting it as far back as it would go, and tilted, and tilted, in front of the glass. Memory peered through the slats of the squint-eyed fan, between the nacreous refractions. If she herself was momentarily eclipsed, you expected to sacrifice something for such a remarkable increase in vision. In radiance and splendour. All the great occasions streamed up the gothick stair to kiss the rings of Memory, which she held out stiff, and watched the sycophantic lips cut open, teeth knocking, on cabuchons and carved ice. She could afford to breath indulgently, magnificent down to the last hair in her moustache, and allowing for the spectacles.

Waldo's middle class transvestism supplanted into an upper class scene relates to his fascination with his mother's life before she married George Brown: 'there were certain details of their mother's breeding, which reserve - and possibly breeding - had prevented her telling, and which Waldo intended some time in the future to ask' (p. 161). The moustache recalls the character of Theodora Goodman, more masculine than feminine, but ultimately so enigmatic that boundaries remain forever blurred. This is the point Marjorie Garber makes when she insists that we look not *through* but *at* transvestism, and thereby engage with the 'category crisis' it evokes:

> By "category crisis" I mean a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another. The presence of the transvestite, in a text, in a culture, signals a category crisis elsewhere. The transvestite is a sign of overdetermination - a mechanism of displacement. There can be no culture without the transvestite, because the transvestite marks the existence of the Symbolic.[43]

Looking through the transvestite involves reinstating the gender binarism ('definitional distinction'), and thus misses the point. Looking at Waldo then, what crisis does his transvestism set in play? Gender and class boundaries are elided as he merges with his upper class, conspicuously feminine, mother. This multiplication of liminal

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42. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 130.
43. Marjorie Garber, 'The Occidental Tourist:*M. Butterfly* and the Scandal of Transvestism', in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 125. See also *Vested Interests*, pp. 9, 16.

positions, intrinsic to cross-dressing, has given birth to confusion in attempts to define transvestism: is it an expression of sex-role preference (homosexuality) or gender-role preference (heterosexuals who want to express their femininity)?[44] While *The Solid Mandala* refuses an answer, through the use of the mirror and the employment of display, it stresses the psychological need for desire to be visible, recognizable. Waldo's reflection in the mirror presents him with an (illusory) complete image of himself as neither masculine nor feminine but both. Even so, we should not be too quick to claim this 'as a resistance to the whole process of devaluation which is made to follow from woman's "difference" - as a refusal to accede to the equation of the mother with insufficiency'.[45] Essentially, Waldo's identification with his mother is class-based: that is, he does not derive erotic pleasure from dressing up as a woman *per se*, but as representing himself to himself as a member of a privileged class (the 'sycophantic lips'). This is why he identifies not with his 'fallen' mother, but with Ann Quantrell, the embodiment of upper class life and values. The key to this unusual configuration lies in what Ann represents - rebellion against social proprieties, having the audacity to go against tradition, choose her own love object, and Marry Beneath Her. In adopting this pose Waldo does in fact take on a typically queer, effeminate, leisure class appearance.[46] Enacting this fantasy of intellectual upper class femininity, Waldo assumes a privileged position that momentarily empowers his deviance in sexual object choice. Even so, the class-directed overlay of male homosexuality onto femininity remains narcissistically motivated: in other words, no matter how much Waldo detests the 'feminine' qualities of his brother, and women in general, the cultural designation of such exhibitionism as 'feminine' persists, and along with it, his psychic involvement in it.

The focus on Waldo's moustache is thus indicative. Despite the class-bound basis of his fantasy, the moustache takes on the role of a fetish, the hair which disavows the lack that a heterosexist order imposes on his homosexuality: 'Above all the fetish is connected with sight, more precisely with the desire to deny that something is absent from sight. The

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44. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, pp. 132-3.
45. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 372.
46. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 137.

trope central to androcentric culture for the threat of castration is the absence at the centre of feminine genitalia, its "nothing", just as blindness, the fear of losing one's sight, and castration are conceptually associated with each other. Triumphing over this anxiety is always connected with making things present to sight.'[47] As this chapter has been arguing, Waldo's misogyny can be located in his fear of and resentment towards being placed symbolically in a feminized or 'castrated' position within patriarchy. If Waldo is here deriving power from playing a wealthy single woman overwhelmed by suitors, the focus on the moustache implies an awareness of the fragility of that power. The fetish represents a paradox by signifying 'that women [are] castrated and that they [are] not castrated'; likewise, Waldo's oscillation between closeted homosexual and patriarchal man is incompatible: he is and is not feminized. The fetish allows him to deny woman's 'lack' and, by implication, his own.[48] Garber allots this 'seeming' position to transvestism: 'transvestism becomes the middle term, the 'to seem', that Lacan suggests will intervene to protect both the fantasy of having and the fear of losing (or having lost) the phallus.'[49] Hence, the illusory wholeness of Waldo's image in the mirror, and the power of the transvestite effect to throw into relief the constructedness of the sexual and gender orders.

Arthur's intervention shatters this image by forcing both the reader and Waldo to look *through* the image, recalling the narrative back to the order of binary oppositions. His language - '"Silly old cunt"' - short circuits the fantasy by recalling the symbolic construction of femininity as

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47. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body:Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 97. See also Sigmund Freud (1927), 'Fetishism', *Standard Edition*, 21, pp. 152-57, and Robert J. Stoller, *Sex and Gender:On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1958), pp. 176-77.
48. Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism', p. 156. The fetish which Freud uses as an example is an athletic support belt, 'which covered up the genitals entirely and concealed the distinction between them.' See also Naomi Schor, in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Elizabeth Wright, pp. 113-7; Sigmund Freud (1909), 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy', in *The Penguin Freud Library*, Volume 8: 1 (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1990), pp. 167-303. Barbara Creed's discussion of 'Little Hans' argues that the case history 'suggests quite clearly that the origin of Hans's phobia was fear of the mother's genitals - her widdler - not as *castrated*, but as *castrating* organs.' See, *The Monstrous-Feminine:Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 89. Italics in the original.
49. Marjorie Garber, 'The Occidental Tourist', p. 138.

'castrated', 'lacking', and realigning Waldo with that powerless position. The nightmare of exposure cannot be severed from Waldo's fear of publicly appearing as feminine:

> When Waldo Brown overheard: "Scruff! Come here, Runt! Runty? Silly old cunt!"
>
> Arthur's obscene voice laughing over fat words and private jokes with dogs.
>
> As the situation splintered in his spectacles Waldo was appalled. The chair-legs were tottering under him. Exposed by décolletage, his arms were turning stringy. The liquid ice trickled through his shrinking veins. Shame and terror threatened the satiny lap, under a rustle of beads. Each separate hair of him, public to private, and most private of all the moustache, was wilting back to where it lay normally.
>
> Was he caught? Breath a thought, even, and it becomes public property.
>
> Only the elasticity of desperation got him out of the wretched dress and into respectability. His things. (pp. 193-4)

The volcanic imagery dramatizes Waldo's disintegration as the focus on his body beneath the dress subsumes the fantasy. While the return to 'respectability' indicates a jettisoning of the masculine-feminine indeterminancy, it is also a return to masquerade. 'His things' are as much a construct as his transvestite episode. All desire is constructed, because all desire relates to a fantasy that conceals a lack.[50] Compounding this is Waldo's 'ideologically determined "handicap"' - his homosexuality - and it poses, in Silverman's words a, 'major obstacle in the way of phallic identification, or may expose masculinity as a masquerade' (p. 47). In this way, White's creation of this closeted homosexual subverts phallocentrism at its most basic level by throwing into relief the predication of masculine subjectivity on lack.

Overall, the negative representation of Waldo is grounded in his fear of femininity. The stress on the twins' classical education, and the importance of registers of passivity-activity and femininity-masculinity to the Greeks is one clue offered by the narrative for this. As Genevieve Lloyd has pointed out, the alignment of the male with activity and the female with passivity comes from the Greek notion that in sexual reproduction, the father provided the causal factor in generation while

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50. As Kaja Silverman points out: '[Freud's] "Fetishism" implicitly shows it to be a defense against what is in the final analysis male lack. Since woman's anatomical "wound" is the product of an externalizing displacement of masculine insufficiency, which is then biologically naturalized, the castration against which the male subject protects himself through disavowal and fetishism must be primarily his own'. *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, p. 46. Subsequent references are incorporated in the text.

the mother received and nourished it.[51] In this respect, Waldo's gift of a huge plastic doll (p.185) to the childless Mrs Poulter as a celebration of peace time is at once absurd, and an unconscious desire to exhibit his 'activity'/masculinity in the light of his rejection by Bill (another implied interpretation would relate this to the crisis of masculinity set in place by the war). According to Maria Daraki, the battle against the 'woman within' was intrinsic to the formation of classical Greek masculinity, and it is precisely what appears to Waldo as the 'woman within' Arthur that repulses him most.[52] Being his twin, the 'woman within' Arthur is, like the mirror that tells Snow White's stepmother exactly what she does not want to hear, a constant reflection of Waldo's feminized status. And, as Snow White's stepmother wishes her dead, so Waldo wishes Arthur dead in a displaced recognition of his hatred of his own inferior status: 'If it was immoral, then he was immoral. Had been, he supposed, for many years. The million times he had buried Arthur' (p. 116). Both seek to remove the obstacles to perceiving what they want to perceive. The number of times Waldo is described kissing himself in a mirror underscores this point.

Waldo's repulsion toward so-called feminine behaviour in his twin remains a constant throughout his life. As a child Arthur instinctively takes Waldo's hand, 'which even then Waldo hated. He would say: "You're a big fat helpless female"'(p. 42). Although 'backward' (p. 58), Arthur is infinitely more perceptive of character and situations than any member of his family, especially Waldo, cares to be. And because Waldo has 'Something To Hide', he must always 'withdraw his mind from his mind's mirror' (p. 62). However, his detestation of femininity in his brother is comparatively mild beside the way he feels about women, especially those who represent themselves as sexually knowledgeable, or about to be. Having decided to propose to Dulcie Fenstein because it would benefit his literary aspirations, providing him with an 'atmosphere in which to evolve a style. The novel of psychological relationships in a family' (p. 150), Waldo's misogyny is at its worst when Dulcie knocks him back because she is engaged to Leonard Saporta:

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51. Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason:'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 3.
52. Maria Daraki, 'Michel Foucault's Journey to Greece', *Telos*, 67 (Spring 1986), p. 102.

> He did look back just once at Mrs Saporta, increasing, bulging, the Goddess of a Thousand Breasts, standing at the top of her steps, in a cluster of unborn, ovoid children. This giant incubator hoped she was her own infallible investment. But she would not suck him in. Imagining to hatch him out. (p. 157)

Not only this, Waldo even imagines that 'In slightly different circumstances [he] could have been the object of [Leonard's] courtship ... Well, he wouldn't have fallen for it' (p. 156).

David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979) depicts maternal desire as monstrous in a manner similar to Waldo's presentation of Dulcie above. In her analysis of the film, Barbara Creed argues that such a representation of illegitimate maternal desire bases itself on the woman wishing 'to give birth without the agency of the male', and also on 'woman's desire to *express* her desires'.[53] She continues: 'The mother's offspring in *The Brood* represent symbolically the horrifying results of permitting the mother too much power. An extreme, impossible situation - parthenogenetic birth - is used to demonstrate the horrors of unbridled maternal power' (p. 47). Dulcie's rebuttal, coupled with Waldo's knowledge that she is already engaged, exacerbates his sexual insecurity; and this double blow to his ego produces his grotesque construction of Dulcie in terms of unbridled maternal power.[54] This passage delivers the novel's most pronounced overlap of homophobia and misogyny. Already disenfranchised of his hierarchical position in respect of heterosexual femininity by virtue of his homosexuality, Waldo's jilted position reflects how the mechanisms of misogyny and homophobia are mutually implicated.[55] His endeavour to disavow his

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53. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 46. Italics in the original. Subsequent references are incorporated parenthetically in the text.

54. The combined effect of Waldo's attempt to mask his feminized position and his representation of Dulcie as monstrous is contradictory. As Creed argues, 'those images which define women as monstrous in relation to her reproductive functions work to reinforce the phallocentric notion that female sexuality is abject. On the other hand, the notion of the monstrous-feminine challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity.' *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 151.

55. This is not always the case, and is dependent on the specificity of the sex-gender system at hand. Gayle Rubin notes that the kinship system of many New Guinea groups openly advocates and validates male homosexual partnerships because it considers women to deprive men of their life force. See Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 181. Eve Sedgwick also notes how the gender and political systems in Classical Greece promoted the devaluation of women at the same time as it promoted male homosexual bonds. *Between Men*, p. 4.

'lack' by marrying Dulcie, to alter his feminized status within the culture of the novel, is converted by failure into an equally preposterous fantasy of himself as the one who would spurn the advances of the athletic soldier, Leonard Saporta. Waldo's complex psychic and social involvement in two spheres he perceives as antithetical - masculinity and femininity - produces the extremity and the contradictory effects of his actions.

By linking the 'femininity' in Arthur solely with the capacity for caring, nurturance and love, White simply repeats a series of patriarchal stereotypes used to confine women to the private sphere. Further, locating such characteristics in a male character constructed as a simpleton remains problematic for a feminist reading. Although this is partly counterbalanced by the pathological representation of Waldo, it still leaves in place essentialist notions of femininity antipathetic to many feminists, and counterproductive to women's struggle against oppression. I will return to this problem and how it can be related to the novel's ending later, but for now I want to concentrate on what ends notions of femininity serve in the characterization of Arthur.

The Oedipus and Tiresias myths reverberate symbolically throughout the narrative of *The Solid Mandala*. Apart from the title of Waldo's 'fragments', there is George's club foot (recalling Oedipus's swollen foot), and the symbolic emphasis on blindness as a trope for castration which can be related to Waldo's closeted sexuality. However, it is the way White constructs Arthur which is of most relevance, as he is modelled on Tiresias himself. Wondering whether Arthur understands any of the stories, George inquires:

> "... if there's any character, any incident, that appeals to Arthur in any way."
> Arthur couldn't answer Dad, or not in full.
> "Tiresias," he said, to keep him quiet.
> "Why on earth Tiresias?" asked Dad.
> And Waldo had begun to stare....
> They would laugh to be told how shocked he was for Tiresias when Zeus took away his sight at the age of seven - *seven* - for telling people things they shouldn't know.... He was only surprised they didn't notice how obviously his heart was beating when Zeus rewarded Tiresias with the gift of prophecy and a life seven times as long as the life of ordinary men. Then there was that other bit, about being changed into a woman, if only for a short time. Time enough, though, to know he wasn't all that different. (pp. 223-4; White's italics)

The uncanny atmosphere of Part Three has to do with Arthur's

prophetic status: he, like Tiresias, foresees all. But the uncanny effect is reinforced by the narrative structure itself. Prophecy entails a scrambling of causality whereby we know of an event before it happens, but in *The Solid Mandala* readers are given the prophetic import of the message *after* the event. This means that readers are constantly called upon to re-interpret events in the light of Arthur's delayed prophecy. The notion of origins being called into question by means of a delay tactic as opposed to a heralding means that the replay gives Arthur an omniscience over the reader. This double reversal of cause and effect enacts a type of narrative masquerade, by presenting readers with a façade that passes for the real. And the façade, once exposed, shatters assumptions of faith in the realist narrative - the familiar becomes strange. While such time reversals are a common feature in modernist fiction, they are given added symbolic force here due to the construction of the narrative around a thematics of the closet, of masquerade. 'Arthur's' ironic commentary on 'Waldo' foregrounds the duplicitious effects of the closet.

Given this, it is clear that Arthur's sensitivity or 'feminine side' coincides with Tiresias's dual sex, and also with that character's bond with truth. His ability to, in Yeats's phrase, 'see into the life of things', allows Arthur to unveil his family's repression, albeit in the knowledge that 'Except in theory, the afflicted cannot love one another' (p. 230). Even though he 'had begun to fear for Waldo, for some lack of suppleness in his relationships with other people' (p. 242), Arthur's construction as a simpleton renders him powerless. His primary narrative function is as a critical foil to Waldo, the one who reveals his pathological frame of mind, rather than as one who can enact change. Intended as a comfort, his incestuous relationships with Waldo in their parent's bed become instead a reminder of a love irretrievably tainted because anathematical to a mind 'of tidiness and quick answers, of punctuality and unbreakable rules' (p. 229). When Waldo finally burns his 'novel', the destruction of the only object that threw light on his life brings with it his own destruction. With only Arthur remaining as the final proof of his secret self Waldo, like Dorian Gray, seeks to destroy him, but destroys himself instead.

Arthur's unintentional murder of Waldo, and the dogs defilement of Waldo's Adam's apple and his genitals as his corpse lies decomposing in their parent's bed for days, provide a gruesome and violent ending to

the novel. Arthur's sensitivity and his non-conformist stance in relation to behavioural and sexual codes, while wholly endorsed by the novel are, finally, perilous because yoked to 'madness'. *The Solid Mandala's* valuation of femininity incorporates a basic powerlessness that precludes an effective challenge to the legal, cultural and psychic oppressions that give rise to a character like Waldo. Given that the novel's treatment of Arthur implies that a positive valuation of his 'feminine' side is a necessary counter-agent to misogyny and homophobia, its placement of Arthur in the 'Peaches and Plums' mental institution could be interpreted as a capitulation to theories of male homosexuality as an illness. However, it is significant that in the period with which White's narrative deals, the most common delusions amongst men in mental asylums centred on power fantasies and a fear of femininity.[56] Waldo enacts both these attributes and as such represents the site of struggle between resentment of the closet, the fear of coming out, and the pathology inherent in remaining in it when others have left.[57] His inability to love replicates the erotic anxieties of 1960s Australian society: the general obsession with decency, and the denigration of femininity, sexual expressiveness and homosexuality are mutually constitutive. Femininity is therefore situated as central to the struggle over the meaning of masculinity and of sexual behaviour generally. Between the idealist and nurturing notions of femininity propounded through Arthur, and the misogyny of Waldo, lies the troubled reality of the insecurity of Australian 'manliness': as Michael Gilding notes, the 'problems and contradictions in the construction of masculinity were central to men's incarceration in lunatic asylums'.[58] On the other hand, there is no doubt that incarceration is preferable to death in the wars: the novel's linking of soldiering and wars with traditional masculinity, and Arthur's and Waldo's manifest non-participation in them, is a criticism of the psychic and physical 'health' assumed to inhere in heterosexual masculinity. Walter Pugh's fate is emphasized as exemplary in this

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56. See, Stephen Garten, *Medicine and Madness:A Social History of Insanity in New South Wales, 1880-1940* (Kensington, New South Wales: N. S. W. University Press, 1988).
57. Jonathan Dollimore calls this type of behaviour 'self-oppression'. See, 'The challenge of sexuality', p. 55.
58. Michael Gilding, 'Men, Masculinity and Australian History', *Southern Review*, 25 (July 1992), p. 162.

respect: one of the men on whom 'the stench of khaki was inebriating', the narrative relates - notably in parentheses - that '(Wally, in fact, was so good at war he got killed for it, and they sent a medal to Cis)'(p. 128). The symbol replaces the man.

Accentuating 'madness' as a determining factor in the crises of gender and sexuality produces a particularly damning criticism of the prevailing intransigence of these systems, their polarization of masculinity and femininity, homosexuality and heterosexuality. Positioned uncomfortably between the worlds of conformity and transgression, Waldo and Arthur highlight the mutual determination of these spheres, the ways in which the legitimization and very existence of one depends on the condemnation of the other. D. A. Miller argues similarly that 'with a frequency long outlasting the formative years, however particularly striking then, straight men unabashedly *need* gay men, whom they forcibly recruit (as the object of their blows or, in better circles, just their jokes) to enter into a polarization that exorcises the "woman" in man through assigning it to a class of man who may be considered no "man" at all.'[59] As we have seen, the novel forcibly depicts the psychic, social and cultural costs of such homophobia, but its representation of femininity in traditionally confining terms (domestic heterosexual femininity has certain parallels with the confines of the closet) runs counter to its critique of existing social relations: the transformation of attitudes to homosexuality cannot exist independently of a critique of normative femininity. Never developed to the extent that they suggest what portraits of non-closeted homosexuals might look like, Arthur and Waldo more properly represent the dynamics of a society caught up in a period of sexual, medical, legal and ideological upheaval.

