

**The tripod in the dunny :
a study of Patrick White's sylleptic habits**

David John Merrington.

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of relations between aspects of Patrick White's prose style and his perception of a moral equivocation that is entailed in the construction of identity and in the making of fiction.

Chapter One presents examples of White's sylleptic style. The virtuosity of the figure is seen to reflect the discursive puissance of a detached and ironic narrative stance. His habitually ironic perspective is ascribed to his apparent sense that human life is governed by fiction, and that such governance is morally equivocal. The chapter concludes with the specification of gossip as a malicious social discourse which, for White, also reflects the practice of narrative fiction.

In Chapter Two the analogy between fiction and gossip is developed. The discourse of repute is seen to exercise a perverse and vicarious dominance over its object. This governance by a morally equivocal discourse is considered to illustrate White's habitual apprehension of a universally ironic dispensation under which the human subject exists. The role and the conduct of authorship is examined as the "voice" which governs and articulates such a dispensation.

Aspects of M.M. Bakhtin's theory of carnival are adduced, in Chapter Three, to the analysis of narrative irony. The figure of syllepsis is considered as a stylistic

formula for the carnivalesque. The concept of a reactionary "counter-carnival" is formulated, and is used to examine the equivocal energies of White's ironic dispensation.

Chapter Four focuses on the carnivalesque dialectic between the orthodox and the grotesque "other". "Illicit knowledge" of the grotesque is seen to be cognate with the discourse of repute and gossip, and the artist is found to be guilty of vicarious appropriations.

Chapter Five is an extended analysis of The Twyborn Affair as White's allegory of fiction. The chapter is in two parts: the first focuses on the discursive means by which the fiction of "Eudoxia Vatatzes" is constructed. The flaws in such "authorship" are examined, and this "text" is seen to be a vulnerable and unreliable narrative structure. The second part traces the development of Eddie Twyborn as a fictional "text", through his personae as a jackeroo and as Eadith Trist the brothelkeeper.

The Coda comprises brief illustrations, from Three Uneasy Pieces, of Patrick White's last thoughts on authorship.

"The Tripod in the Dunny": A Study of Patrick White's
Sylleptic Habits.

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Dissertation submitted towards fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts, in the
Department of English, University of Cape Town.

March 1994

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Patrick White, who died soon after it was begun.

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Preface

I have chosen to make a study of Patrick White's writing which, despite current fashions for excising the author from the text, would consistently echo his own audible voice. The "presence" of the author within his own fiction is underwritten by many points of intersection with Patrick White's autobiography. White's fictional stock, for instance, of characters, places, events, and images, is readily traced back to his autobiographical writings. Indeed, he says in an interview, "all my characters are fragments of my own somewhat fragmented character".¹ Conversely, but to the same point, his "self-portrait" - as the autobiography Flaws in the Glass is subtitled - depicts a figure who, in many ways, is constructed like a character in a novel.

White develops his characters - and his autobiographical self-image - around the concept of some inherent "flaw". I shall argue that, for White, this constitutive imperfection evolves out of the discursive process by which identity is created. The Twyborn Affair is an allegory of fiction which demonstrates this process.

Conflicting discourses in the novels give rise to dialectical tension. These are generally, on the one hand, a discourse that comprises an "imperfect" signification (and this may mean both "flawed" and "incomplete") and on the other hand, a highly established discourse, such as that

which articulates a national mythopoeia. White represents his own identity as an ambivalent construction, formed, as is Hurtle Duffield in The Vivisector, by the heterogeneous mingling of an imperfect and a perfected "discourse". The following example from Flaws in the Glass illustrates the tension between an hypostatized myth of orthodox identity and the "flaw" of a foreign genesis which defines the young Patrick White dialectically as the imperfect "outsider". Dame Nellie Melba, a national institution in her own right, visits his school and probes the boys' authenticity as Australians:

We clattered to our feet as she paraded in, dressed in brown, a springy queen of toads hung with diamonds at 11 a.m.

Coming at once to the point, she commanded, "Hands up anyone born in Australia?" No nonsense about Nellie.

A matter of shame to a small boy, I couldn't hold up my hand with the others.

"Where were you born?" She pointed sternly at the outsider in the front row.

When I told her, [London] she muttered with a knowing glint of the professional expatriate, "Not a bad place either."

(FG:19)

Her answer to the boy seems to formulate a consolation which is putatively subversive to the myth of the orthodox identity; the "knowing glint" implies this. The consolation is that ambivalence is "not a bad place", and the singer's manner suggests some kind of wicked collusion between two who share a subversive but stimulating secret.