With its focus on melancholic male homosexuality, *The Twyborn Affair* also addresses the psychic affliction endured by the homosexual subject exposed to the operations of homophobia. What makes it distinctive is its implicit psychoanalytic approach to the process of gender acquisition, a key issue in the narrative which has been overlooked to date. Presenting the primary incest taboo as homosexual, not heterosexual, *The Twyborn Affair* delineates in painful detail the ramifications of its protagonist's

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59. D. A. Miller, 'Anal Rope', p. 135. Italics in the original.

incorporation of a prohibitory model of gender acquisition. The impact of the two World Wars on the hero provides a particularly forceful commentary on the construction of normative masculinity. Given this background, the 'threat' posed by homosexuality to traditional masculinity is once again presented as inhering in its connotations of femininity. Being alert to the novel's psychoanalytic premise, the following chapter reads *The Twyborn Affair* as White's strongest endorsement of a break with the past and its restrictive ideology of sexual difference.

Chapter 5

The Twyborn Affair: *returning to the scene of the 'crime'*

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.
- *Not Waving but Drowning*[1]

The Twyborn Affair is a highly sexually provocative novel, not primarily because it places male homosexual and lesbian transvestism centre stage for the first time, but because of the way these subjects are mediated through a representation of gender acquisition that inscribes the death of homosexual desire.[2] The interpretation offered in this chapter argues that *The Twyborn Affair's* distinctive representation of male homosexual transvestism derives from its refraction through melancholia, the unsuccessful mourning for a lost beloved. The protagonist, Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadith Twyborn (often labelled simply 'E.' in the novel) cannot break free from his affair with the past, a time associated in his adult mind with the one perfect love - the love for his father, Judge Edward Twyborn. His present awareness of homophobic reactions -'I am the stranger of all time, for all such hairy bellies an object of contempt - a Pom, or worse, a suspected wonk' (p. 142) - leads him to seek solace in the time before he broke off his engagement to Marian Dibden, a recollection 'his memory loathed, yet mourned as the occasion of his downfall, the confession of his deficiencies' (p. 140). Asking himself, 'Can you escape into the past? Perhaps you can begin that way. If you can escape at all' (p. 80), E.'s life necessitates capturing and reliving the past in the present.

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1. Stevie Smith, *Not Waving but Drowning*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Fourth Edition, Volume 2, p. 2363.
2. Patrick White, *The Twyborn Affair* (1979; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988). All references are to this edition and are incorporated parenthetically in the text by page number. For the purpose of clarity, I propose to follow the novel's labelling of its protagonist as 'Eudoxia Vatatzes' in Part I, 'Eddie Twyborn' in Part II, and 'Eadith Trist' in Part III. However, when my discussion refers to times when these identities coalesce, the protagonist will be referred to as 'E.' to designate the psychic overlap.

Because his ability to love is immured in loss, in the 'death' of his true love, all subsequent loves fail him in one way or another, being but imperfect copies of the original.

The application of transvestism in *The Twyborn Affair* to notions of copies and originals works as a metaphorical extension of melancholia (searching for copies of the original beloved), yet also operates as a critique of the assumption that there is a 'proper gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property.'[3] Eudoxia's claim that 'The difference between the sexes is no worse than their appalling similarity' (p. 63) expresses his liminal position. However, *The Twyborn Affair* can never jettison gender as a 'true' expression of identity to the extent that it becomes - along the lines of the social constructionism of some queer theorists - purely an act, demonstrating that 'there is no natural, essential, biological basis to gender identity or sexual orientation.'[4] But the reason for this does not fall within the ideological claims of essentialism; instead, it derives from Eddie's devotion to the (name-of-the) father, to a man and to an order that provides him with a model of gender and desire that is heterosexist.

While some critics choose to ignore that *The Solid Mandala* represented a 'coming out' for White as a homosexual novelist, the content of *The Twyborn Affair* emblazoned this fact by having a male homosexual transvestite as its hero. White's decision to write his autobiography following the publication of *The Twyborn Affair* testifies to the far-reaching impact he felt the novel would have on the reading public and, consequently, on his personal life. Marr claims that 'White's urgent purpose in writing *Flaws in the Glass* was to make a public and dignified declaration of his homosexuality. The confession was half-made in *Twyborn*, and what was generally known might at any minute be said. He wanted to say it first himself.'[5] In the *New Zealand Listener* of 19 January 1985, White said *Flaws in the Glass* was written to 'stop some other bastard getting in first' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 595). Given the

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3. Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in *Inside/Out:Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, p. 21.
4. Carole-Anne Tyler, 'Boys Will Be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag', in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, p. 32.
5. *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 595. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

readings presented of his novels here, it seems extraordinary that it took so long for the public to react to their homoerotic content, and that White believed it was only with *The Twyborn Affair* that he came dangerously close to 'outing' himself. But again, we need to bear in mind the climate of sexual prohibition and ignorance in which his books were received in Australia prior to *The Twyborn Affair*: the censorship of minds may have made it difficult in the first place to recognize a homoerotic content, and in the second, to discuss it even if it was recognized. Additionally, there is the effect this atmosphere had on White's writing itself: censorship both 'protected' White's work and formed it as censorial in its own way.[6]

It is within the context of the formation of the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (1970), a Sexual Liberation Forum at Sydney University (October 1971; this was followed by another in January 1972), the Sydney Gay Liberation (1972), and *Sydney Gay Liberation Newsletter* (first published in 1972), including a host of 'outings' by well-known academics, journalists, clergymen and writers during the seventies that we need to view White's eagerness to 'stop some other bastard getting in first.'[7] Garry Wotherspoon notes the significance of the film producer Richard Brennan whose '[coming out] publicly in print in 1975 ... indicated that the new ideas, and new openness were having an impact far beyond the narrow confines of the gay activist world' (p. 181). They were also having an effect on White's writing, one which was to present us with the first (and last) explicit and indepth fictional portrait of a homosexual man.

In addition to White's long familiarity with images of disguise, the centrality of the trope of transvestism to *The Twyborn Affair* can be traced to a curious painting by Emanuel Philips Fox of an idyllic family group reading in an arbour (**fig. 5**). The twist in the picture is that the maternal, fragile, serene and somewhat voluptuous figure in white holding the parasol is a man. White came across this painting, called *The Arbour* (1910), on a visit to the Victorian National Gallery (Melbourne) in 1974. In his biography, Marr relates how White was told by his companion that

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6. Despite the dramatic change, political and social, in attitudes to homosexuality in Australia in the 1970s, some reviews still exhibited marked homophobic reactions. See Leonie Kramer, 'Pseudoxia Endemica', *Quadrant* (July 1980): pp. 66-7.
7. Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p. 168, and chapter 5. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

the delicate figure in white was Herbert Dyce-Murphy. The story runs that on seeing him crossed-dressed his mother inquired: 'Are you my son, Herbert?' to which Herbert replied: 'No, but I am your daughter, Edith.' His mother then announced: 'I'm so glad. I always wanted a daughter.'[8] According to Marr this snatch of dialogue sowed the seed for *The Twyborn Affair* (White uses it almost verbatim in the novel, pp. 422-3). In addition, during his research on Dyce-Murphy White found that in 'old age Dyce-Murphy was entirely unashamed of this youthful transvestite life and boasted that the war office had employed him for five years to travel round France in drag spying on the French railway system. He returned to Melbourne and married. His widow was still alive but White did not want to meet her. "I think my original facts will be well enough disguised to avoid causing embarrassment or distress"' - much like the portrait itself (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 562).

While *The Twyborn Affair* utilizes most of the ingredients of Dyce-Murphy's transvestite life in one way or another, it is the way the novel manipulates transvestism as a peculiarly powerful instance of the uncanny that makes it one of White's most interesting and dazzling works. In the following pages this connection between transvestism and the uncanny will be developed in a reading that focuses on the patterns of doubling and repetition which dominate the narrative. In addition to concentrating on transvestism as a figure of rhetorical ambiguity or, in Marjorie Garber's words, as 'the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself', this chapter examines the mechanisms whereby the novel renders transvestism as disturbing for the homosexual transvestite himself as it is for his audience by way of its involvement in melancholia.[9] While one of the repetitions the novel exploits is Eudoxia Vatatzes's/Eadith Trist's

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8. *Patrick White:A Life*, pp. 544-45. The identity of the figure has since been disputed (*Patrick White:A Life*, note 9, p. 706). Marr's *Patrick White:Letters* mistakenly describe Dyce-Murphy as 'standing in an arbour' (p. 453). Emanuel Philips Fox (1865-1915) was Australian. Caption details of the painting are as follows:
   The Arbour 1910
   Oil on canvas
   190.5 x 230.7 cm
   Felton Bequest, 1916
   National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.
9. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 17.

proximity to the figure of Dyce-Murphy in the painting, it is the novel's divergence from this scene of idyllic familial harmony that constitutes its drama. Even so, an important element of camp humour is always sustained, as when Eudoxia looks at himself in a mirror and decides 'I would pass. As I do! Or at any rate, on the days when I don't hate - when I can forgive myself for being me. So that I'm not purely the narcissist I'm sometimes accused of being - by Angelos on his worst days - and as I am, undoubtedly, on mine' (p. 23). The strategy of filtering the protagonist's self-doubt through camp irony - 'I would pass' - propels the tone of the entire narrative, lending him support.

The novel's plot consists of three parts: Part I stages the protagonist's life in France as Eudoxia Vatatzes, lover of the ageing Greek Angelos; Part II describes his time in Australia as Eddie Twyborn, jackeroo on the Monaro; and Part III his period in England as Eadith Trist, madam of a London brothel.[10] The narrative structure of Part I replicates the genre of detective fiction where the 'cross-dresser plays a crucial narrative role as that which is mistaken, misread, overlooked - or looked *through*. In order for the mystery to play itself out, for the suspense to be prolonged, it is crucial for both the reader and the detective to fail, at first, to recognize the existence of the transvestite in the plot.'[11] Although not strictly an example of detective fiction, *The Twyborn Affair* exploits suspense in a like manner, and employs a sense of the uncanny to exaggerate the effect of mistaken identity.

Freud's discussion of the uncanny in fiction is helpful in explicating *The Twyborn Affair's* structuring of homosexuality.[12] He defines the uncanny as the feeling or affect that is set in motion with the recurrence of repressed material. The recurrence is signalled by anxiety or fear, irrespective of whether the emotions were originally fearful in themselves:

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10. A. P. Reimer speculates that White chose the name 'Eudoxia' to connect Eddie with the depraved Empress Eudoxia, consort of Arcadius. See, 'Eddie and the Bogomils:Some Observations on *The Twyborn Affair*', *Southerly*, 40 (1980): 12-29. John Coates refutes this in his article, 'Byzantine References in *The Twyborn Affair*', *Australian Literary Studies*, 11: 4 (1984): 508-13.
11. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 187. Italics in the original.
12. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', *Standard Edition* 17, pp. 219-53. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

> In the first place, if psychoanalytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny; and it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some *other* affect. (p. 241; Freud's italics)

It is on the issue of the importance of specifying the affect tied to the repressed material that *The Twyborn Affair* differs. The key emotion which Eudoxia has tried to repress is his homosexual love for his father which, because of its ultimate impropriety (along incestuous *and* erotic lines), makes each subsequent homosexual relationship shameful. Paradoxically, the profundity of this love means that Eudoxia seeks to repeat it in each love affair, so that the negativity irrevocably tied to it is also reinstated. These two opposing strategies - recovering the lost love for the father only to be forced to view it as indecent - merge in Eudoxia's relationship with Angelos to whom he is 'committed by fate and orgasm - never love' (p. 36). 'Love' is that which is untainted by the homosexual act such that Shakespeare's *Sonnet 94* could be the metaphorical echo of E.'s tangled emotions: 'The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,/ Though to itself it only live and die,/ But if that flower with base infection meet,/ The basest weed outbraves his dignity:/ For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;/ Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.'[13]

The trope of death underpins nearly all the relationships in Part I. Joan Golson, the 'spy' preying on the fascinating couple staying at 'Crimson Cottage' (everyone blushes on discovering Eudoxia's sex), recalls her old friend Eadie Twyborn (Eudoxia's mother) who has been 'aged by her tragedy' (p. 18) - she believes her son is dead. Eudoxia refers to his parents in the past tense, as if they were dead, and refers to himself as 'one of the premature suicides' (p. 35). The spectacle of Eudoxia induces Joan to recall the sentence of shame cast upon her by her father on his death bed. And Angelos persecutes Eudoxia with ceaseless references to his deceased wife, the 'saintly Anna' (p. 37) who, like Judge Twyborn,

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13. William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 94*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Fourth Edition, Volume 1, ed. M. H. Abrams et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 807.

reminds Eudoxia of all he should be, and is not.

Ultimately, *The Twyborn Affair* poses the omnipresence of the trope of death as originating in the founding moment of the prohibition of homosexual desire. The way the novel figures Eddie's sexual psyche presents us with yet another instance of the uncanny insofar as the fictional formation of his sexual orientation anticipates, by over a decade, queer theorists' provocative engagement with Freud's theories on gender acquisition in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923).[14] As this forms the basis of the preceding discussion, I turn to it now.

Freud defines melancholia as an inability to come to terms with the loss of a love object, so that instead of withdrawing the libido from that object and transferring it to another living person, it, and all the ambivalences which characterize it, become reinstated or introjected within the ego.[15] Consequently, melancholia entails 'an extraordinary fall in [the subject's] self-esteem, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale.... The patient presents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and chastised' (p. 155). This dual and contradictory role of the ego in melancholia is replicated in Eddie's relationship with his father and in his sense of himself. On his return to Australia, Eddie leafs through La Rochefoucauld, and comes across a quotation which, with a minor adjustment, sums up his life: '*Nos vertus ne sont le plus souvent que des vices déguisés* ...; when according to his own experience the reverse was true.' (p. 136; White's italics). What, in Eddie's mind, are nothing more than expressions of virtuous love become, when situated historically and culturally, vices which he must then disguise.

As the original love object, Eddie's father was the one toward

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14. Specifically, *The Twyborn Affair* prefigures Judith Butler's account of melancholia and homosexuality in *Gender Trouble:Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 57-78. Sigmund Freud (1917), 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *Collected Papers*, 4, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. Ernest Jones (London: The Hogarth Press, 1925), pp. 152-70, and *The Ego and the Id, Collected Papers*, 4 (1923; London: The Hogarth Press, 1942). See also Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); and Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents, Sex, Politics and Society*, and *Against Nature*.
15. Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', pp. 158-61. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

whom he directed his libido. In this way, *The Twyborn Affair* postulates a primary incest taboo that is homosexual, not heterosexual.[16] In Freud's theory of the incest taboo, the boy is said to renounce his desire for the mother and transfer it to other women. For the purpose of the present argument, the key point is the way *The Twyborn Affair* engages with a situation where it is not only the love object which has to be displaced (as in Freud's typology, from incestuous to non-incestuous), but also the form of desire implicated in the relationship, which here is homosexual. Thus, for the homosexual girl or boy, allegiance to a heterosexist culture involves a double renunciation - of love object, and form of desire. Insofar as Eddie is unable to do either, but must nonetheless forfeit his father, he internalizes the love for the father and it becomes part of his ego. 'Mourning and Melancholia' characterizes this action as follows: 'Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object' (p. 159). This act of internalizing a prohibitory entity characterizes Eddie as a melancholic homosexual. His repeated self-interrogatory reproaches - 'Shall my will ever grow strong and free enough for me to face up to myself?' (p. 122) - testify to this. His suicide attempt in Part I is also comprehensible within this context: although he loves Angelos he feels he '*must* break away.... I used to imagine I could burn for love, but now to drown for it would be the less obtrusive way out' (pp. 77-8; White's italics). As 'the Amateur Suicide' (p. 80) Eddie fails, but his conviction to break away remains, leading him to enlist in World War I where he later admits that what was interpreted as courage was '"often despair running in the right direction"' (p. 138). Ironically, to kill himself would be to kill the censorious love he lives for, and so he always remains, like Joan Golson, '"the least successful suicide"' (p. 101). E.'s

16. In her reading of Freud, Judith Butler does likewise incorporating Gayle Rubin's theory as a focal point in her discussion. She quotes Rubin as follows: 'the incest taboo presupposes a prior, less articulate taboo on homosexuality. A prohibition against *some* heterosexual unions assumes a taboo against *non*heterosexual unions. Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex. The sexual division of labor is implicated in both aspects of gender - male and female it creates them, and it creates them heterosexual.' *Gender Trouble*, p. 73. Italics in the original. The quotation is from 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, pp. 157-210.

'affair' with the past gives White's representation of a melancholic homosexuality and transvestism its distinctive shape; one, moreover, that problematizes transvestism's contemporary theoretical connections with subversive camp.

The 'moment' Eddie/Eudoxia fell in love with his father is described within the realms of fantasy. It occurs during a dream episode which is prompted by Eudoxia's realization that his and Angelos's incognito life in St Mayeul is under threat from Joan, whose arrival is appositely labelled 'the Day of the Second Coming of Our Lady Mrs E. Boyd Golson' (p. 37). Eudoxia recalls the fantasy in a diary entry:

> Last night, to make this dream more disturbing, my father came in.... I never dared call my father "Dad" - Mother might become, grudgingly, "Mum", a sulky "you" more often than not - but my father could never have been less than "Father"....
>
> Mastering fear of his own child, my father was standing over me, offering a cold, knobbly hand. Which I took in desperation and love....
>
> I was brimming with love for his man I was privileged to call "Father", while going through life avoiding calling him *anything* unless it was dragged out of me....
>
> When I said he need not change me, Father re-latched the shutter, and managed a smile. The night-light made the smile dip and shudder on his long face. Then, incredibly, he bent down, and whether by accident, kissed me on the mouth. It seemed to me I was drawn up into the drooping moustache, as though inside some great brooding loving spider without being the spider's prey; if anything, I was the spinner of threads trying to entangle him more irrevocably than his tentative sortie into loving could ever bind me.
>
> Then the moment broke. He tiptoed out, lapped in and dislocated by the elongating light, and I fell back blissful on my bed of piss which the two of us had agreed to ignore. (pp. 33-35; White's italics)[17]

This fascinating and heavily condensed early erotic experience is advanced as forming E.'s sexual orientation.[18] In doing so, it engages with but goes beyond object-relations' theories regarding the role of the parents (especially the mother) in the first year of life, and the establishment of desire.[19] Although it is narrated retrospectively and the child is

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17. One type of Freudian interpretation of this memory would centre on the concept of 'introjection', what Richard Wollheim has termed 'the origin of identification in a phantasy of oral incorporation or a piece of psychic cannibalism. The son, say, phantasies the taking in of the father through the mouth when he identifies himself with him' (p. 176). See, 'Identification and Imagination', in *Freud:A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Wollheim (New York: Anchor Books, 1974), pp. 172-95. In Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, a good-night kiss also provides Marcel with a blueprint for his adult sexuality.
18. I am indebted to Trudi Tate for clarifying my reading of this episode.
19. See, for example, Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering:Psychoanalysis*

somewhat older, the fantasy hinges on the placement of the father (albeit briefly) in the child-caring role, and on E.'s identification with him. There is a tension between the respect E. has for his father as a representative of the public world, and as someone whose 'tentative sortie' into the domestic sphere is so highly charged with love as to spill over into the erotic. The movement between the two worlds is represented simply by E.'s use of capitals and inverted commas when referring to his father. In the first sentence 'Father' designates a superior positioning to 'Mother'/'Mum'/'you', signifying the respect he commands. Placed in psychoanalytic terms, the Judge can be read as evoking Lacan's law-of-the-father, the signature of the prohibition of incest and homosexuality. But placing the term for the love object in quotation marks can also imply that its traditional usage is not necessarily applicable in this instance; and the capital 'F' could signify an importance whose association with traditional concepts of fatherhood is questioned, as this sanctioned name is unable to signify the desire Edward Twyborn elicits in his son.

More than the kiss on the mouth, it is the movement inwards that styles the action along homoerotic lines. As E. is 'drawn up into the drooping [flaccid?] moustache' (the fetish for the penis in *The Solid Mandala*) he controls a situation characterized as innocent on the father's part. At this early stage E.'s sexual desires are so focused and established over and above his father's as to appear predatory. It is also clear that these desires are not fleeting; E. craves to 'entangle him more irrevocably than his tentative sortie into loving could ever bind me.' In contrast, the phrases describing the father are all tender, yielding and soothing. The framing of his smile in the night-light making it dip and shudder, his form 'lapped in and dislocated by the elongating light', produce a picture of a gently eroticized and clearly dream-like body. The rhythm of the last two paragraphs sustains this sense of peaceful, shimmering, eroticism. Instead of being a site of shame and of bodily immaturity, the 'bed of piss' is also eroticized and becomes the founding moment for some of E.'s later sexual tastes. Discussing the 'smell of a man' with Joan, Eudoxia admits that '"Even what you call their smelly smells can have a perverse charm. The smell of an old man, for instance. So many layers of life lived - such a

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and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice:Women's Conceptions of Self and Morality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

compost!'" (p. 52). Most importantly, the father's smell is replicated by Angelos: '... when you could have devoured the stuffy Judge - his man's smell! (This I think more than half explains my relationship with Angelos.)' (p. 123).

The Twyborn Affair's portrayal of homosexual melancholia finds expression in E.'s repeated pronouncements of personal shame and inadequacy, and in the way he lives in fear of exposing his homosexuality (this is partly the reason for his transvestism, and why, in Part I, it more specifically constitutes a masquerade, involving a dislocation between subjectivity and role).[20] Believing that it 'isn't possible to explain to those one loves the reason for arbitrary fears if shame is involved' (p. 29), E. becomes imprisoned by his own destructive thoughts, '... shut in a tower more fatal than those experienced by [Angelos's] other fictions' (p. 65). He is, at one and the same time, conscious of the necessity of freeing himself from the past, yet acutely aware that he primarily exists because of it. This is the crux, and the tragedy, of his melancholia.

A crucial incident in Part II develops this point. Eddie has returned home following his participation in World War I (in a move typical of many modernist heroes he throws his medal '"down a grating in London after I was demobbed."' (p. 154)). He formulates his return as an attempted exorcism of the past, only to realize that 'it was a repetition' (p. 133), a return to the scene of the crime. Believing him to be dead his parents are shocked at his reappearance, but it is his voluntary disappearance that remains wholly insupportable to them, especially to the Judge: '... that this son whom he loved - he did, didn't he? should have perverted justice by his disappearance. Judge Twyborn did not intend to pursue the reason why; it might have been too unreasonable for one who put his faith in reason despite repeated proof that it will not stand up to human behaviour' (p. 156).[21] With the unspoken suspicion of his homosexuality saturating the background, Eddie, Eadie and Edward dine together, and

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20. See Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a masquerade', in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin et. al. (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35-44; and Luce Irigaray's concept of 'mimicry' in *This Sex Which Is Not One*. I take up this point in more detail later in the chapter.

21. Hena Maes-Jelinek notes the Biblical relevance of Eddie's first encounter with his father in the garden, where as 'the Judge in the garden' (p. 170) he represents a punishing God. 'Altering Boundaries:The Art of Translation in *The Angel and the Gate* and *The Twyborn Affair*', *World Literature Written in English*, 23: 1 (1984): 164-74.

Eddie remembers when, as a child, his father took him to Bathurst on legal business: '"We shared an enormous iron bed with a honeycomb coverlet on it"':

> "I don't remember," the Judge said.
>
> "I do." Or thought you did. Oh yes, you *did* ! "I was so excited I lay awake all night listening to the noises in the pub yard. The moonlight, I remember, was as white as milk. It was hot. I pushed the bedspread off. It lay on the floor against the moonlight."
>
> "Eddie, you're making it up!" Eadie was out in the cold.
>
> "No I'm not," he insisted as he messed up Etty's soufflé. "Remembering is a kind of disease I suffer from." ...
>
> "I remember, on the same trip we had a meal in one of those railway refreshment rooms - so-called. We had corned beef, and watery carrots, and dumplings that bounded from under the knife ..." ...
>
> Judge Twyborn was staring at his plate, at the soufflé he had massacred....
>
> Eddie glanced at the father he had wanted to impress and comfort, who was looking as though he had a moron for a son, or worse, some kind of pervert: that honeycomb bedspread, the whole moonlit scene. (pp. 158-9; White's italics)

A faultless balance is evoked here between the poetic beauty of Eddie's love and its opposing reception by the judge, rendering palpable the chasm between them. The sensuality of Eddie's memory - the sexually-resonant milk, heat, and moonlight - sits uncomfortably beside the coldness of the dining room atmosphere, underscoring the distance travelled between the past and present relationship (hence memory is a 'disease'). The *Lolita*-like sense of illicit love suggested by their staying in rooms which overlook pub yards and eating in railway bars, is offset by the family scene in the family home taken over by the judge's 'dustless books': *Private Equity, Real Property, The Law of Contract, The Law of Torts*' (p. 150).[22] When Eddie suspects his father sees him as a moron at best, a pervert at worse, 'that honeycomb bedspread, the whole moonlit scene' becomes instantly sordid: what was symbolic of an ideal love is transfigured into an insult to his father and, by extension, to Eddie's feelings.

This painful emotional ambivalence towards the father is extended to his mother and Joan Golson. The novel identifies Eudoxia with the two women on the basis of their restricted sexual life, their social

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22. Susan Lever points out that the novel's literary allusions to Robert Louis Stevenson, Anthony Hope, Swinburne and Kipling emphasize isolation and imprisonment. '*The Twyborn Affair*: Beyond "the Human Hierarchy of Men and Women"', *Australian Literary Studies*, 16: 3 (1994): 289-96.

confinement to 'compulsory heterosexuality': while Joan 'deplores the tedium of sexual intercourse' (p. 110) with her husband, the passion Eudoxia elicits in her is 'as diabolical as her own never extinct desires' (p. 115). Still, he resents them because of the pain and public disgrace they imposed on his father by their 'lesbian' behaviour. Between these three figures White conveys a dizzying sexual and erotic matrix consisting of Joan and Eadie, Eudoxia and Joan, Eadie and Edward, and Eddie and Edward. Hence, Eudoxia wonders what would have happened if he had thrown himself at Joan - 'Would I have given Eadie cause for jealousy?' (p. 60): and the novel commences with Joan's lust for Eudoxia. Believing Eudoxia to be a woman, Joan is instantly captivated by 'her', so much so that she risks life and limb to catch a glimpse. The repetitions of her spying expeditions lie in her longing to consummate a meeting. She 'perspir[es] in anticipation of reunion with the scene she recalled', 'trembling' with 'nervous stress' (p. 15). The detective hot in pursuit of his killer could hardly be more physically taxed:

> ... she hurried, and panted, and several times ricked an ankle on the stones ...
>
> After bursting out from the last of the runtish pines she laid her hand on the containing wall ...
>
> Still reeling with drunkenness for her triumph in arriving there alone and at a perfect hour, Joan Golson was not at first aware of music....
>
> It was reckless and at the same time controlled (by the man, Mrs Golson might not have cared to admit) it was joyous, with undertones of melancholy, it was a delirious collusion between two who were, the more she looked, united in their incongruity: the lithe young woman and the stiff, elderly man - the lovers; there was by now no doubt in Mrs Golson's mind. (p. 17)

Perhaps there is more to this presentation than meets the eye, and its significance reverberates beyond a replication of the detective genre. Its format may be connected in some way to the later obsession with hunting down homosexuals in the 1950s and 1960s in Australia, where the involvement of 'agents provocateurs' in sexual situations often went - like Joan's - beyond mere detection.[23] Whatever the case, the preceding paragraph leaves no doubt as to the exact nature of Joan's involvement:

> As she stood by the wall watching the scene through the open window, the tears were streaming down her cheeks, for joy, from the music she was hearing, and out of frustration from the life she had led and, it seemed, would always lead,

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23. See Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, chapter 3, and ed. Garry Wotherspoon, *Being Different:Nine Gay Men Remember* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1986), p. 19.

> except for the brief unsatisfactory sorties she made into that other life with Eadie Twyborn; probably never again, since Eadie had been aged by her tragedy. (p. 18)

Joan's position as a voyeuse, in addition to her orgasmic submission to the scene which takes place alongside the oblique reference to the 'sorties into that other life', establishes her fascination with Eudoxia as sexual. The underside of this rapture is hinted at by references to 'tragedy' and 'disaster', and the phrase 'poor old Eadie Twyborn': however beautiful the couple and the scene, it has mysterious roots. As yet, Joan does not realize that she has stumbled upon the Twyborn's missing son, only that there is something about the woman that draws her - especially her eyes which 'troubled memory, and with it most of the certainties of life' (p. 56).

The insistent prevalence of such oblique references to tragedy, death and sorrow contribute considerably to the sense of the uncanny in Part I. While aware that there is more than meets the eye to Eudoxia, the intensity of the action is such that readers' uncertainty is always deflected by yet another 'adventure' - Eudoxia spraining her ankle, Eudoxia attempting a suicide swim, the impending doom of World War I which builds up to an exodus from St Mayeul, Angelos's declining health, the impending doom of the discovery of Eudoxia's transvestism, and so on. Quoting Jentsch, Freud notes that, '"In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton, and to do it in such a way that his attention is not focused directly upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately."'[24] Substituting 'transvestite' for 'automaton', *The Twyborn Affair* evolves a similar method of distracting enough attention from the figure of Eudoxia, thereby restraining readers from seeking an answer to the elliptical references to her large hands and feet (p. 52), her 'mannish' figure (p. 57), to the 'surmise, suspicion, doubt or dream' (p. 59) '"mon jeune ami"' (p. 83) conjures up. Furthermore, by forcing readers to inhabit these positions of intellectual uncertainty, we share those of the characters themselves (especially the precarious uncertainty of the transvestite), a strategy similar to the postmodern method of situating the reader as a character in the novel (as in Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*), and denying them the

24. Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 227.

knowledge of the omniscient narrator.[25]

When Joan eventually gains entrance to 'Crimson Cottage', she is invited to sit and watch Eudoxia and Angelos play the piano. Observing Angelos's stiff shoulders, 'Mrs Golson sensed a moral disapproval, worse still, a physical crisis' (p. 107). What begins as a grave episode slides effortlessly into comedy. Contemplating her father's death, Joan

> was reminded of the seizure which had carried off Daddy, and Daddy's only unkind words: *If what they tell me is true, Joanie ... and what strangers tell is usually true ... dancing at the Australia with a woman ... in a corked-on moustache ... then I've failed to ...* After which, poor Daddy turned blue. It was one of the many incidents she had never able to forgive herself. (pp. 107-8; White's italics)

This mental return to Joan's crime scene - Daddy's death-bed revelation of the one piece of salacious information he has been guarding with his life, literally, for years - is appropriately melodramatic. Tongue-in-cheek, Joan claims to be unable to forgive herself for inadvertently 'killing' Daddy, all the while intuiting that it was other, more trivial, things which were the death of him. Studying Angelos she wonders: 'Would he accuse her from the carpet as Daddy had from amongst the feather pillows which more than likely caused his asthma and cardiac seizure?' (p. 108). (The other notable ingredient in this scene is the 'corked-on moustache': each novel fetishizes moustaches). Such episodes show how *The Twyborn Affair's* affinity to the detective or spy novel is often manipulated to irreverent effect. One such effect is the way the link between transvestism, spying and homosexuality is burlesqued: as White once facetiously said of homosexuals himself: 'aren't they usually *spies*?'[26] With this in mind, the twists in the tale are all the more entertaining: the male homosexual position is the only erotic position *not* occupied by the spies in this particular scandal; and if E. Twyborn occupies the role of the criminal, the crime is not his sexuality and transvestism, but others'

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25. Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveller*, trans. William Weaver (1979; San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981). Teresa de Lauretis's reading of the novel distinguishes between the male and the female reader, arguing that the asymmetry between these two positions can be located in Calvino's ambivalence towards the rise of feminism. See, 'Calvino and the Amazons', in *Technologies of Gender:Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), pp. 70-83.
26. Patrick White to Joseph Losey (4.iv.1981), in *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 545. Italics in the original.

discovery of them.

Part I ends spectacularly with Angelos's death bed pronouncement to Eudoxia, identifying him as a '"dear boy"' (p. 126), and with Joan's (unposted) letter to Eadie. On a tour of the now deserted and unpaid for Crimson Cottage given by the incensed Madame Réboa, Joan sees an 'enema of enormous proportions' (p. 115). Rushing back to her hotel she composes a letter to Eadie:

> ... What I am driven to write you will probably find preposterous, unbalanced, mad, but there comes a point in life when one has to face up to the aspirations, aberrations - failures.[...]
>
> There is this Madame Vatatzes we recently met [...]
>
> She is in any case a radiant creature such as you before anyone, darling, would appreciate. On meeting "Eudoxia" I could have eloped with her, as you too, Eadie, would have wanted, had you been here. We might have made an *à trois*, as they say! I would have been jealous. I would not really have wanted to share our bed of squalor with anyone else, after escaping from husbands, prudence, the past, into some northern town of damp sheets, iron bedsteads, bug-riddled walls. To lie with this divine creature, breast to breast, mouth to mouth, on the common coverlet [...]
>
> ... You if anyone, darling, will understand my predicament. I shall always remember how the palms trembled in the winter garden as we toasted our own daring - the amazed faces at that dance as we forced our way amongst the bankers, graziers, barristers, doctors - their *wives* ... You gave me my first glimpse of the other life and the poetry of rebellion. None of what I hoped for ever began to be fulfilled until a few weeks ago when I met this Eudoxia Vatatzes ...
>
> ... You will understand - and my misery in finding she has disappeared, with her all hopes of definitive evidence for solving a mystery which *concerns you more than anyone else*. I have nothing to prove anything, except those extraordinary eyes reflecting the fears of a small child, seen by night light, years ago. So there is no reason why I should be writi ... (pp. 127-9; White's italics)[27]

I have quoted the letter almost in its entirety because it represents perfectly the concentrated uncanny, yet entertaining tension which has been the distinguishing feature of Part I. The frantic urgency of the *billet doux* occasioned by a double loss - Joan's life with Eadie, and the dashed hopes of ever having one with Eudoxia - is reinforced by the impending war: the prospect of death looming in the distance makes it imperative that Joan finally and effusively express her heart's emotions (one is reminded of White's duty as a letter censor during the Second World War, and of all the equally urgent outpourings he presumably witnessed with his own eyes). Her inclusion of a male homosexual transvestite in her figuration of lesbian desire is especially intriguing, and poses a

27. In order to distinguish between the ellipses in the original and in my transcription, those within square brackets are mine.

challenge to the classifications of gay and lesbian desire along the axes of either gender inversion or object choice. Instead, it agrees with Freud's pronouncement that 'no single aim can be laid down as applying in cases of inversion.'[28] Moreover, Joan and Eadie are women for whom heterosexuality and homosexuality coexist unproblematically within their sexual psyches, which is why Joan can entertain the fantasy of having Eudoxia share their bed aware not only of his sex, but of his familial relation to Eadie. Thus the 'poetry of rebellion' places no hierarchical distinction between sexualities, but does privilege femininity as an especially subversive erotic position. Advanced like this, the feminine eroticism common to all three is neither exclusive to the females nor to the homosexual transvestite. Unlike David Hwang's contention regarding the Kabuki that, a 'real woman can only be herself, but a man, because he is presenting an idealization, can aspire to the idea of the perfect woman', the attraction that inheres in Eudoxia, Eadie and Joan is at odds with such a fabrication of patriarchal idealization.[29] Rather, their marginal subject positions, their passion for 'the other life and the poetry of rebellion' transcends what can be a form of veiled misogyny and homophobia in certain instances of cross-dressing.[30] Finally, the sexual *frisson* evoked by the forbidden, the titillation of the 'bed of squalor' evokes the experiences of many homosexuals at this time: for some the fact that it was prohibited added to the excitement of their sexual lives.[31]

What has largely been a positive representation of femininity in

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28. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 24.
29. David Hwang wrote the play *M. Butterfly* about the 1986 scandal regarding the French diplomat who passed information to his Chinese lover whom he believed to be a woman, but who was in fact a male transvestite. The quote is taken from Marjorie Garber's, 'The Occidental Tourist', p. 134.
30. In her essay on the politics of gay drag, Carole-Anne Tyler makes a similar point when she insists that it 'is important to read each instance of drag (and its interpretations) symptomatically rather than to insist it is always radical or conservative'. See 'Boys Will Be Girls', p. 33. For related arguments see Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, p. 24, and Gayle Studlar, 'Midnight S/Excess:Cult Configurations of "Femininity" and the Perverse', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 17: 1 (1987): 2-14. Judith Butler responds to criticisms of her theories of performativity in, 'The Body You Want'. She sees the principal weakness of *Gender Trouble* as not bringing 'forward the psychoanalytic material into the discussion of performativity well enough' (p. 89).
31. See, for example, the biographies in Garry Wotherspoon's *Being Different*.

Part I, including a sustained light-hearted tone uncommon in White, gives way in Part II to an intense emphasis on traditional masculinity. The reason for this can be partly located in the historical period in which this section of the novel is set - the aftermath of World War I - and its attending obsession with phallic masculinity. The dominant image of Part II is provided not by the landscape, but by the body of Don Prowse who missed the war. When Eddie first sees him minute attention is paid to his 'well-developed calves' (p. 175), 'his overtly masculine back' (p. 180), the way he 'exercised his musclebound shoulders' and 'lashed the trunk to a rusted rack' (p. 176), and this attention to Don's 'inviolable masculinity' (p. 251) is maintained throughout. The obverse side to pictures of perfect macho masculinity was provided by the walking wounded who returned scarred, mentally or physically, or both. In this post-war traumatic tableau the Judge occupies a curious position, presenting himself as wounded by Eadie, of the sensational sexual past: '"You'll never be left alone, my dear. There'll be a host of surviving fleas - and probably a paralysed husband."' (p. 162). Don's introduction to Marcia Lushington is also coloured by a masculine resentment associated with the immediate post-war years, one that viewed women as enjoying a safe haven back home while the boys were at the front risking their lives. Curiously, Don also stayed at home, but still invokes the common reproaches made against women in explaining why: '"I was doing what they considered a necessary job. I would 'uv, of course. I talked it over with old Greg.... Marcia said I oughter go.... It's easy for a woman, isn't it? to decide what a man oughter do in a war. Some women need a man dead before they can appreciate 'im"' (p. 177). Such statements reflect, perhaps more than anything else, the intense pressure on men to conform to an ideal of aggressive masculinity at this period in history. And Australia's own myth of the digger as 'the fulfilment of all the hopes that had been invested in "The Coming Man", the ideal expression of the Australian "type"', served to reinforce the ideal.[32] Finally, as Richard

32. Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, p. 125. Additionally, White notes that in the late nineteenth century, the 'emphasis was on masculinity, and on masculine friendships and team-work, or "mateship" in Australia. All the clichés - man of action, white man, manliness, the common man, war as a test of manhood - were not sexist for nothing. Women were excluded from the image of "The Coming Man", and so were generally excluded from the image of the Australian "type" as well.... More

White points out, the identification of the digger with the bush was augmented by the success of the ANZACs: 'bush life made men more independent and more practical, and therefore diggers from the country were better soldiers than those from the cities' (p. 132). Clearly the ideology weighs heavily on Don.

Superimposed onto this historical sensitivity to the gender, national and class orders in the beginning of the twentieth century are Eddie's futile attempts in Part II to dissemble his sexuality, and the tension and frustration this arouses in him. Having been confronted again in his parents' home with the 'nightmares and unrealisable romances with which [his] narrow bed was still alive' (p. 149), he decides to 'escape from himself into a landscape' (p. 161), and take on the role of jackeroo on an estate owned by a friend of his father, Greg Lushington. All in all, the function of Part II appears to be a dramatization of Eddie's traumatic final acknowledgement that 'his rebellious body' (p. 150) will not allow him to partake in what the dominant culture deems the only rational sexuality. Because the terms of a predominantly heterosexual culture disavow homosexual desire, they also prohibit a legitimate displacement of that desire, denying the homosexual an erotic outlet in a substitute love object recognized by a social community. The questions then arise: how is homosexual desire to be imagined? and how is it to be lived? The attempts to find liveable responses to these somewhat closed questions account for the oppressive atmosphere of Part II.

Eddie's attempts to impress 'strangers with the [masculine and heterosexual] self which, he felt sure, was in the process of being born, and which was the reason he had chosen a manner of life on the whole distasteful to him' (p. 211), is bathed in irony. This is because firstly, his looks and behaviour continue to implicate him in so-called feminine positions and, secondly, because the narrative structure of Part II pivots on the problematization of the very masculinity Eddie is at pains to emulate. The novel's interrogation of masculinity takes place over the body and person of the hypervirile Don Prowse. Having met Eddie, Don

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often, women were portrayed as a negation of the type, at best as one who passively pined and waited, at worst as one who would drag a man down' (p. 83). Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically. Nicholas Brown discusses the decline of the image of the heroic digger in, 'Shaping the Plain Australia:Social Analysis in the 1940s and 1950s', *Australian Studies*, 7 (November 1993): 173-89

tells Peggy that he is a '"good-lookun young cove"' (p. 181). Whilst out riding with him, Greg compares Eddie's looks to his father's: '"A good looker in those days. Still is - the Judge. And you've inherited the looks - if I may say so without turning a young man's head"' (p. 196). As this dialogue indicates, the dividing line between homo- and heterosexual desire could hardly be finer, and Don's disgust on overhearing this 'courtship' confirms the precarious blurring of boundaries. Even so, Don remains the key representative of the mobility of desire, of its tendency to go both ways; and he is the one who recognizes Eddie's exhibitionism as a homosexual signifier.

Before the two instances of violent sexual intercourse between Don and Eddie, the narrative presents Don in a number of poses where his erect body is meant to signify the masculinity Eddie strives towards. However, in each case the description undoes the conviction of appearances. In one, Don is offering to fix Eddie up with a prostitute from town, and the narrative lingers over his body in a way that conjures up film stills of Rock Hudson or James Dean smiling their erotic availability to the non-sexually specified masses:[33]

> Prowse was at his most ostentatiously virile, in faded moleskins and heavy, conspicuously polished boots, a generous golden fell wreathed round the nipples of the male breasts. He stood looking down at the passive figure before him on the bed. The thick arms looked strangely powerless, and the smile which accompanied his invitation to lust, directionless, and finally evasive. (p. 211)

The gaze of the narrative as it is directed at Don's body indicates the impressiveness of his well-endowed manhood, but no such certainty attaches itself to his gender or his sexuality. The construction of the two visual fields (the reader's and Don's) split this representation's signification into active and passive forms: the reader 'looking' at Don's body objectifies him, while Don's towering position over Eddie's body places him in the active role. His evasive smile conflates these opposing gazes so that, in the end, the male body as signifier of masculinity could not be more indeterminate.

The culmination of Don and Eddie's relationship in the two 'rapes' demonstrate the extent to which the diacritical opposition between

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33. For a discussion of Hollywood's changing attitude to Rock Hudson after the revelation that he had AIDS, see Richard Meyer, 'Rock Hudson's Body', in *Inside/Out:Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, pp. 259-88.

homosocial and homosexual bonds is more exact for men than for women.[34] On the plane of the homosocial, Eddie can put a drunken and helpless Don to bed, and Don can carry an injured Eddie home without their masculinity being called into question. The sparsity of women means that life in the outback necessitates a lifting of the taboo on 'sentimental' or 'domestic' behaviour between men: as such, class more than gender operates as the register of power amongst the characters in Part II. When the homosocial shows signs of sliding into the homosexual however, the anxieties circulating around masculinity (and femininity) at this time in Australia assert themselves. In his study on masculinity in Australian history, Michael Gilding argues that in the early twentieth century 'masculinity was identified more closely with heterosexual activity and juxtaposed against the "homosexual".'[35] Furthermore, he notes how tenuous this juxtaposition was, with the result that men could 'never be quite sure whether they [had] achieved "manliness" or whether they [could] hold onto it' (p. 162). *The Twyborn Affair* chooses to demonstrate this dilemma in a blatantly visual and sexual format by spotlighting the acts of sexual intercourse between Don and Eddie. It thus figures the scenes of sexual assault as a symbolic nexus of the anxieties that structured the construction of masculinity at this time.

The crisis of masculinity reaches its zenith in *The Twyborn Affair* when a drunken Don confronts Eddie with the homophobic claim: '"I reckon I recognised you, Eddie, the day you jumped in - into the river - and started flashing yer tail at us. I reckon I recognised a fuckun queen"' (p. 284). This derogatory verbal assault, which also implicates the speaker in an 'it takes one to know one' situation, is soon accompanied by physical abuse, as Don 'push[es] his opponent around and about the chest and thighs, spinning him face down in the chaff.' White's portrayal of the 'rape' scene places these two figures in several shifting positions:

> "A queen! A queen! A fuckun queen!" Sobbing as though it was his wife Kath walking out on him.
>
> Prowse was tearing 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.
>
> His victim's face was buried always deeper, breathless, in the lose chaff as

34. Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 2. The continuum between the homosocial and the homosexual amongst the female characters is made apparent through Joan and Eadie.

35. Michael Gilding, 'Men, Masculinity and Australian History', p. 161. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

Don Prowse entered the past through the present.

On one level, Don is clearly acting out his hatred and fear of femininity through his attack on Eddie. Imbricating Eddie and Kath, Don takes revenge on the *coup d'état* Kath dealt to his masculinity by walking out on him. In this belated assertion of masculine power, Don feminizes Eddie by using Eddie's homosexual body as the battle field through which he seeks to re-establish control over an undisciplined femininity - chiefly over Kath. This 'bridging of the psychic and the social' establishes misogyny and homophobia as the motivations for his attack.[36]

The jolt introduced by the provocative reference to the snapshot album destablizes Don's position as a representative and enforcer of traditional gender and sexual norms: as an 'outing' device, the album undoes the sexual and gender disparity initially formulated between Don and Eddie, allocating them similar subject positions. This development transforms Don's aggressive display of manhood into a form of masochistic revenge on himself, whereby he acts out what he hates most (homosexuality and its attending feminine connotations). Earlier, a drunken Don had revealed a photo of himself as a baby to Eddie: 'Mum was holding a frocked moppet with abundant curls.... Don's thumb rasped against the edge of the page. "That's bloody me! That's how she kept me! That's what they do to yer when you're helpless," he bellowed. "The women!"' (p. 259). With this in mind, Don's 'enter[ing] the past through the present' reconstitutes his masculinity as always already implicated in the femininity it is prescriptively defined against; simultaneously, his 'rape' seeks to dispel this awareness, to re-establish a masculine hierarchy by reformulating the past in the present.

The second sexual assault establishes the essentially self-defeating impact of such behaviour, and identifies its roots once again in a homophobic system of values. Entering Eddie's bedroom one night, naked and drunk, Don tries to excuse his behaviour and begins to cry. His tender (and sexual) feelings for Don coming to the fore, Eddie takes pity on him:

> It was too much for Eddie Twyborn to endure. He was rocking this hairy body in his arms, to envelop suffering in some semblance of love, to resuscitate two

36. Jeffrey Weeks, in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Elizabeth Wright, p. 156.

human beings from drowning....

"Go on," [Don] moaned, "Ed!" and bit the pillow.

Eddie Twyborn's feminine compassion which had moved him to tenderness for a pitiable man was shocked into what was less lust than a desire for male revenge. He plunged deep into this passive yet quaking carcase offered up as a sacrifice. He bit into the damp nape of a taunt neck. Hair sprouting from the shoulders, he twisted by merciless handfulls as he dragged his body back and forth, lacerated by his own vengeance. (p. 296)

The intensity of the language reverberates in response to the violence of the action. What begins as an attempt on Eddie's part to respond to two men drowning in storming waves of homophobia is transformed into a paralysis of self-oppression. Engulfed by the self-mutilating masculine stereotypes they seek, in one way or another, to uphold, both men recall Franz Fanon's black faces in white masks.[37] The metaphors of the assault underscore the inherent rigor-mortis of gender norms, of an order that excludes boundary crossing, liminality, gender indeterminacy. As if expelling its last life breath, all Don's body can manage is to quake in its masculine straight-jacket. Conceding to the strict demarcation of gender behaviour, Don's sacrifice requires a total 'feminine' submission in response to Eddie's 'masculine' dominance. In this way Don achieves one position that has painfully eluded him thus far: he finally becomes a victim of war - a gender war. Eddie is granted no such reprieve, however dubious: never achieving the masculine self he came to the Monaro to assemble, this scene reduces him to a perversion of polarized notions of sexual role and gender.

It is necessary to place the narrative's treatment of Marcia Lushington within the context of this forceful deconstruction of masculinity. Her irreverent attitude to marriage vows, to the traditional family, and to all related institutions is experienced as a type of trauma by both Don and Eddie.[38] The text's graphic representation of the results of

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37. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), Franz Fanon characterizes one of the psychic effects of colonialism as the creation of 'Blacks who are whiter than the Whites' (p. 115), elucidating the results of the psychic introjection of racist attitudes in those who should be seeking to destroy them.

38. In fact all heterosexual relationships in Part II are represented negatively: Mrs Tyrrell of the toothless smile is the mother of no less than seventeen boys; Else's pregnancies are the result of marital rapes but she stays with her husband for the children; Marcia's unfaithfulness to Greg is rewarded by the deaths of all her infant children; Dot Norton, repeatedly abused by her father, is finally married off to the local half-wit Denny, to provide a father for her consanguineous child; and Kath has

some of her affairs - the babies buried in the graveyard beyond the house - can signify its challenge to the presumed healthiness and naturalness of the heterosexual family; or it can be interpreted as a condemnation of unrestrained feminine sexuality.

Eddie's devotion to Greg as a father substitute ('His own affection for the old man was too delicate to bear exposure' (p. 215)) intensifies his resentment of Marcia. After their first sexual act he tells her '"To me it's only conscience - for having fucked the wife of a man I respect"' (p. 225).[39] Admitting that he does not love Marcia because he is not a masochist as a man, he takes pleasure in insulting her, alternately finding her female form repugnant, and as that through which he rediscovers the womb (p. 240). Through characters like Don (the deserted husband), Denny (the half-wit encouraged to marry to provide a home and a father for a consanguineous child) and Greg (whose unfaithful wife cannot give him the only thing really wants - a son), the institution of heterosexuality is graphically represented as failing the individuals involved in it. If *The Twyborn Affair's* representations of feminine sexuality sometimes seem monstrous, it is important that we examine the contexts in which they appear. Barbara Creed argues that 'the monstrous is produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not.'[40] While Marcia, Kath and Dot all take up the role of wives, it is their sexual unfaithfulness to this role that distinguishes them, making them monstrous in Eddie's misogynist eyes. His twisted emotional investment in upholding the law-of-the-father means that he views all who threaten it - including himself - as monstrous.

The femininity that is positively evaluated in Part II is, therefore, not illustrated by any of these women. It appears in abstract form in details like Eddie's 'feminine compassion', in the sensitivity of Greg who writes poetry, and the 'feminine' vulnerability of Don Prowse. As such it is quite stereotypical and sentimental, and expressive of a patriarchal ideology which presents sensitivity, nurturance and a sexually-attractive

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walked out on Don, both hating each other equally. Paradoxically Eddie enters into this as the only character not directly involved in heterosexual relations, yet seeking to 'pass'.

39. The triangular relationship between Greg, Eddie and Marcia, wherein Marcia becomes the go-between for the homosociality of Eddie and Greg, conforms to Eve Sedgwick's paradigm in *Between Men*.

40. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 7.

weakness as inherently feminine, though capable of being reproduced as such by some men. Posing such traditional codes of femininity as honourable, Part II proposes that masculinity be reconstructed via an incorporation of these norms. The query is why the novel should choose to celebrate a patriarchal form of femininity in a male homosexual, while deriding it in Marian Dibden whom Eddie left 'to bear the children who were her right and fate, the seed of some socially acceptable, decent, boring man' (p. 222), and omitting it from most of its major female characters? Eddie's fantasies suggest the most likely motive - so that he can supplant the women who are his rivals in love: specifically Marcia Lushington. Thus he dresses up in Marcia's clothes and make-up to lie 'palpitating, if contradictorily erect, awaiting the ravishment of [Greg's] male thighs' (p. 282), before he looses his nerve and 'thr[ows] off [his] borrowed clothes' (p. 283). Drawing attention to his penis in this way (as 'contradictorily erect') positions Eddie in a no-man's-land between homosexual desire and the impossibility of ever consummating that desire with Greg Lushington. The borrowed clothes indicate the temporality of any displacement of Marcia. Ultimately, his love for Greg dictates the form his feminine side should take; it is, therefore, one which is defined over and against Marcia and her adulterous acts. In his fantasies, if not in reality, Eddie is the perfect feminine compliment to the squirearchal Greg.

By thus extolling the characteristics of a traditional femininity here, *The Twyborn Affair*, like *The Solid Mandala*, effectively blocks its own path towards challenging the gender system as a whole.[41] Women's positive qualities remain those defined for them by a patriarchal format. However, by depicting a clearly rebellious feminine sexuality that threatens to depose masculine power, *The Twyborn Affair* underlines how fragile that power is. This is perhaps the key to why the only affair Eddie has is with Angelos, a Greek. In ancient Greece, male homosexuality was an important component of masculine supremacy,

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41. Stephen Adams makes a similar point regarding John Rechy's *City of the Night*: 'Although the author champions this subculture's defiance of persecution and conventional morality, there is also a deep and unacknowledged conflict between his hero's progressive involvement in homosexuality and his frantic determination to contain this within a traditional male identity.' *The Homosexual As Hero In Contemporary Fiction* (London: Vision, 1980), p. 84.

and the way in which clear-cut gender roles were upheld while sexual roles were mixed complies with Eddie's sexual and psychic make-up. The form homosexuality took in ancient Greece - young boy and older man - is reproduced in *The Twyborn Affair*, along with the temporary feminization of the younger partner. Moreover, the Greek paradigm of male homosexuality was formed to reflect and uphold the patriarchal organisation of that culture. As David Halperin remarks: 'Sex was a manifestation of public status, a declaration of social identity; it did not so much express an individual's unique "sexuality" as it served to position social actors in the places assigned to them (by virtue of their political standing) in the hierarchical structure of the Athenian polity.'[42] The relationship also had an obvious educational function, initiating the youth into the politics of his society.[43] In a similar way, Eddie's love for older men who belong to the upper or ruling classes is bound up with a respect for their position: however, both the historical period and the country in which the novel is set precludes his sexuality being a structural component of society. Nevertheless, in the portrait of Eddie's homosexual love for older men, the continuum, as Sedgwick contends, 'between "men loving men" and "men promoting the interests of men" appears to [be] quite seamless.'[44] This overlap between the homosexual and the homosocial is fully congruent with the melancholic format of Eddie's homosexuality; that is, with his internalization of what this chapter has represented as patriarchal norms, and the rigid gender system they imply.

In Part III, E. appears in post-war London as Mrs Eadith Trist, 'bawd' of a brothel where the guests are 'exclusively male' (p. 307). The anxiety produced by this, his latest masquerade, provides the main theme of this section, which delineates Eadith's love for the middle-aged Lord Roderick Gravenor. The role played by class in E.'s eroticism overall in the novel is made apparent in his choice of Gravenor. If, as Alan Sinfield claims, 'effeminancy figured leisure-class uselessness [as well as] aspiring towards refinement, sensitivity and taste', then Eadith's life as a successful transvestite bawd complements Gravenor's life of 'shooting

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42. David M. Halperin, 'Sex before Sexuality: Pederasty, Politics, and Power in Classical Athens', in *Hidden From History*, p. 50.
43. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, cited in Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 4
44. Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 4.

birds, landing salmon, yachting, motoring, escaping from the toils of mothers who wished him to marry their daughters, and fluctuating more generally between watering places, the stock exchange, and the House of Lords' (p. 307).[45] The middle class charge of effeminate idleness and immorality would apply to both, and Gravenor's patronage protects Eadith's overdetermined and more dangerous immoral stance (as a bawd and homosexual transvestite) from exposure to the law.

Like the Wildean dandy whom Sinfield affirms as a figure of rhetorical indeterminancy, 'less a distinct entity than a device for unsettling conventional ideas' (p. 72), E.'s shifting erotic positions (he elegantly seduces his own whores in Part III) 'de-natures' his sexuality, figuring 'the artifices of gender and the errant play of desire.'[46] However, it is important to stress that the masquerade which signifies this subversion of gender and sexual codes can also involve, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a profound unease with the self-same gender and sexual indeterminancy. When masquerade is less a choice than a necessity, its disruptive connotations are laid open to dispute.

Believing love for Gravenor to be possible 'if she allowed herself to fall from the trapeze into the trampoline of love' (p. 316), Eadith still cannot 'wreck the structure of life by overstepping the limits of fantasy' (p. 322). This split in E.'s psyche between lived reality (what he appears as) and fantasy (what he would like to be) highlights the apprehension endemic to his masquerade. The split also makes it difficult to establish an exact point where transvestite masquerade desists from being a key ingredient in his erotic life and instead signifies behaviour responsive to the dictates of an oppressive culture. On the whole, his role as 'Mrs Angelos Vatatzes' was a device for passing as one half of a conventional heterosexual couple, the prospect of living openly as a homosexual couple in the beginning of the twentieth century being unthinkable.[47] Likewise in Part III, the disguise of 'Mrs Eadith Trist' allows the hero to

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45. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 52. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.
46. Carole-Anne Tyler, 'Boys Will Be Girls', p. 32.
47. John Coates argues that the construct 'Eudoxia Vatatzes' 'underlines what is suggested in other ways that the relationship is doomed to failure. Like his original in the thirteenth century Eddie is courting humiliation by attempting to cross cultural, racial and religious barriers, entering a world to which he is alien.' 'Byzantine References in *The Twyborn Affair*', p. 512.

pass as a heterosexual woman, even if he is a bawd. To adopt a masquerade even partially as a protective shield against homophobic reactions muddies the waters of subversive play, and demonstrates how the negative and positive aspects of masquerade are mutually implicated. Significantly Part III focuses on its negative implications more often than not, as when it declares: 'Yet whatever form, or whatever the illusion temporarily possessing her, the reality of love, which is the core of reality itself, had eluded her, and perhaps always would' (p. 336). Presented thus, the trope of masquerade in *The Twyborn Affair* is in accordance with that of the closet; it is that which is taken on in desperation as an expressive channel, and imposed from without as a means of prohibiting sexual expression on terms other than those of the hegemonic culture.

This complexity of masquerade, central to White's narrative, is blurred in some psychoanalytic appropriations of the concept. The complexity pivots on the barbed issue of the freedom to choose. In her influential account, Joan Riviere represents masquerade as an activity freely chosen by its (essentially) subversive agents:

> Womanliness could therefore be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it - much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen the goods. The reader may ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the "masquerade". My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (p. 38)

As this chapter has argued, E.'s masks of femininity and heterosexuality (which cover his homosexuality) can never be reducible to an 'expression' of that homosexuality in the way Riviere claims that gender is coterminous with masquerade. The drive toward self-protection and veiled self-expression enacted by E.'s masquerades is always maintained at the cost of rejecting open confrontation, and articulating a desire for equality of expression between sexualities and between genders. By the end of Part II E. has chosen mask over truth so often that he hardly knows who he is, claiming his 'whole life had been so preposterous, to think of it made him laugh' (p. 249). His attitude is congruent with conceptualizing his desire according to a heterosexual matrix (to adopt Judith Butler's phrase), one that requires the very confusion that E. feels as its basis for upholding the binarism of the genders and the pathology of

homosexuality.[48] For if the genders are no longer understood as expressive of a 'natural' heterosexuality, then the confusion E. experiences (at one stage he defines himself as '"a kind of mistake trying to correct itself"' (p. 143)) ceases to exist.

By the time Eadith is reunited with his mother, 'Her person, her life, her arts, constantly failed to convince her, though others seemed taken in' (p. 354). Thus, on being told of the death of his father, Eadith becomes Eddie 'skittering across the lawn ... in his ridiculous drag' (p. 391). The fact that Eadith becomes 'an institution, a cult, even with many who considered themselves far above anything like that' (p. 318), and caters to those who make and enforce laws designed to imprison her mentally and physically, is both ironic and evidence of the recuperable power of hegemonic culture. As Alan Sinfield points out, 'We [homosexuals] have to invoke dominant structures to oppose them, and our dissidence, therefore, can always be discovered reinscribing that which it aspires to critique.'[49]

By labelling Eadith an 'abbess' (p. 323) and a 'Mother Superior' (p. 326) in his role as bawd, *The Twyborn Affair* shares the irony intrinsic to Genet's philosophy of the holy sinner. Likewise irony suffuses the information that the razor the Judge presented to Eddie as an initiative tool of manhood is now used by Eadith to assist his mask of womanhood. Overall however, Part III presents Eadith's masquerade as more of a burden, aligning him with the whores who represent the 'menopausal hells of a sex pledged to honour and obey' (p. 328). But his position as voyeur, empowered by his 'omniscient eye' (the peep-holes he has had inserted in the walls (p. 329)) to spy on each and every client who enters his establishment, underscores the dominance of his masculine subject position. Eadith's dream, wherein his sex is discovered by a young boy he is trying to save from the war, illuminates his misogyny:

> She was holding his pink head against her breast, when he tore the nightdress she was wearing, and it fell around her, exposing a chest, flat and hairy, a dangling penis and testicles. To express his disgust, the pink-stubbed boy bit into one of the blind nipples, then reeled back, pointing, as did all the children, laughing vindictively as their adult counterparts might have, at the blood

48. Judith Butler asks 'to what extent do we read the desire for the father as evidence of a feminine disposition only because we begin, despite the postulation of primary bisexuality, with a heterosexual matrix of desire?'. *Gender Trouble*, p. 60.

49. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 203.

> flowing from the wound opened in the source of their deception, down over belly and thighs, gathering at the crotch in such quantities that it overflowed and hid the penis. The dripping and finally coagulating blood might have gushed from a torn womb. (p. 414)

The dream clearly represents the female genitals as a wound, as castrated, and this in turn bespeaks the male (homosexual) transvestite's anxiety at being recognized as having renounced the 'privileges of manhood'.[50] Once the impersonation is rendered unsuccessful the homophobia of the audience and the misogyny of the description take effect: merely to dress as a woman becomes tantamount to self-castration.

The final pages highlight E.'s melancholic homosexuality and the way it is a structural component of the dominant culture's gender and sexual systems. Having spent his life in search of legitimate father-substitutes, E.'s ego has finally internalized his (now dead) father's dictates (in Part II the Judge admitted to Eddie that he would '"die so much happier for seeing you dedicated to the Law"' (p. 160)) so completely that he no longer even hopes to consummate his love for older men, 'because how can one surrender to a father without a vague sense of disgust?' (p. 347). The 'pure contact with the Judge under the honeycomb bedspread of a circuit hotel' (p. 392) remains his inspiration and his downfall.[51]

The dénouement, in which Eddie/Eadith is killed by a bomb in wartime London, 'on a short but painful visit to his mother's womb' (p. 428), sustains what has essentially been a complex manipulation of the trope of transvestism, and the cultural and historical positioning of male

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50. Alan Sinfield remarks that 'There *is* a lot of male gay misogyny. The effeminate gay model inspires both admiration for women (or, rather, for an idea of them) and self-hating anxiety at losing the privileges of manhood' (p. 194; Sinfield's italics). The misogyny in *The Twyborn Affair* probably accounts for White's decision to remove it from the short list of the Booker Prize. In this context, Marr remarks: 'White removed [*The Twyborn Affair*] in order, he said, to give younger writers a chance - and he was worried the women among the judges might not favour him.' *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 591.

51. In a recent account of the novel, Michael Hurley argues: 'at [*The Twyborn Affair's*] centre is the character of E. and the question of sexual ambivalence. " Ambivalence" is deployed here to mean inability to maintain a single, fixed, sexual role and identity.' My interpretation contests any assumption of ambivalence with regard to E.'s sexuality and identity. See 'Homosexualities:fiction, reading and moral training', in *Feminine, Masculine and Representation*, p. 167.

homosexuality throughout the novel. As the chapter has shown, transvestism in *The Twyborn Affair* puts the uncanny repetition between masculine and feminine on display, but this deconstruction of the 'naturalness' of gender characteristics was always subordinate to the focus on the dominant culture's repression of the hero's homosexuality and its stigmatized position as 'feminine'. Thus, when Eadith decides to doff her disguise and go back to Australia with Eadie, this is represented as 'positive action': and Eddie's incomplete removal of his make-up 'disgusted [him]' (p. 428). The mode of Eddie's death testifies to the essentially ruinous life he has partly chosen and partly been forced to live: the fragmentation of his psyche and the homophobia directed at his sexual body become a blueprint for the configuration of his death:

> A detached hand was lying in a stream of blood nor'-nor'-west of Eddie Twyborn's left cheek. It was neither of the soldier's hands he began to realise, for these were arranged on the pavement, a dog's obedient paws had it not been for blunt fingers with nails in mourning, still attached to bristling wrists.
>
> It was his own hand he saw as he ebbed, incredibly, away from it.
>
> "Fetch me a bandaid, Ada," he croaked over his shoulder, while flowing onward, on to wherever the crimson current might carry him. (pp. 429-30)

Note how the direction of Eddie's severed hand is described in war vernacular, and how this tallys with the passivity of the soldier's corpse, and of Eddie's dying body. Images of severed hands appear frequently in the literature of the Great War (for example, in Remarque, Blunden and Barbusse), and in her discussion of William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), Kaja Silverman demonstrates how the film equates severed hands with symbolic castration.[52] The film's focus on Homer's metal hooks underscores its alliance of the male subject with insufficiency and passivity; as Silverman claims, 'Over and over again the film insists upon this equation, making the spectacle of Homer's hooks (and, even more, his stumps) something primal and traumatic, and stressing that to the civilian eye he is a "mutilated creature"' (p. 70). Eddie Twyborn's mutilation graphically translates the psychic 'castration' he struggled with throughout the narrative into physical terms by

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52. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, pp. 67-89. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically. Trudi Tate analyzes the gendering of soldier's dead bodies in the novels of Remarque, Blunden and Barbusse in her doctoral dissertation, *Modernist Fiction and the First World War*, pp. 11-66.

inscribing it on his body. Finally, the image of his mind flowing from his body can be read as a continuation of his mind-body split; also, it can signify a final release from this split.

Where Eddie's death is represented as an abrupt end, denying the hero another chance to find love, Eadie is given a final reprieve. Accepting her son for what he is by telling Eadith that she always wanted a daughter, *The Twyborn Affair's* final words describe Eadie sitting in her London hotel, as the sound of bombs and screams saturate the background:

> Eadie said I must not fail Eadith now that I have found her Eadith Eddie no matter which this fragment of my self which I lost is now returned where it belongs.
>
> Sitting in the garden drying our hair together amongst the bulbuls and drizzle of taps we shall experience harmony at last.
>
> She loved the birds. As she dried her hair and waited, a bulbul was perched on the rim of the stone bird-bath, dipping his beak. Ruffling his feathers, he cocked his head at her, shook his little velvet jester's cap, and raised his beak towards the sun. (pp. 431-2)[53]

The mood of tranquillity called forth here by the Persian nightingale echoes Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* where the speaker desires to 'Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget/What though amongst the leaves hast never known,/The weariness, the fever, and the fret'.[54] But where Keats's nightingale's 'plaintive anthem fades' till it is 'buried deep', White's bulbul remains.

The melancholic disposition of Eddie's life and its tragic and violent ending are almost superseded by the intrinsic beauty, harmony and confidence of this final scene. Fundamental to it is the novel's

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53. This delineation of the bulbul and Eadie's relationship with it recalls an anonymous rhyme:
'The sons of the prophet were brave men and bold,
And quite unaccustomed to fear,
But the bravest by far in the ranks of the Shah
Was Abdul the Bulbul Amir.'
Bloomsbury Dictionary of Quotations, ed. John Daintith et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 1987).

54. John Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Fourth Edition, Volume 2, pp. 823-25. This imaginary world also recalls Tennessee William's glass menagerie which Mark Lilly argues is the 'imagin[ary] world where homosexuality will not be problematic'. *Gay Men's Literature of the Twentieth Century*, p. 107.

presentation of Eddie and Eadie's reconciliation in terms of gender liminality: Eddie must become Eadie's daughter - Eadith - in order to relate to his mother as a *son*; and this in turn enables Eadie to accept Eddie unconditionally. *The Twyborn Affair* constructs this *renaissance* for Eadie and Eddie on the basis of two significant events: the death of the Judge, and the violent assault on traditional masculinity during World War II. The final pages graphically depict how the image of masculinity to which Eddie has aspired can be indiscriminately and literally death-dealing. In contrast, the pastoral image of Eadie and Eddie drying their hair in the garden is an affirmation of the conciliatory capacity of feminine subject positions. The novel's identification of Eadie with the bulbul figures her in terms of a celebration of colour, bravery and playfulness, qualities which were eclipsed by Eddie's and the Judge's resentment of her. Allocating her this strikingly positive and poetic position at the novel's close affirms the *The Twyborn Affair's* endorsement of her survival through defiance and compassion.

Focusing on the interconnections between writing and transvestism, the next chapter reads *Memoirs of Many in One* as a culmination of White's explorations of identity, sexuality and relations of power, with homosexual desire playing a pivotal role therein. White's wish to be on the front and back covers of the novel emphasizes his identification with the heroine whose memoirs he has been asked to edit.[55] Because it encourages comparisons with almost all his previous novels, *Memoirs of Many in One* invites interpretation as an allegorical text through which we can read the vicissitudes of White's own fictional career. An examination of the complex interaction between an author, 'her' work, and the politics of publication, *Memoirs of Many in One* provides a fitting conclusion to this analysis of the elaborate workings of homosexual desire in White's novels.

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55. White called Willian Yang to ask him to take photographs for the covers of *Memoirs*: '"She is me," said White, "so I thought I'd have a photo of me as her for the frontispiece and a photo of me as Patrick on the back flap"' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 626). In the end it did not work out as too many people were against the idea, one commenting that '"He'd be leaving himself wide open"' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 627).

Chapter 6

Memoirs of Many in One: *revelations of disguises past*

And, after all, what is a lie? 'Tis but
The truth in masquerade.
- *Don Juan*[1]

The themes which provided the original springboard and framework of this thesis' exploration of the status of homosexual desire in White's fiction - those of disguise, masquerade, and cross-dressing - define both the structure and content of White's final, and shortest novel, *Memoirs of Many in One* (1986).[2] What distinguishes *Memoirs* from the novels examined thus far is that, unlike them, it is wholly taken up with the venture of making the techniques of past disguises visible, and flaunting them before the reader. By baring its masquerading devices, *Memoirs* presents itself as both a metafictional text and, tantalizingly, a literary symbol for transvestism.

Memoirs is a significant text in the White *ouevre*. It is an exposition of the ironies, contradictions and tensions that structure the other novels, their basis in a linguistic system that pivots on equivocation and is, therefore, simultaneously oppressive and pleasureable. Much of the action takes place in the heroine's mind, recalling the concentrated focus on the creative psyche in the 'Jardin Exotique' section of *The Aunt's Story*, where Theodora Goodman constructed fantastical worlds to compensate for the emotional inadequacies of her everyday existence. By making 'Alexandra Xenophon Demirjian Gray' an author, White encourages us to interpret her staggering leaps of fancy as allegories of his own imaginative creations. In fact, White acknowledged that the creation of Alex gave him a literary freedom hitherto unexploited so fully: 'Alex ... is myself in my various roles and sexes. It gives me great scope' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 622). Further, as Alex composes her memoirs when she

1. Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto 11: 36-7, in *Lord Byron:The Complete Poetical Works*, 5 vols. ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-86).
2. *Memoirs of Many in One* (1986; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987). All references will be to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text by page number.

is senile, both she and the aptly titled *Memoirs of Many in One* challenge us to rethink the connections between literature and life, between realist narative form and 'truth'. A narrative constructed around a playful and elaborate intercourse between fact and fiction, *Memoirs of Many in One* fixes the spotlight on the conditions of literary production, and stages a dialogue between reader and text that calls to mind the spectacle of sartorial transvestism. Just as the cross-dressed woman or man highlights the naturalness of gender as a fallacy, so White as a cross-dressed author is actively encouraging theoretical speculation regarding the illusory effects of realist narrative form, the ideological subterfuge it puts in place by posing as a transparent means of comunication.

Interpreting *Memoirs* as a declaration of intent - an intent to expose past dissimulation - is clearly attributing a political motive to it. But White more or less disclosed this motive himself in a letter to David Tacey where he responds to Tacey's queries regarding an appropriate title for the book he was about to publish on White's fiction:

> Thank you for your letter. A Life Sentence doesn't seem too bad a title. A Death Sentence might be better. I've been in hospital twice in the last twelve months ...
> *Memoirs of Many in One* comes out on April 1, or that is what is planned. You who write books about me may find you have been deceived. You should wait.[3]

White's recommendation to Tacey to wait and read *Memoirs* before publishing a word is telling. It acts almost like a priviledged documentary moment when the cameras are invited into the dressing room for the very first time to see the performer donning the mask. And when *Memoirs* was published on April Fool's Day 1986, it seemed that even fate lent a hand to White's lifelong double act as a novelist, by both aiding and abeting his final novelistic rouse, and undermining it, alerting readers to the trick.

As is the case with all White's novels, the influence of modernist themes and structures on *Memoirs* is apparent. Alex, an old but vibrant woman suffering from senility, is a familiar modernist vehicle for unrestrained behaviour and writing. Her senility gives her a distinctive outlook on life, and produces a similar ironic fascination with animals and their natural secretions as that found in Samuel Beckett's *The End.*

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3. Patrick White to David Tacey (20.xi.85), in *Patrick White:Letters*; p. 606. The title Tacey choose for his book was *Patrick White: Fiction and the Unconscious.*

The linguistic puns she activates, such as that between Dog and God (p. 106), resemble those in Joyce's *Ulysses*; and her awareness of the past as a disease inflitrating the present suggests analogies with Eliot's *The Waste Land*. But the reaction of some critics demonstrates that, unlike *The Aunt's Story* or *Voss*, the content of *Memoirs* does not easily lend itself to the terms of canonical interpretations. In his review, David Tacey dismisses *Memoirs* by claiming: 'the ideology to which White makes his appeal is that of homosexuality and gayness. White can do virtually anything, write the most ordinary work, and somehow it is all justified under the wonderous banner of gayness.'[4] And Mark Williams reacts similarily in his account:

> In this novel only one human artifact is granted reality: excrement. The self is a construct, sets of clothes worn to hide nothingness, art is a system of disguise and evasion. Only shit is "real"....
>
> Perhaps all this confirms that homosexual subtext that has always been present in the novels.[5]

Recognizing the centrality of disguise to *Memoirs of Many in One*, and extrapolating from that to its deployment in all White's novels, Williams indirectly - if also carelessly and dismissively - pinpoints the role of the closet in White's work. Additionally, the explicit association both he and Tacey make between homosexuality and transvestism, between White's *literary* transvestite pose as Alexandra Gray and his sexuality, underlines how 'the hegemonic cultural imaginary is saying to itself: if there is a

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4. David Tacey cited in *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 606. Tacey's review appeared in the *Age*, 'Saturday Extra' 19 July 1986. It is reproduced in *Critical Essays on Patrick White*, pp. 60- 4 as 'The End of Genius'. In relation to critical response to *Memoirs of Many in One*, David Marr remarks that 'Critics mourned the passing of his talent or discovered a master writing at the height of his powers.' *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 610. For positive responses see Antonella Riem, 'Autobiography or Fiction? Patrick White's *Memoirs of Many in One*', *Westerly*, 36: 3 (1991): 95-101; Carolyn Bliss, 'Transpositions:Patrick White's Most Recent Fiction', *Westerly*, 3 (September 1989): 77-82; Peter Beatson, 'White and Gray: Image Patterns in Patrick White's *Memoirs of Many in One*', *Landfall 161*, 41: 1 (1987): 59-76; Hena Maes-Jelinek, 'Last Flight to Byzantium: *Memoirs of Many in One*', *Australian Literary Studies*, 15: 2 (1991): 173-83. Negative responses include Laurie Clancy, 'Fantasies and Old Scores', *Overland*, 104 (September 1986): 72; David Tacey, *Patrick White:Fiction and the Unconscoius*, pp. 200-09, and A. S. Byatt's review, 'The disreputable other half', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 (April 1986): 357.
5. Mark Williams, *Patrick White*, pp. 159 -60.

difference (between gay and straight), we want to be able to *see* it, and if we see a difference (a man in women's clothes), we want to be able to *interpret* it.'[6] Faced with the confusions of *Memoirs*, the one certainty Williams can hang on to is White's homosexuality. It is ironic that when criticism finally and unequivocally acknowledged the centrality of homosexual desire to White's fiction, it was in a manner that he had foreseen all along.

That an episode of authorial cross-dressing prompted such reactions attests to the fragility and permeablility of the gender and sexual orders. It also testifies to the fear such liminality occasions. This accounts for the move, evident in Williams and Tacey, to conflate gay sexualities with transvestism, despite evidence that many heterosexuals cross-dress and many gays do not. Automatically interpreting transvestism as evidence of gay sexuality helps momentarily to categorize neatly the areas of sexuality and gender. In the end, the real significance of such an event of fictional cross-dressing lies in the way it acts as a catalyst for the revelation, in Severo Sarduy's words, 'of the coexistence, in a single body, of masculine and feminine signifiers: the tension, the repulsion, the antagonism which is created between them.'[7]

White proclaimed his awareness of the subversive effects afforded by literary transvestism when he refused to allow the authorship of *Memoirs* to be attributed to him rather than to his creation, 'Alexandra Xenophon Demirjian Gray'.[8] The deconstruction of literary and socio-cultural convention has special significance for a homosexual writer whose gradual, and not always explicit, foregrounding of homosexual characters and themes reflects the constraints under which he worked. Discussing White's posture as editor of *Memoirs*, Axel Clarke comments that, in retrospect, White has been an 'editor' 'throughout his career as a writer of fiction.'[9] Always the invisible editor of 'that homosexual subtext', White is here the visible one in a narrative that burlesques

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6. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 130. Italics in the original.
7. Severo Sarduy, 'Writing/Transvestism', *Review*, 9 (Fall 1973), p. 33.
8. David Marr relates how both Jonathan Cape and Viking 'wanted to credit White as the author on the cover of *Memoirs*. They tried hard to persuade him. He said he did not care if being called editor cut sales. Would he allow inverted commas on the jacket? No.' Viking included the 'Nobelist Patrick White' on their blurb until White forced them to remove it. *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 628.
9. Axel Clarke, 'A Whiter Shade of Gray', *Scripsi*, 4: 2 (1986), p. 2.

editorial supervision of books.

The pivotal symbolic role transvestism occupies in *Memoirs* is made apparent from the very first page. The structure of the sentence in which White as editor introduces Alex, informing us that 'Alex acquired names as other women encrust themselves with jewels and bower-birds collect fragments of coloured glass' (p. 9), fabricates an aura of voluptuous decadence.[10] Its rhythm simulates the indulgence of its images; and the focus on glittering, precious stones and glass provokes a strong visual element, enabling Alex's acquisition of names to be exhibited to the reader's mind as a image of delightful ornateness. This sort of linguistic embellishment produces a dynamism that mirrors that of Alex herself who proudly asserts, 'I've always become anything I intended to' (p. 49). It could also be argued that such 'dresses of thought' are stereotypically feminine, so that in clothing his prose thus, White provokes a critical awareness in his readers of the sexual politics of language and of gender.[11]

Overall, the novel contains several passages in which the transformative power of cosmetics and clothing are used to mirror acts of psychic masquerade. For instance, Alex's passion for make-up is inextricable from the identities she adopts; manipulating what White saw as the Australian tendency 'to confuse reality with surfaces', Alex reinvents herself before coming downstairs to meet Patrick:[12]

> I must make the most of my beauty. I love the smell of make-up. People have often told me I am an actress by instinct, not realising I am that by profession. Sometimes I surprise strangers, even relatives, by performing my monologues *Dolly Formosa and the Happy Few*. Patrick is less surprised than others because he too is a performer. (p. 25)

The distinction between being an actress by instinct and one by profession

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10. This type of extravagant visual emphasis is quite camp, and can be related to the costumes displayed in Gay Mardi Gras. It also evokes the masquerade in eighteenth-century England. On the latter see Terry Castle, 'The culture of travesty: sexuality and masquerade in eighteenth-century England', in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 156-80.
11. The phrase is Susan J. Wolfson's from her article '"Their She Condition":Cross-Dressing And The Politics Of Gender In *Don Juan*', *English Literary History*, 54 (1987), p. 597.
12. Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass*, p.128.

is significant, as only one implies a necessity for survival. Alex, like Patrick, has clearly had to train herself in the art of performance. Believing herself to be surrounded by 'Boobies', Alex hopes her disguise will keep her safe.

The fragility of this hope is reflected in the first words of Alex's memoirs which inscribe a paranoia that should not be dismissed as the ravings of a senile woman:

> I don't know where to begin what may turn out to be a monstrous mistake - start at the beginning? Plunge in today? Who knows when the end will come - and whether in a flash, or a long gnawing. In any case THEY will be watching, from inside the house, from the garden, the Park, or most disturbingly, from above. (p. 17; White's emphasis)

The thought that writing her memoirs may be a monstrous mistake echoes the fears behind those of White's writings in which homosexuality, both fictional and autobiographical, is explicitly figured. The dystopian effect conjured up by Alex's feeling that she is surrounded, inside, outside and from above, has an Orwellian or Panoptican quality to it, and this is reinforced elsewhere by her references to 'Boobies', a word which refers to stupid people, but which is also a slang term for the police.[13] It is when Alex is like this that she most resembles Waldo Brown. Like him, Alex worries about her manuscript 'locked in its case, and in one of its many hiding places. Hilda might organise a search, call in Patrick, even Hal and his friend the priest the Jewish convert to Catholicism' (p. 40). As with Waldo, the closet, whether metaphorical or literal, is never the shroud it purports to be. So Alex protects herself 'by cultivating this jungle of words. None of the Boobies will investigate me if I plait the branches densely enough' (p. 51).

Intrinsic to this information about the methods Alex employs in her memoirs is a reference to White's own literary techniques. Alex's memoirs thus act as an allegory through which we can read the linguistic masks of White's previous fiction. This allegorical dimension lends enormous weight to *Memoirs*, making it as important as *Flaws in the Glass* in demonstrating the techniques of a homosexual writer upon

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13. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines Booby as a silly or stupid fellow: a sea-bird, of the gannet tribe, remarkable for its apparent stupidity in allowing itself to be knocked down with a stick. 'Booby Hatch' is slang for a police station.

whom the closet had a uniquely creative influence.

The intimacy of the memoir genre bespeaks its sexual and revelatory premise, and it is mainly because of such risqué overtones that Alex insists on the distinction between the terms memoirs and archives: '"Archives are only half the truth. That's why I'm writing my memoirs. Archives have no soul"'(p. 21).[14] The drama around which *Memoirs* revolves is between Alex's determination to tell the truth, and her fear of the consquences. She sees the world to which she plans to entrust the intimacies of her life as profoundly conservative, and this world is mainly represented by her rationalist, apparently asexual, daughter Hilda. In contrast to Alex, Hilda is compiling the archives with a view to erasing 'dirty words'. Ironically, the craft of linguistic policing - albeit with different ends in view - is shared by conservative and radical alike, highlighting the elasticity of the signifying system and enabling the subversion of conformism from the inside. For example, *Memoirs* engages in a critique of the ideological premises upon which Hilda's notions of decency are based, while presenting them from Hilda's own point of view. Patrick is not allowed to use the word 'darling' as Alex '"has made it dirty"' (p. 63). 'Soul' is also a 'dirty word' (p. 119) because it offends Hilda's rationalist sensibility. At one stage Alex tells Hilda about the snipe shit on buttered toast which Magda and her Diacono aunt loved:

> "I never heard about the aunt." ...
> "You must have been told. But none of the Grays had memories."
> "Not for what is disgusting. I don't remember the snipe. And I can't bear 'words'."
> "Shit is real, isn't it? You've always been on about what is real...." (p. 21)

In her drive to excise dirty words, Hilda obviously represents the practices of censorship. But Alex's insistence on the materiality of things and people underlines how, despite the zeal of the censor, certain realities are not so easily erased.

One such 'reality' is Hilary's, Alex's husband, homosexuality. In writing her memoirs, Alex sees it as a duty to represent the past as truthfully as possible, despite the pain and humiliation it causes her. Her

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14. A familiar example of the intimacy between the memoir form, homosexuality and the masquerade is John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749).

senility both eases and promotes this exercise which is largely focused on her disastrous marriage to Hilary, and the consequences it provoked. In his role as editor, White corroborates Alex's opinion of her late husband's sexuality. Describing their childhood together, White's introduction to Hilary is intensely erotic, evoking the intimate effect of a soft-focus camera: 'He had moist black eyelids and curving lashes. At school it got round that he was delicate and allowances must be made for this. He was given milk at break, and was allowed to sit in the sun reading books of his own choosing (Henry James and Proust) from under an eyeshade the colour of milk chocolate' (p. 11). Despite being homosexual, Hilary marries Alex during the upheaval of war. The best man at their wedding, White perceived Alex as 'a vision of camellia flesh asking to be bruised' (p. 13). Looking back over their marriage in the knowledge of Hilary's sexual unsuitability, Alex interprets it as a farce in which she played a tragic part, viewing Hilary as one of her 'major disasters' (p. 26). Appraising her image in the mirror, she notices 'the grains of powder trembling on the hairs of the moustache', and feels 'the more-than-down on my forearms, details of the disguise Hilary had forced on me as part of a pre-meditated revenge' (p. 26). It would appear that Alex's moustache is a fetish for Hilary, the object which is metonymically associated with male genitalia. The moustache enables Hilary temporarily to disavow Alex's 'lack' and view her as a masculine substitute. Significantly, Hilary is 'smooth and silky', and therefore minus the fetish for the penis which would, like Waldo's moustache, facilitate a disavowal of homosexuality as 'castration' or 'lack', a position inflicted upon him by a homophobic heterosexual order. In choosing Alex, Hilary has for a while psychically and erotically negotiated his position in the heterosexual symbolic. Unfortunately, Alex intuits the deception and, like Eddie Twyborn, Hilary is unable to sustain it anyway. Recalling the physical intimacy between Patrick and her husband, Alex is belatedly aware of the extent of the psychic and social roles people play in order to blend in:

> Hilary was Patrick's friend, they cut up frogs together in the bath, they ...
> He was our best MAN. (p. 23)

The ellipsis followed by the emphasis on MAN are the linguistic symptoms of the confusion of genders and sexualities between these three characters. The ellipsis, especially as it has already been filled in by the

editor, has the effect of giving enormous potency to the unspeakable homoerotic past of the two men. The juxtaposition of homosexual desire and a formal heterosexual ceremony confounds the pure semantic difference that supposedly exists between these two sexual positions. And the exaggerated but effectively impotent stress on MAN further attests to the instability of its signification, parodying its 'normal', exclusive relation to the heterosexual symbolic.

The suggestion that Hilary choose Alex because, in addition to being a legitimate sexual partner, she represented the closest Hilary could get to an erotic masculine image, is given credence by Alex's portrayal of their sex life as as a painful performance (p. 28). Now with the benefit of hindsight, Alex can contemplate how 'misguided' both she and Hilary were:

> In the early days of our marriage he liked to refer to desire as love. I did too, for that matter. We did not believe we were being deceitful. We weren't either. Were we? We couldn't have been. The children were living proof of our bona fides. We were sincere. We believed in our vocation as parents. (p. 74)

Such was the pressure to conform that at the time, Hilary and Alex were not altogether conscious of the imposture they were silently and unobtrusively forced to adopt. Alex's description underscores how cultural impositions can be taken on by people as 'natural' and 'inevitable'. But Hilary's suicide destroys any value supposed to inhere in a pretence of heterosexual love. As a prelude to the suicide Alex shoots Hilary's dog, Danny, who was '"consolation for [his] marriage"'. Having left Alex and his family, Hilary returns only to hang himself '"in the coal bunker where his dog had lived out the last of his life"' (p. 32). Clearly, disguise can either be predominantly liberating or constraining, rebellious or conformist, depending on the underlying motive. In Max Beerbohm's *The Happy Hypocrite*, for example, disguise is presented as liberatory when Lord George Hell's mask becomes his face: 'As days went by, he grew reconciled to his mask. No longer did he feel it jarring on his face. It seemed to become an integral part of him.'[15] Beerbohm's narrative eventually represents George's complete merging with his mask: 'but lo! his face was even as his mask had been.' Hilary's disguise is altogether

15. Max Beerbohm cited in John Felstiner, *The Lies of Art:Max Beerbohm's Parody and Caricature* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1973), p. 50.

different; it does not represent freedom, but imprisonment - a painful, and ultimately self-sacrificing, capitulation to conformity. His invisiblity in the narrative (he only appears in others' accounts of him) symbolizes his sexually closeted role. Like Waldo, Hilary teaches by negative example.

Given this, it is to be expected that *Memoirs*' presentation of heterosexual acts will be devastatingly negative. Images of the holocaust are invoked to denote the crime of bringing children into the world merely to fulfill one's role in a dominant regime: Alex sees Hilda as one of her 'burnt offerings (p. 53), and whilst staying with the Dobbins, she interprets Mollie's burning bread as 'the babies my surrogate mother and I had prepared for their holocaust' (p. 51). Whether or not we view the metaphor as appropriate, through it *Memoirs* points towards an element of sacrifice that is wholly destructive and that inheres in socially approved sexual roles. Placed alongside Alex's religious fantasies, the metaphor of the holocaust (the biblical meaning is a sacrifice divinely inspired) implicates religion in the psychic and social consequences of 'our vocation as parents.'[16]

As I have noted, Alex's battles with Hilda are incisive critiques of the restrictive narratives imposed on the individual by the collective. Hilda's intellectual insularity is thus a foil to Alex's colourful imagination: as Alex herself proudly asserts, 'the great flights my temperament requires and my state of mind allows are something [Hilda] will never imagine' (p. 65). Having discovered letters in a suitcase which she wants to include in the archives, Hilda interrogates Alex on their contents, only to dismiss her interpretation of them. The narrative then presents Hilda self-assuredly taking care of the matter:

> "Don't upset yourself, Mother. You should let others interpret the past - objectively. That's why I've made a point of taking charge of any papers which concern the family."
>
> She snaps the hasps on the bulging Globeite. And that, Hilda believes, is that. (p. 84)

The image of the bulging Globeite is resonant. The papers almost forcing themselves out of the containter intimate that Alex's attempts to unlock

16. On the controversy surrounding Sylvia Plath's use of the holocaust in her poem *Daddy*, see Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1992), pp. 205 -17.

locked lives will be successful in the end. Interpretation is endless, no matter what Hilda may think. A symbol for what Perry Meisel has termed 'semantic spillage ... [the] random effect of the overdetermined structure of language', the 'bulging Globeite' cannot contain the letters in the way Hilda wants.[17] And even though Hilda's quest to contain continues to the end, the person to whom she entrusts this exercise in censorship is Patrick. Her assumption that placing Patrick in charge of Alex's papers after her death is the best move as, '"You are so discreet"' (p. 180) is pefectly ironic, as for Patrick, Alex represents the opportunity to unveil the secrets of the past. Ignorant of the fact that Patrick's discretion is a performance, Hilda puts him in a position to beat the censors at their own game, and to have the last laugh.

The way in which *Memoirs* frequently deflates Hilda's pomposity is very similar to *The Solid Mandala's* disparagement of Mrs Dun. On one occasion, Hilda is discussing her brother Hal, whom the text represents as 'so subtly camouflaged' (p. 53) that Hilda can avoid having to acknowledge his homosexuality. Nonetheless, it is she who unwittingly offers the quick-witted Alex an opportunity to bring Hal's private life out into the open:

> "Isn't Hal coming over, darling?"
> Hilda: "No."
> "I knew he wouldn't. It's possibly better for all of us."
> Hilda only answers obliquely. "Hal has his own affairs."
> "I realised that long ago. The priest - the New York Jewish convert to Catholicism - such a handsome man - it was easy enough to understand - and difficult not to resent Hal's good taste and fortune. In fact, it's more or less the reason I haven't wanted your brother around."
> Hilda contains her feelings. (p. 20)

With this use of *double entendre*, White's deployment of language in *Memoirs* imbibes homosexual desire. Punning has, of course, a long camp tradition, as in the use of 'she' or 'her' to refer to camp gay men. Garry Wotherspoon views this as 'a friendly spoof of the square world's perspectives, turning things a bit topsy-turvy.'[18] But when, in 1972, a gay candidate stood against the Australian Prime Minister, Billy MacMahon, with the slogan 'I've got my eye on Billy's seat', camp dialogue entered

17. Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern*, p. 34.
18. Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p. 94.

Sydney politics and put homosexual law reform on the political agenda.[19] In addition, the exploitation of doubled meaning or language was, and still is, a type of masquerade in which one generally accepted, 'respectable' meaning co-exists with its subversive other (for example, Joe Orton's *Prick Up Your Ears*). As with Freud's concept of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, it is not possible to separate the two meanings for they are part of an exercise in violation.[20]

While such punning indicates that for White, language is not a transparent medium, there is no natural relation between signifier and signified, Alex's subterfuge still presumes a more accurate or truthful message hidden behind the dense branches symbolizing the complexity of language. Again, analogies between acts of cross-dressing and writing which straddle the divide between disclosure and concealment suggest themselves here. By way of its dual action of miming and displacing, transvestism challenges the uncritical assumption of the naturalness of gender and sexuality, subtly indicating the existence of a male body beneath women's clothes, or a female body beneath men's.[21] Alex's writing, which combines a 'passing' attempt at respectability with an awareness that the mime is imperfect, enacts a similar break on a linguistic level. If clothes could be words, Alex's clothing of her prose is imperfect, proclaiming 'the problematic distance disguise sets up between outward sign and inner reality, appearance and essence.'[22] In relation to Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Terry Castle states that 'The narrator's famous comparison of life and stage ... reminds us of ... the fluidity, the artificiality, of so much of what passes for immutable human nature' (p. 618). Alex's and the editor's inversions of theatre and life are likewise clear signals of the folly inherent in the assumption that appearences - linguistic and sartorial - are all.

However, because *Memoirs* does 'accept a substantial real world

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19. This slogan was David Widdup's. See, Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, p. 206.
20. A concentrated example of this type of linguistic sexual play is Gertrude Stein's *Miss Furr and Miss Skeen*.
21. Not all transvestite acts displace the mime and thereby question the operations of the gender system. See Judith Butler, 'The Body You Want'. Also, Peter Ackroyd, *Dressing Up. Transvestism and Drag:The History of an Obsession* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979).
22. Terry Castle, 'Matters Not Fit To Be Mentioned:Fielding's *The Female Husband*', *ELH*, 49 (1982), p. 613. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.

whose significance is not entirely composed of relationships within language', its lingustic play does not extend to the type found in Joyce's *Ulysses*.[23] Statements such as '[Hilda] knows me, not the essential part, but she knows - the worst. Too much truth exhausts' (p. 24) illustrates that *Memoirs* employs parody to challenge and undermine past texts or systems of thought, rather than achieving this wholly at the level of the linguistic sign.

Alex's quest 'to take culture to the outback' where she will perform '"some of Shakespeare's more interesting characters - both female and male"' (p. 120) is a good example of White's humourous stance regarding traditions of interpretation. As her naked body propels itself across the stage in Ochtermochty in a performance of *Dolly Formosa and the Happy Few*, Alex overhears a member of the audience comment: '"... it's a shame - the Government ought to protect decent people from such indecent rot!" From another quarter she is assaulted by: "Why don't they send us something like *How To Succeed in Business*?"' (p. 137). On a moderately serious level, these reactions highlight how, instead of engaging with the performance offered, audiences look through it, finding only that which fails to support their preexisting ideas. On a humourous level, the responses are possibly a comment on the 'avant garde' in Australian drama. But the real key to these episodes is the way Alex's exploits in her 'Theatrical Tour of Outback Australia' elicit responses that stress the inversion effect of transvestism. Writing to Patrick of her tour, Alex describes the outrage her inversion produces in its presentation of gender as a synthetic acquisition:

> Sometimes creatures, always at the back of the hall, shout rudery such as, "If the guy's supposed to be fat and short of breath 'e shouldn't look skinny as an old ewe on agistment," or "Why's the lady carryin' the straw dolly got whiskers tied on under 'er chin?" In such cases the mayor, or at least the alderman, has to go round and silence them, or if that doesn't work, ask them to leave. Sometimes that doesn't work either. At Peewee Plains there were eggs and tomatoes: quite a scandal. (p. 128)[24]

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23. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction:The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 53. Distinguishing *Ulysses* from *The Waste Land* in terms of linguistic play, Perry Meisel claims that Eliot 'represses the temporal flux of the various meanings that flow through his poem', while Joyce rejoices in the 'free play of language' mocking the search 'for meaning in any fixed sense.'*The Myth of the Modern*, p. 143.
24. In *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago, 1982), Angela Carter expertly unveils the

The scandal of Alex's performances here echoes all those sexual scandals found in the novels already examined. Her scandal is, of course, also mirrored in the 'performance' of the novel itself, in the way it deploys the complementary exchange between the theme of transvestism and a transvestite structure to emphasize the historical and cultural contingency of representations of homosexual desire in the preceding novels. This ironic stance vis-à-vis realist narrative form is also reminiscent of the sentiments behind Virginia Woolf's parody of the realist novel in *A Room of One's Own* where, having informed the reader that it was October she continues thus: 'I dare not forfeit your respect and imperil the fair name of fiction by changing the season and describing lilacs hanging over garden walls, crocuses, tulips and other flowers of spring. Fiction must stick to facts, and the truer the facts the better the fiction - so we are told.'[25] The way in which *Memoirs* contextualizes Alex's humiliation in Ochtermochty sticks to the facts in a way that is suitably tongue-in-cheek: she retires as 'the draught from the open door hits me in the pubics' (p. 137).

Unlike the deployment of Arthur Brown's or Theodora Goodman's madness, Alex's senile acting fantasies furnish White with the imaginative freedom to explore the agency involved in the construction of self. In a letter to Jean Lambert regarding a suitable French title for *Memoirs*, White asks 'would it be possible to suggest a company of actors which make up the central character?'[26] The character of Alex thus continues White's exploration of the dandy's 'critical, oblique relation ... to society', and stresses how individuals can intervene in dominant systems - such as that of realist narrative form - by exploiting

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device of self-invention invoked by Leilah, the strip-tease artiste: 'Her beauty was an accession. She arrived at it by a conscious effort. She became absorbed in the contemplation of the figure in the mirror but she did not seem to me to apprehend the person in the mirror as, in any degree, herself. The reflected Leilah had a concrete form and, although this form was perfectly tangible, we knew, all three of us in the room, it was another Leilah. Leilah invoked this formal other with a gravity and ritual that recalled witchcraft; she brought into being a Leilah who lived only in the not-world of the mirror and then became her own reflection.' (p. 28)

25. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1987), p. 17
26. Patrick White to Jean Lambert (14.v.87), in *Patrick White:Letters*, p. 613.

them in an oppositional fashion.[27] The way Alex interprets her life as a play (p. 34) also encourages a comparison with Judith Bulter's concept of gender performativity, that is, 'the idea that gender is an impersonation, that becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits'.[28] The agency Alex's senile performances bestow on her highlights this fact, and also permits her a temporary reprieve from life's oppressions. The centrality of Alex's senility to *Memoirs* is further emphasized when the obtuse Hilda chooses Patrick White as the substitute for the psychiatrist Falkenberg, thus ensuring that Alex, unlike Theodora and Arthur, will not be silenced in the end.

In assuming the persona of a senile woman, White is utilizing a familiar figure in the literary history of subversion, one whose disruptive connotations centre on the assumed physical and mental irrationality of the female form. In her analysis of transvestism in Byron's *Don Juan*, Susan Wolfson claims that literary and festive male transvestism was especially subversive of societal hierarchies as 'women were deemed susceptible to irrational behaviour and so given some legal licence for misbehaviour'.[29] Consequently, Wolfson argues, 'men resorted to transvestite cover, hiding behind the female dress when they wanted to challenge authority or engage in outright rebellion' (p. 608). As White is making his literary cross-dressing obvious, his rebellion is arguably more provocative in the context of Australian heterosexual and gay macho culture[30] Adopting the viewpoint not only of a woman but a senile woman, White challenges the gender system and concepts of what is normal and abnormal. In this context it is worth bearing in mind the defining role 'effeminacy' played in the construction of homosexuality as 'abnormal'.[31]

The subversive powers of masquerade are reinforced on a

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27. John Felstiner, *The Lies of Art:Max Beerbohm's Parody and Caricature*, p. 20.
28. Judith Butler, 'The Body You Want', p. 85.
29. Susan J. Wolfson, '"Their She Condition":Cross-Dressing And The Politics Of Gender In *Don Juan*', p. 608. Subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically.
30. As Garry Wotherspoon notes, images of masculinity in Australian society such as 'the mustachioed macho man' have emerged from its gay subculture. *City of the Plain*, p. 218.
31. See, for example, Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 163. For the Australian viewpoint see Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, pp. 18, 26, 102-3, 169, 181-2. This point was also discussed in relation to *The Solid Mandala* in chapter four.

linguistic level by way of the non-gender specificity of Hilary's and Alex's names which reflect the confusion of sexualities and identities in *Memoirs*. The dizzying sexual trapeze acts of the characters includes Hilary masturbating in bed with Patrick as a child (p. 11) and, as we have seen, Patrick as best man at their wedding. Additionally, Alex tells her daughter Hilda that she '"would have been better as a father, and often was"' (p. 20); Patrick is presented as the creator of the 'finished' Hal, Alex and Hilary's son, who is gay (p. 53); and Patrick, to his own incredulity, ends up living with Hilda at the close of the novel. Furthermore, the choice of the mask, 'the veritable icon of transgressive desire', on the cover of the 1987 Penguin edition announces the crucial role of disguise and homosexual desire to *Memoirs* and, given its allegorical character, to all White's fiction.[32]

Alex's misogyny and vitriolic social commentary carry echoes of White's own past quarrels and social debates.[33] This aspect of *Memoirs* tends to detract from its more interesting themes, making Alex a mere vehicle for White's pet hates, which include his loathing of ostentatious materialism (Lady Miriam Surplus of Comebychance Hall), popular religion in the guise of the Popemobile, the philistinism of 'average Australians' and newspaper critics (K. V. H. of the S. M. H.), the parasitical intrusion of students and academics, and so on. While the representation of some of these attacks move beyond the personal (for example, Alex's Outback Tour), what they all illuminate is how *Memoirs of Many in One* is a type of fictional swan song for White, a mapping out of the personal fears and social and literary restrictions which circumscribed his writing, and largely shaped the terms on which it was received by the reading public. The ostentatious frames and frame-breaks, which enact a critical and parodic dialogue with each other, expand on the metafictional direction of *The Solid Mandala*, positioning *Memoirs* as a fictional text created 'to make a statement about the creation of that fiction.'[34] The editor's introduction, which ends with an admission that,

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32. Terry Castle, 'The culture of travesty: sexuality and masquerade in eighteenth-century England', p. 161.
33. David Marr relates how 'Disguised as Alex Gray, White took revenge *inter alia* on Harry Miller, Harry Kippax, and the vulgar Mary Fairfax, stepmother of James, who appears as Lady Miriam Surplus of Comebychance Hall.' *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 623.
34. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 6.

'some of the dramatis personae of this Levantine script could be the offspring of my own psyche' (p. 16), immediately implicates the so-called factual editoral process in the fictional exercise. The use of footnotes at the end of each section further highlights White's send-up of editorial practices; and when he interrupts the memoirs to insert his own version of Alex's and Hilda's stories, he pointedly calls it 'Editor's Intrusion'.

Crucially, instead of reflecting 'objectively' on Alex's memoirs, the 'Editor's Intrusion' gets drawn into them, becoming a part of their world: 'My work! Shoving it into a drawer of my desk, I wondered whether it could be of any account. Insistent characters like Hilda, Alex, Hilary, Magda make you suspect their lives count for more than the flesh and blood of your own creating' (p. 61). Such details reiterate the complex relationship inscribed in White's novels between the creative process and the forces of literary production. This point is encapsulated when Alex' says that she 'hadn't found the frame which fitted me' (p. 49), an admission which emphasizes the restraints imposed by all frames, literary or otherwise: but the wider point is that no one frame can fit anyone, a fact the narrative manifests through Hilary's suicide.

In the Epilogue, White presents Alex as a part of his creative life, her 'saints' and 'demons' an 'extension of my own creations' (p. 185). This point is literalized when White's 'Editor's Remarks' (pp. 141-5) fade into the continuation of Alex's memoirs, thus producing an obvious moment of literary transvestism. It is significant, therefore, that Alex writes herself into existence. Wanting to 'nip upstairs first and read all I have written about Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray, past, present, and future. To confirm that I am I. I' (p. 89), Alex perceives the real world in terms of narrative, the telling of stories - or more precisely, alternative stories. Patricia Waugh argues that in 'showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly "written"'; but importantly, *Memoirs* also illustrates how reality can be re-written, firstly by including the excluded, and then transforming the terms on which inclusion is traditionally permitted.[35] The presence of White himself in the narrative contributes greatly to this process.

Alex's desire to put an end to the containment of meaning makes

35. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 18.

her a particularly radical muse for White: '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' (p. 192). Given this admission, it is appropriate that *Memoirs* rejoices in the same technique of the subversive display characteristic of sartorial transvestism itself, which deceives and lifts the veil of deception at one and the same time. Finally knowing all, being all, Alex is 'afraid of what I have let loose, of what I have created' (p. 166). And yet she knows that '"Words are what matter. Even when they don't communicate. That's why I must continue writing. Somebody may understand in time"' (p. 86). Thus, in his final novel White unites with his heroine in a quest to free expression from the shackles of the censors: Alex's memoirs are both her's and White's attempt stop the subterfuge (p. 57), to make 'her' writing be 'of account'.

The humorously shocking cohabitation of Patrick and Hilda at the end of *Memoirs* is again symbolic of the play of transvestism; a text constructed as an instructive joke, a parody designed to expose the constructed grounds of conventionalism or normality. Hence, Patrick's and Hilda's image of heterosexual cohabitation is not so perfect that it will pass as the 'real thing'. Additionally, in terms of White's own construction of narratives, the Patrick and Hilda duo is a pay-off to Alex, a fitting end to her memoirs. If she is the representative of the paradoxes, the complexities, the lies of White 'endless scribblings' (p. 192), he now takes on the role destined for him in Alex's narrative - as the '"something"' Hilda can look after.

Because it contains ingredients of almost all of White's other fiction, *Memoirs of Many in One* emphasizes the pivotal role homosexual desire plays in his writing. The cross-dressing of *The Aunt's Story*, the shady homosexual character of *The Living and the Dead*, the domineering, dying mother of *The Eye in the Storm*, the processes of reinvention in *The Twyborn Affair*, and much more, find a place in *Memoirs of Many in One*. An overt literary display, it enacts the same provocative challenge to the interpretative process as the sartorial spectacle of transvestism itself. As we have seen, the novel contains all the ingredients of cross-dressing necessary to make it an analogue to transvestism: parody, exaggeration, mimicry, theatrics, disruption, and (though not a definitive component of male transvestism), misogyny.

Discussing Quentin Crisp's unabashed sartorial revelation of his sexuality, Marjorie Garber asserts that 'His self-presentation is deliberately hyperbolic, parodic - and, in being so, simultaneously confrontational and self-protective. What is crucial to him is that he should be read, visually and sartorially, as who and what he is - that he should be unmistakable, should avoid becoming the cause of mistakes in others.'[36] With his act of literary transvestism White clearly intended something similar: and when he wrote to David Tacey recommending that he wait and read *Memoirs* before publishing his book White, like Crisp, was attempting to avoid becoming the cause of a mistake in another critical evaluation. In Alex's words, '"Somebody may understand in time."'

36. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 140.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

For White, all sexual desire has an intrinsic tendency to overstep the limits imposed upon it by social regulation, and this represents the most radical element of his fiction. It is inevitable, therefore, that the binarisms of masculinity and femininity, and the designation of a person's sexual identity solely by reference to sexual object choice, will always fall short of giving expression to the manifold possibilities of sexual desire. By and large, the novels emphasize the oppositional force of the sexual body and its disruption of norms, and this gives rise to their dramatic endings. For instance, Waldo Brown's death is a ghastly symbol of his life, immured in hatred and unable to attain a critical distance from the denigratory stereotypes around him, yet powerless to deny his sexuality. In a similar manner, Theodora Goodman's sexual desire surpasses attempts to contain it, except perhaps the last one at the novel's close. But even there White chose to emphasize a symbol of freedom in the last words of the narrative, the 'doubtful rose' on Theodora's hat, which 'trembled and glittered, leading a life of its own' (p. 287). Eddie Twyborn continued in his quest for homosexual love, despite his acute awareness of the prohibitions against it. While homophobia is clearly present in all the novels discussed here, whether as a structuring principle (*The Twyborn Affair*, *The Solid Mandala*), or as the underlying theme (*The Aunt's Story*, *Voss*), it is never allowed to obliterate the potentially positive force of homosexual desire.

The movement in the novels from equivocation to a direct treatment of homosexuality reflects White's involvement in wider cultural and political attitudes to sexuality. But even in *The Aunt's Story* the deconstructive opposition to conventional narrative form and to traditional concepts of sexuality was apparent. There, the secret sexual body was offered as a blueprint for a map of reading, unsettling the modernist structure and creating a space for the homoerotic content of the narrative to emerge. *Voss* took this a step further by identifying masculine homoerotic relations as a privileged site for challenging cultural dictates. In critiquing the attempts of the Empire's

representatives to impose their definitions on an emerging country, *Voss* addresses the far-reaching consequences of colonial encroachment. Additionally, the strict demarcation of the genders encouraged by ideologies of Empire (that is, hierarchical notions of dominance, appropriation, civilization, and superiority) were effectively overthrown by White's delineation of the character of Judd, the 'union of strength and delicacy' who survived with dignity.

An important factor in White's critique of homophobia is his representation of the nuclear family. As highlighted in *The Twyborn Affair*, the heterosexual family's taboo on all homosexual desire makes the process of gender acquisition for the homosexual subject an especially torturous experience; and the novel's manipulation of melancholia underscores that the prohibition against homosexual desire will remain while 'the family' is defined and modelled solely along heterosexual lines. Significantly, in *The Twyborn Affair*, as in *Voss*, *The Solid Mandala*, and *Memoirs of Many in One*, femininity - albeit in its middle/upper class manifestations - is represented as disruptive because it occupies an ambivalent position in the sex-gender system: and it is sometimes more disruptive than homosexuality itself.

The comic element in the novels provides an important balance to the sometimes overpowering weight of the effects of homophobia. The recurring presence of the moustache as fetish is instrumental to this. As we have seen, the fetish is in a metonymic relation to the penis, and all the novels choose to represent the penis only in fetish form. Eadie Twyborn accompanying Joanie Golson to the *Australia* in a corked on moustache is the most comical of these episodes, as the image of the two lesbians clashes violently with several symbols of the patriarchal system as represented by the novel: the legal system in the figure of Judge Twyborn; the social class system as depicted by the *Australia* and Joanie's dying father; and the gender system symbolized by Eddie. The fetishized moustache is a comic reminder of the masquerade of normative heterosexual masculinity, and its dependence on an idea of femininity as castrated in order to defend against its own fears and deficiencies. Hence its appearance in corked on and natural forms on male and female characters.

Overall, White's intricate negotiation of the diversity of sexual desire in all the novels studied here is a indication that gay, queer and

feminist literary criticism should engage seriously with his work. Such an engagement brings with it a rewarding dialogue with several strands of critical discourse, and this represents one of the more productive features of White's work as it insists on a qualified and nuanced investigation of the interaction between subjectivity, sexuality and the social sphere. Such an exploration encourages a critical engagement with the limitations of the notion of sexual difference without eliding the important insights it has offered into the social construction of gender and sexuality. By highlighting the difficulties inherent in the acquisition of gender and sexuality for both men and women, Patrick White's novels enable us to reconceptualize not only homosexualities, but heterosexualites. They illustrate that, in the final analysis, if we are to intervene in the oppressions of homosexuality then those of heterosexuality need also to be addressed. That is why femininity plays such an influential role in the novels, and why White's novels represent the importance of mediation, not separation. Such a philosophical standpoint puts the focus on sexual desire itself, empowering it to override the demarcation points fixed by traditional concepts of hetero- and homosexuality; hence, it insists that we must always be prepared to speak and write of sexual desire in other words.

Epilogue

As I discussed in the Introduction, the choice of *The Aunt's Story, Voss, The Solid Mandala, The Twyborn Affair* and *Memoirs of Many in One* to illustrate the significance of White's homosexuality to his creative enterprise is directed by the nature of the study - the first to site and examine this subject in detail - and by the representative quality of these five novels to the issues in question. While all White's fiction displays the importance of the subject of homosexual desire, in the novels not investigated here there is a more concentrated focus on the relationships between men and women within the normative system of sexual classification, on the constraints of marriage to the sexual self, and the bearing all this has on characters delineated either tacitly or overtly as homosexual. As such, homosexual characters and subtexts operate as critical foils to the barrenness of heterosexual unions, becoming catalysts for the repressions and divisiveness inscribed in normative male-female sexual and social relations. Where this subject-matter provides the imaginative background to the five novels examined here, it is foregrounded in *The Living and the Dead, The Tree of Man* (1955), *Riders in the Chariot* (1961), *The Vivisector, The Eye of the Storm*, and *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976). In these novels, White's perception of the all too often emotionally desolate condition of heterosexual relations in general takes precedence over the positioning of homosexual desire. A synopsis of each of the narratives will establish this point, and suggest possible paths of investigation for future gay affirmative readings of all White's fiction.

The first of White's closet homosexuals, Elyot Standish, makes his appearance in *The Living and the Dead,* the novel that followed *The Happy Valley*.[1] The marriage of Catherine and Willy Standish is identified in the beginning as 'an odd and unusually prolonged charade' which you played 'for all you were worth, ignoring the moments of uncertainty' (p. 37). Catherine and Willy's daughter and son, Eden and Elyot, are born into this 'travesty' and, in a tragic echo of their parents relationship, engage in a series of doomed and claustrophic heterosexual

1. *The Happy Valley* was to be republished in 1974, but White objected due to fear of libel: he had used the names of a family, the Yens of Adaminaby, in the novel, and closely modelled characters on actual people. See *Patrick White:A Life*, p. 546.

encounters identified as 'false' (p. 132). The novel's main focus is on Catherine Standish's divided personality (which resembles that of in Ellen Roxburgh in *A Fringe of Leaves*), and her life becomes the novel's symbol for the constraints of social codes on individuals. Thus, when Kitty Goose becomes Mrs Willy Standish, the narrator claims that she has to 'import a brand-new mechanism to cope with the new person, the other values. And as she was both sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently naïve, she did this successfully' (p. 258). A sense of life as a charade dominates the atmosphere and action of the novel; and the central philosophical question raised is that of the difficulty of distinguishing between the living and the dead: if life is a series of charades, how is one to know whether one is participating in an uniquely individual life or merely repeating a dead pattern? This is the context for Elyot's dilemma regarding his sexuality: 'He had to find somewhere, in motion, in closer collaboration with a body, an answer to the secret that was already no secret' (p. 260). Despite the stifling atmosphere of *The Living and the Dead*, its ending is unusually positive, if vague: following the death of his mother and the departure of his sister, the last words describe Elyot as 'someone who had been asleep, and had only just woken.' (p. 357). This image of the sexual awakening has a long literary tradition (most obviously, Edna Pontelier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*), and it creates a space for Elyot to reinterpret his life. Thus, although Elyot has remained steadfastly in the closet throughout the narrative, the ending of *The Living and the Dead* is formulated in such a way as to imply that a transformation will occur.

With Stan and Amy Parker in *The Tree of Man*, White claims that he aspired to 'discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people' (*Patrick White: A Life*, pp. 285-6). In effect, the extraordinary, the mystery and the poetry are to be revealed only to and through the character of Stan Parker. His introduction delineates him in epic terms: he is the pioneer explorer, in search of permanence - itself something of a contradiction. 'He was good to look at' (p. 9), a man with 'a golden body' (p. 16).[2] Stan is the carrier of the novel's philosophical musings on the meaning of life, and every other character, especially his wife, is at turns superfluous or intrusive. As with so many of White's 'heterosexual'

2. *The Tree of Man* (1955; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

couples, Stan and Amy are a disheartening example of marriage. The first sign we have of this is at the close of chapter 1, where the hero is described as getting a wife in much the same way as one would get groceries:

> Then, once, when the man had been gone some time, longer than normal perhaps, he brought with him a woman, who sat beside him in the cart, holding the board and her flat hat. When she had got down, the dog, loosed from his chain, craned forward, still uncertain of his freedom, on trembling toes, in silence, and smelled the hem of her skirt. (p. 17)

The lack of descriptive attention given to Amy in her introduction is an indication that she will always be secondary to Stan, and the land. This point is reiterated in chapter 2 when, as they are driving along in the cart, a branch breaks in the wind and grazes Amy's cheek:

> When they were settled into a recovered breathing the man looked at the cut in his wife's cheek. It was the cheek of the thin girl whose face had become familiar to him the night of the ball, and whom apparently he had married. And he was thankful. (p. 27)

Amy's wholly conventional function in the narrative as a wife sharply distinguishes her from Laura in *Voss*. Unlike her, Amy exists solely to aggrandize Stan, to help him interpret the meaning of his life: 'The woman Amy Fibbins was absorbed in the man Stan Parker, whom she had married. And the man, the man consumed the woman. That was the difference' (p. 33). And, even after decades of life spent together, Stan and Amy never attain the closeness or intimacy that normally develops between a couple.

The sense that Stan and Amy exist partly for the convention of realist narrative plot is suggested by the narrator's representation of their sexual union. As inexorably as Violet Adams foregos education for indoctrination into the codes of femininity in *The Aunt's Story*, so Stan and Amy have children. The first is a boy, 'because that is what it would be' (p. 54). However, with Ray Parker the narrative digresses from its plot of heterosexual fatalism. We are told that Ray's 'healthiness of body quite disguised any trace of disease; only the neurotic could have had any misgivings about the corners of his mouth, or found in his rather bold eyes reflections of their own hells' (p. 236). The first clue to what these 'hells' are resides in the manner in which the early development of Ray's

character is described, one which repeats the now discredited 'vulgar Freudian' explanation of male homosexuality which traduces the mother for her 'unnatural' dominance in the parenting role. Regarding Amy with his son, Stan exclaims: "'I'd put it down... It can't be healthy to maul it like that"' (p. 115). Later, when Con the Greek comes to help on the farm the predictable plot of heterosexual relations is further upset; also, the familiar link between Greece, homoeroticism, and the deciphering of (sexual) mysteries is implanted into the narrative:

> The Parker family, once they had recovered from the strangeness of the situation, expected great things of the Greek. Secretly they hoped he would be able to answer all kinds of questions. But he was still a cipher, or a smile. His eyes, which promised frankness on the surface, withheld secrets in their liquid depths. His greenish skin was still repulsive. But he did finally begin to emerge, woodenly at first, leaning on learned phrases, that might give way if he did not take care. (p. 225)

Con provokes Ray's sexual feelings in a manner at first disturbing, and then loathsome to him. Initiated by a hand wrestle that is swiftly immured in sexual innuendo, Con and Ray are figured as 'that Laocoön of man and boy' (p. 229), evoking the marble group in the Vatican of the Trojan priest and his two sons being crushed in the folds of two enormous serpents (combining an image of homoeroticism with the Christian symbol for original sin). The narrative continues thus: 'Their flat, breathless chests were boarded up together, so that it was difficult in that moment to extricate the hearts one from the other.... the Greek refused [to let Ray go]. So that the boy who was writhing on the rack began to fear that still greater weakness than his lack of strength might be discovered' (p. 229). When Con leaves to marry a widow with five children who has a good business, Ray is tortured by a realization highlighted by homophobia:

> He had begun again to think of the man who had gone, and whom he would have kept, he almost trembled to admit, though kept for what. Because if he did not love the Greek, and it was obvious he could not love him, then it was hate.... as he walked through the bush, peeling off bark in search of some answer, and feeling the swollen misery of those cruelties he was perpetrating, and had still to perpetrate on his memories of the man. This way he would become stronger. Though he did doubt his strength. He was still pinned by the arms of the golden Greek. (pp. 234-5)

In *The Tree of Man*, the central characters' intimacy with the bush

brings with it a penetrative perception of their sexual, intellectual and emotional needs. This imaginative deployment is repeated with characters such as Theodora Goodman, Voss and Laura, Frank Le Mesurier, Ellen Roxburgh, and Alf Dubbo. For Ray Parker, such knowledge coupled with an almost innate homophobia can lead only to self-destruction, and his disaffected life climaxes when he gets shot in the stomach in a club at a young age (p. 435). This violent end to a closet homosexual character's life echoes that of Waldo Brown and Eddie Twyborn.

Fifteen years after the revelations of Auschwitz and Belsen, White wrote his sixth fictional work, *Riders in the Chariot*. Concerned with a type of religious epiphany in which evil, prejudice and insight are intertwined, *Riders in the Chariot* is a distressing novel which takes the lives of four characters who are made to suffer because they fall outside religious/national/racial/social norms. In Marr's biography, White relates how an unpleasant incident in Sydney in 1947 in which he was mistaken for a German Jew '"persuaded me to write the novel"'. Marr continues:

> Memories of Palestine, his admiration for Ben Huebsch and his sense of outcast sexuality also played their part in Himmelfarb's birth: "As a homosexual I have always known what it is to be an outsider. It has given me added insight into the plight of the immigrant - the hate and contempt with which he is often received." (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 248)[3]

The fact of having a German Jew, Mordecai Himmelfarb, as one of the key characters positions the Holocaust as the omnipresent background for all seven parts of *Riders*: its horrific image possesses the prejudice of the Sydney suburbs, augmenting an already disquieting catalogue of ignorances and discrimination.

The sexual content of *Riders* is, like all White's novels, provocative. Himmelfarb and Reha's marriage is asexual, and concerned friends comment about her lack of children: '"But Rehalein, it is time you had a child. Why, the duties of the *Rabbanim* do not begin and end in books. Given me a good, comfortable family Jew. He may not spell, but he

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3. The 'swastika plague' in Australia is also a factor in White's condemnation of what he called 'Australian ordinariness'. In 1960, swastikas accompanied by slogans such as 'KILL JEWS', 'GAS JEWS', 'EXTERMINATE THE JEWS', and 'JUDEN RAUS' were painted throughout Sydney, Melbourne and elsewhere. See *Patrick White:A Life*, pp. 367-8.

will fill the house with babies'" (pp. 131-2). If it were not for the Freudian reference to Reha's lack of sexual fulfilment making her 'undeniably fat' (p. 131), and the narrator's gloss on her defence of her husband's intellectual life - 'Then he left, relieved that his wife was such a simple, loving creature. If her words sometimes hinted at deeper matters, no doubt it was pure chance; she herself remained unaware' (p. 133) - readers would be unable to substantiate any suspicions regarding the reason for Himmelfarb's excessive introversion. In effect, his intellectuality is very like Aschenbach's in *Death in Venice*, a shield from too much worldly intrusion, an ivory tower that functions like the closet.

The manner in which the 'closet' Jewish family, the Rosetrees, are depicted as denying their Jewishness evokes similarities with succeeding portrayals of self-homophobic characters.[4] Himmelfarb's arrival at Brighta Bicycle Lamps triggers the realization of the lie that Haïm and Shulamith Rosenbaum live in the guise of Harry and Shirl Rosetree. Although their children, Steve and Rosie, 'had learnt to speak worse Australian than any of the Australian kids', and Shirl 'had a kind of gift for assimilation' (p. 208), they still '"can't get away from it ... the blood draws you"' (p. 210). Even so, this does not prevent Haïm Rosenbaum hiding behind the mask of Harry Rosetree when the workers in his factory assault and brutalize Himmelfarb because of his difference. The hatred directed at anything not 'ordinary Australian' is disturbingly intense in this novel, as is the hatred of the narrative voice for such mutilating insularity. It seems unlikely that White's feelings regarding the fates of homosexuals in both Australia and in the German concentration camps play a not inconsiderable part in the intensity of the delineation of prejudice in this novel. Hence, the rather startling parallels put in place between the persecution of Jews in Hitler's Germany, the crucifixion of Christ, and the treatment Mary Hare, Alf Dubbo, and Himmelfarb are subjected to because of the way in which their unconventionality is perceived.

A contrast to this negativity is provided by the camp homosexual, Norman Fussel. Safe in the sanctuary of a prostitute's house, Norm's day life as a nurse gives way in the evenings to 'queans' night[s]' (p. 355) at his

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4. A relatively minor character, the rector Timothy Calderon, is established as a closet homosexual. For years he was in love with his sister's husband, Arthur Pask. Not long after the latter's death, he and his sister take in the boy Alf Dubbo, but Alf has to leave after Mrs Pask discovers him having sex with the rector.

landlady's. One of Norm's gay friends is an art dealer who expresses a keen interest in Alf Dubbo's paintings, and this group of apparently carefree gay men recall the time just before the Cold War when Sydney was a haven for those who chose unconventional lifestyles, especially those involved in the art world.[5] Places like the Rowe Street Bookshop, which stocked large quantities of homoerotic literature, and the Long Bar, the Australia Hotel's (also featured in *The Twyborn Affair*) camp bar, were also popular havens for gays at this time, so that while the predominate mood and tone of *Riders in the Chariot* is of persecution, the presence of characters like Norman signals again White's particularized grasp of the workings of cultural hegemony, and its fissures.

The 'figure of the painter was one of the permanent members of White's imagination' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 465), and in *The Vivisector*, this figure becomes Hurtle Duffield, who exchanges knives for paint in his dissections of people and life (his adopted mother tells him: '"You, Hurtle - you were born with a knife in your hand. No," she corrected herself, "in your eye"' (p. 146)). Duffield is portrayed as a genius and, not surprisingly, his paintings are inspired by Francis Bacon's, in particular the 'figures like half-dismembered medical specimens laid out on slabs for inspection' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 474). Duffield's perception of the world is singularly brutal, and his dissections can be read as the painting equivalent of White's verbal tirades against mediocrity, conventionalism, etc., exemplified in the characters of Mrs Dun in *The Solid Mandala*, Mrs Merivale in *A Fringe of Leaves*, and Mrs Jolley and Mrs Flack in *Riders in the Chariot*.

The Vivisector, as the title suggests, is concerned with a search for truth, with discovering how people are fashioned, and fashion themselves. It contains two gay characters who are utilized to portray the roles of one central truth of existence - one's sexuality - and how it takes several different paths through life. The first is Maurice Caldicott, another of White's camp art dealers. He is a 'mild creature of indeterminate age and sex', with a 'hairless, milky face' (p. 213). His campness is as much

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5. It is interesting to speculate whether, when he created the character of Alf Dubbo, White was aware of the comment of J. S. MacDonald, Director of Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria, that most modern art was created by 'degenerates and perverts'. For more on male homosexual artists in the late 1940s and early 1950s see, Garry Wotherspoon, 'The Flight of the "Exiles of the Spirit"'.

appreciated by the ladies who visit his gallery as the risqué paintings he exhibits:

> Instinctively they recognized "Maurice" as one of themselves by the way he tweaked at his non-existent string of pearls... (p. 214)

Hurtle's relationship with Maurice (somewhat like Ray Parker's with Con), functions to arouse a realization regarding his own heterosexual affairs: whereas the latter are described and viewed sadistically, and always fall short of fulfilment for both parties, Duffield is tender with Caldicott. Having discussed the number of paintings Hurtle will show in his gallery, Caldicott

> put his hand on Duffield's thigh, in a gesture half-way between unconscious affection and conscious appraisal. Almost at once he removed the hand: he could have burnt it; his smile was trembling painfully. (p. 219)

Caldicott is afraid that he has misjudged Hurtle, and retreats awkwardly. But the narrator informs:

> Duffield warmed towards Caldicott limping away through the scrub in his escape back to civilization. If it had been in his power, he would genuinely have liked to help the man out of his cabinet by smashing the panes; but he had never felt so impotent.
>
> When his visitor was long enough gone to be out of earshot, he took the brandy bottle and chucked it into the gorge, where it hit a rock and exploded into a galaxy. He hoped Caldicott hadn't heard after all. With guilt on his heels, how much more noticeably he would have limped. He was accusing his friend of his frightened little attempt; he was demonstrating against an emotional state of his own, which had unexpectedly given birth to this plume of transcendental glass. (pp. 219-20)

While the narrator is proposing a homoerotic affinity between Hurtle and Maurice here, *The Vivisector* is not 'about' homosexual desire: the latter is deployed in this narrative as one aspect of sexual behaviour, no more or less prone to success or failure that any other interpersonal or sexual relationship. But because the overall perspective of *The Vivisector* and of its protagonist pivots on conducting painful experiments on living people for the purposes of highlighting their depravity (Hero Pavloussi exclaims of her portrait: '"It is a pornography! Are you trying to kill me?"'(p. 360)), sexual intercourse takes on the appearance of vivisection itself.

The second, clearly identifiable, homosexual character in the novel is Cecil Cutbush. He is married and precariously in the closet, almost getting '"caught out once: he got off by the skin of his teeth. It was a horrid pimply boy, too"' (p. 468). Cutbush is disparaged because of his closet existence, and Hurtle's hatred of him seems to stem more from what he sees of Cutbush in himself; as Arthur was Waldo's mirror, so Cecil Cutbush's duplicity sparks off a distressing realization in Hurtle of his own duplicities and inadequacies, sexual and intellectual. In contrast, Rhoda's perspective on the matter produces a more compassionate and realistic understanding of the perils of homosexuality:

> "This boy, luckily for Cutbush, was well known as a liar - though Cutbush himself is what you would call a compulsive liar - respected as a man of business, however - and churchwarden. He had to resign from the Council after the scandal."
> ... In the circumstances, [Duffield's] hands were almost throttling the brandy bottle. "I wonder you can enjoy the company of liars, and buggers, and hysterics, and Scottish prigs."
> Rhoda seemed hypnotized by his blenched knuckles. "Aren't they other human beings? Almost everybody carries a hump, not always visible, and not always of the same shape." (p. 469).

This statement encapsulates the perspective *The Vivisector* is - ironically, given the title - reaching toward; an eclectic and compassionate understanding of human beings, and of the roles their sexuality plays in their constitution.

The Eye of the Storm, White's ninth novel, is a book about families, sexual betrayal, love, sickness, and death. It tells of the life of Elizabeth Hunter as she lies dying in the house which witnessed many of the familiar Whitean family dramas. The psychological structure of the heterosexual family is here again presented as innately pathological, devouring individuality and difference. The marriage of Elizabeth and Alfred Hunter, like Catherine and Willy Standish, is more of a disaster than a success. Their children, Basil and Dorothy, escape their parents as soon as possible and, like Elyot and Eden, can lay claim to a string of disastrous heterosexual relationships. Clearly, *The Eye of the Storm* is loosely based on White's own relationship with his mother Ruth, and her protracted death 'attended by acolytes and besieged by heirs who wished this opulent convalescence would end, either with death or a bare room at the Blue Nuns' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 494). Elizabeth Hunter is, at one and the same time, a devouring but careless mother, a

disrespectful wife, and an independent woman - all potentially explosive characteristics. She is manipulative and controlling, and the parallels with White himself, as well as with his mother, are striking. Directly or indirectly, Elizabeth Hunter activates all the tensions in the novel, tensions which are made all the more potent as they come from a dying woman confined to bed.

The most tangible tension is sexual. Almost all the characters, from the nurses, to Basil and Dorothy, have bizarre, or destructive, or highly complex sexual relations. As there is not the space here to go into all of them, I shall confine myself to Elizabeth, Basil and Dorothy.

Elizabeth and Alfred fall into the mould of White's upper class married couple. Rich, egocentric, and frivolous, they marry predominantly for the sake of convention: as the narrative relates in parentheses; '(Their whole married life they had spent trying to encourage each other's uninteresting interest)' (p. 33). Their morally commendable, but somewhat futile, attempts to make each other happy are upheld by the novel, highlighting the value placed in the White *oeuvre* on respect for difference, and reconciliation:

> And what about her own betrayal of Alfred? But she hadn't betrayed him, or only once, and that was little more than an afternoon's indiscretion, of no lasting significance. It didn't destroy the possibility of an ideal relationship, above the respect and affection she had for Alfred, and Alfred's (hurt) devotion to her. If she could to some extent understand or visualize this probably super-human relationship. But she couldn't. (p. 92)

This ambiguous placement of the sexual as central to the life of all White's characters, and as transcended by respect and affection where present, underlines the difficulty in making any clear claims for its position in our lives. Its interrelationship with all other social, economic, personal and historical issues means that the constant striving for a more complete or perfect articulation of our sexuality is an enterprise always already precluded by our positions in society. While acknowledging that such a striving characterizes the 'humanist dream of a complete and flourishing sexuality', Foucault remained very much aware of the contradiction inherent in the understanding of sexuality as the key to one's personality, and its inevitable refraction through the social arena:

> ... [doctors] constructed around and apropos of sex an immense apparatus for producing truth, even if this truth was to be masked at the last moment. The essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something

fundamental ...[6]

As we have seen throughout this thesis, White's novels enact this tension: what is the truth of one's sexuality, whether it be heterosexual or homosexual? and where is the path to this truth? Of course, like the way to the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow, there is no path; but this remains what all White's 'homosexual'/homosexual characters seek: Theodora on her world trips; Voss and Laura on their trip into the Australian interior; Waldo in his journeys through literature; Eddie in his exodus to France, Australia and England; Eadie and Joanie in their trips to the 'Australia'; and Alex in her mental flights.

Dorothy and Basil have spent their lives travelling, trying to escape their past and present. Dorothy is imprisoned in a socially-esteemed, but hapless marriage to Prince Hubert de Lascabanes, for which she has had to forgo her religion. Like the limbo White felt himself to be in between England and Australia, 'Dorothy Hunter's misfortune was to feel at her most French in Australia, her most Australian in France' (p. 47). Back at 'Kudjeri', the closest she gets to feeling at home is a sexual embrace with her brother, by whom she later feels repulsed (p. 508). In this, the critique of the sexual make-up of the nuclear family in *The Eye of the Storm* follows the same pattern as the rest of the novels: the sexual relationship between mother and father is less the example to follow than the instigator of the 'perversions' it is normatively designed to exclude.

The character of Basil has elements of several of White's more enigmatic characters who figure homosexuality. Returning from the suitably exotic Bangkok to be at his mother's deathbed, the latter vents her disappointment in him before he arrives:

> "Why - why? *Bangkok*!" Mrs Hunter's mouth was working past grief towards abuse. "Basil knew better than anybody how to - disappoint," she gasped. "I wonder whether he would have disappointed me as an actor." (pp. 25-6; White's italics)

The pregnant pause before 'disappoint' is later filled by information regarding Basil's sham marriages. His daughter Imogen from his first to Shiela ('He had been in love with her - or the lines with which they wooed each other nightly' (p. 142)) is not his, but Len Bottomley's (p. 133).

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6. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, pp. 71, 56.

Enid, his second wife,

> he couldn't think why he had married ... unless to consume more of the unlimited flattery she appeared to offer, and for the doors she opened to allow him to indulge his lust for sociability. As a wife she was one long squabble. After the first week, in which they continued to share the triumphs of knowingness, they realized that beyond their few points of agreement, each knew something better and different.... The most amicable thing about their marriage was their parting. (p. 141).

Basil's attempts to fit into the rituals of heterosexuality and the regimes of gender are doomed to failure. His career as an actor is in many ways indistinguishable from his life as one. Basil, like all White's sexually-unfulfilled protagonists, is under no illusion about the duplicities he perpetrates on others and on himself; but without the freedom or the courage to reconstitute himself outwith the constraints of the norm, only repetition remains - the same dialogue, the same 'plays'.

As telling as the catalogue of disastrous marriages in Basil's life is the combination of references to Basil's secrets (p. 97), and to Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* as the text which inspired the young boy to be an actor (p. 51). This constitution of the interplay between self and society as one between actors and audience frequently present in White's novels springs mainly, as I have demonstrated throughout the thesis, from White's own life as a homosexual man, forced first to hide this fact, and then to live it on terms dictated largely by an antagonistic hegemonic ideology. It is thus wholly appropriate that Basil claims that his final act will be a play of his life, '"Acted out with a company of actors. According to how we - the actors and audience - choose, it could go this way or that - as life can - and does"' (p. 135). The sense of possibility intrinsic to the ambiguity in this statement does not dilute the very real pressure of the 'audience'; it rejects a fatalistic perception of the plots available to us, and underscores the power we have to remake our destinies.

A Fringe of Leaves is the only one of White's novels not to have a covert or overt homosexual character. It uses a female protagonist to symbolize the quest for sexual freedom, and as such relates to Catherine Standish/Kitty Goose in *The Living and the Dead*, Theodora in *The Aunt's Story*, Laura in *Voss*, Eadie Twyborn and Joan Golson in *The Twyborn Affair*, and Alex in *Memoirs of Many in One*. In has particular parallels with *Voss*, and with David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*: all three

involve protagonists leaving the confines and security of 'civilisation', and in so doing discovering other, more significant, deep-seated aspects of the self.

Based on the true story of Eliza Fraser, the only survivor of the shipwreck of the *Stirling Castle* in 1836, *A Fringe of Leaves* was partly inspired, like *The Aunt's Story* and *The Twyborn Affair*, by a painting (more accurately, a series of paintings), this time by Sidney Nolan. Nolan had visited Fraser Island and completed several paintings of Eliza Fraser whilst there. Later in London, he painted another thirty portraits for the Whitechapel Gallery's 1957 retrospective of his work (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 378). White heard the story of Eliza Fraser's ordeal from Nolan and, having decided to write a book about it, stated: '"One can no longer imagine Mrs Fraser apart from the Nolan paintings"' (*Patrick White:A Life*, p. 413).

Having spent twelve years in his drawer, the manuscript came to life not long after White visited the island for himself. The first pages establish Mrs Ellen Roxburgh as '"something of a mystery"' (p. 15), instigating the connections between Freud's 'dark continent' of sexuality, Ellen's sexual awakening, and the image of untrammelled sexuality symbolized by the Aborigines.[7] Operating as a stark foil to this is Ellen's upper class husband, Austin Roxburgh, who is an invalid, and who White deploys as an image of social control or sculpture (made all the more compelling because of his invalidism):

> That he might marry Ellen Gluyas became after all a tenuous possibility on seeing her not only as his wife, but also as his work of art. This could be the project which might ease the frustration gnawing at him: to create a beautiful, charming, not necessarily intellectual, but socially acceptable companion out of what was only superficially unpromising material. (p. 54)

This picture of Austin is clearly meant to evoke Pygmalion. Nonetheless, his desire to mould Ellen into a 'socially acceptable companion' is frustrated by Ellen herself, and by Austin's death at the hands of the Aborigines, the novel's ultimate contrast to the stifling 'civilisation'

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7. *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). This imaginative deployment of the Aborigines is questionable, most obviously from a postcolonial perspective, but also from a feminist perspective. An indepth reading of the novel would address this issue, exploring how White's positive representation of the Aborigines' life and sexual behaviour interacts with the stereotype of the 'natural savage'.

Austin represents. Once shipwrecked on Fraser Island, Ellen is released not only socially but sexually: having 'only once responded with a natural ardour, but discovered on her husband's face an expression of having tasted something bitter' (p. 67), she rediscovers with the escaped convict (somewhat ludicrously named, Jack Chance) the sexual abandon that had been arrested by Austin, and then stirred by Garnet Roxburgh in the '"*morally infected* country ... Van Diemen's Land"' (p. 73; White's italics).

Ellen Roxburgh is perhaps the most suffocated of White's heroines, which is why her release is so extreme. Writing in her diary from 'Dulcet', she suspects that only death will deliver the physical, sensual, and mental liberty she craves:

> ... in spite of gratitude and love for a husband as dependent on me as I am on him, I begin to feel closer to the country than to any human being. Reason, and the little I learned from the books I was given too late in life to more than fidget over, tells me I am wrong in thinking thus, but my instincts hanker after something deeper, which I may not experience this side of death. (p. 92)

One cannot help but think that somewhere behind the fervour of Ellen's desire for deliverance lies the strangled passion of Waldo Brown and Eddie Twyborn.

Given White's astute understanding of the power of labelling, it is appropriate that when Ellen Roxburgh's shackles are loosened the narrative refers to her as 'Ellen Gluyas'. The split between the Cornish girl and the woman moulded by her husband widens, and Ellen finds it more and more difficult to maintain her identity as 'Mrs Roxburgh' the further they retreat from the familiarities of 'civilisation'. Equally significant is the way in which this split is accompanied by images of depth (Ellen Gluyas) and surface (Ellen Roxburgh): 'Had she been left to mature naturally she had inherited that same chapped skin [as her father]. Looking at her hands, Mrs Roxburgh noticed that she was returning, and not by slow degrees, to nature' (p. 173). This image of the truth of oneself being (to borrow from Jeanette Winterson) written on the body is present throughout White's fiction; but nowhere else has the naked body been so persistently on display, the release of a protagonist's sexuality from normative constraints so extreme.[8] Nevertheless, it is important that

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8. Some of the descriptions of Ellen are questionable from a feminist perspective. For example, having beached on a reef for a night, Ellen is described leaving the tent, 'crawling on all fours' her hair hanging 'round her face in ropes and mats', and leaving

White has Ellen construct the fringe of leaves to cover her genitalia, and that she hides her wedding ring beneath it. These two acts emphasize White's insistence that no matter how intensely we feels our sexuality to be that part of ourselves which most completely and truthfully represents us, the forms in which it is given expression will be constructed by the societies of which we are a part. No matter how much his sexually-alienated characters feel that their worlds are denying them freedom of sexual and intellectual expression, White's narratives insist that there is no pure essence of being which one can discover, or return to. However, this knowledge does not entail a rejection of the notion that individuals can alter their circumstances to effect more fulfilling lives; indeed, as far as White is concerned, they have a responsibility to themselves to do so.

As we have seen, all White's novels exhibit a penetrating concern with societies' obsession with moulding individuals, making them accommodate to predetermined and prejudicial norms of behaviour; and the norm White is most interested in critiquing is that of heterosexism. In this respect, the character of Austin Roxburgh is one of White's more potent symbols of repressive social control: as an invalid, and an especially manipulative character, he signifies repression as a disease (like Eddie's melancholy, and Waldo's hatred); but he also demonstrates the results of an in-valid ideology in his physicality. His death at the hands of a cannibalistic tribe is also symbolic: having dedicated his married life to consuming the spirit in his wife, he is finally consumed by those who, for White, represent a more unconstrained, and certainly unorthodox existence.

Finally, even on the basis of these brief discussions of those novels not closely examined by the thesis, it is clear that the driving force behind all White's novels is the power, the pain, the intricacies, and the importance of all sexual desire, but especially homosexual desire. As such, any future reading which fails to give due attention to this subject will be flying in the face of White's repeated claims as to the importance of his homosexuality to his creativity, and will inevitably fail to do justice to the richness of his narratives.

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a trial behind her in the sand like that of 'some giant lizard' (p. 195). While such corollaries with the natural world are meant to signify Ellen's progressive movement toward a more open expression of her own 'nature' and sexuality, the descriptions have problematic affinities with the misogynist ideology of woman = nature.

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