Patrick White describes himself in the "self-portrait" as an "indecent hybrid". (FG:20) In the novels the "hybrid"

appears as the product of dialectical conflict between sets of discursive practice: characters who articulate an established discourse (such as Austin Roxburgh in A Fringe of Leaves) conflict with the representatives of an "imperfect" discourse (such as the Aborigines, or Jack Chance the convict). The product - a third kind of discourse - is forged out of this tension between dialectically opposed categories. It is embodied in White's favoured characters, who are equivalent to the heterogeneous "indecent hybrid". Ellen Gluyas/Roxburgh, who is constructed in ambivalence, is an example, as is Laura Trevelyan in Voss. It is customary, in the canon of Patrick White analysis, to describe characters like Ellen and Laura as "initiates". Whereas this usage invariably connotes some kind of induction into a felicitous spirituality, my own approach is to consider the character's "initiation" as the apperception of ambivalence and of fictional construction which makes them "part of Patrick White" - or part of their own authorship.

This next extract from the "self-portrait", much quoted by critics, reflects the importance for White of ambivalence as a constitutive influence. It also expresses his sense that a world that is defined or constructed in language is in fact a world of narrative contracts, or of fiction:

Sexual ambivalence helped drive me in on myself. Lacking flamboyance, cursed with reserve, I chose fiction, or more likely it was chosen for me, as the means of introducing to a disbelieving audience the cast of contradictory characters of which I am composed.

(FG:20)

This could equally well have been uttered by the multiple persona of Eddie/Eudoxia/Eadith in The Twyborn Affair, who is the most overtly autobiographical of White's characters.

While Eddie Twyborn is defined by the intradiegetic narrative practices of gossip and repute, he is also the deliberate "author" of his own fictitious personae.² This novel illustrates White's apparent view that identity is discursively constructed, that conflicting "authorships" generate dialectic, and that the discourse of naming is a form of fiction. This consciousness leads him to consider life as an absurd "illusion of reality" - as a gaudy carnivalesque or vaudeville production. (FG:154)

White articulates this world of illusion in language which is in itself rhetorically carnivalesque. His typical stylistic habits comprise synaesthesia, aposiopesis, conjectural subjunctives, and syllepsis. These devices produce the strategic ambiguities that signify the impossibility, for the author, of achieving a monological stability of meaning and an unequivocal closure in narrating human experience.

In my study of White's celebrations of ambivalence and of fiction, I have also considered the moral thematics which are entailed in the tensions between opposing orders of discourse. In general, he seems to represent the orthodox, established, and apparently homogeneous discourses as the more inimical to honest and sympathetically human expres-

ion. I have called such discourses (as for instance the mythopeia of national identity) "master narratives", in order to signify both their discursive power and their actual fictive quality.

The encompassing irony which White seems increasingly to ponder in his later books is that the powers of governance which are invested in authorship constitute in themselves a form of "master narrative". For example the "editor's" apology in Memoirs of Many in One reflects the way in which so many of White's "initiates" are dominated, appropriated, and even destroyed by the importunities of discursive orthodoxy.

As the title of this thesis implies, I have considered the rhetorical figure of syllepsis to epitomise this sense of an equivocal ethics in the practice of narrative fiction. As a highly wrought device, which exhibits compositional wit and artifice, the figure belongs to the discursive realm of Augustan competence and literary puissance. Paradoxically, it also formulates a carnivalesque ambivalence, an open-ended signification, which denies that competence its prerogative of authoritative closure. My phrase "the tripod in the dunny" is intended to reflect the kind of ambivalence in authorship that White constantly demonstrates. (The "tripod" - alluding to the seat of the Pythian Priestess - symbolises a vatic authorship. The "dunny" - Australian slang for lavatory - signifies the bathetically material conditions which govern authorial discourse.)

This next segment from the "self-portrait" is White's sylleptic warning against facile belief in his artistry as a monologically sincere practice:

Double values abound amongst those I used to respect; and as for myself, 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.

(FG:153)

The stylistic ambivalence of syllepsis formulates the kind of failure which Carolyn Bliss has described as paradoxically "fortunate". My thesis is altogether indebted to her analysis; my own focus on White's equivocal ethics of fiction is really an extrapolation from her work. To reflect this debt I have adapted her title to describe Patrick White's own favourite creation - The Twyborn Affair - as a "paradox of fortunate fiction".

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My parents have provided the support and forbearance which only an implicit, and I hope justified, faith can have inspired and my twin brother Peter Merrington has been an invaluable reader, critic, and eirôn. I am also indebted to Dr Brian Phipps of Oystermouth, Swansea, for supplying me with reference material unavailable in South Africa.

Chapter One: Sylleptic Habits

[Syllepsis] epitomizes what the novel's action demonstrates: that the mundane and transcendent, or comic and tragic, like other opposites, engage in perpetual dialectic.

(Bliss 1986:188)

This thesis is going to be a study of Patrick White's "perpetual dialectic". I shall apply the phrase to describe a writer's world in which metaphysical categories such as the "mundane" or the "transcendent", or social categories such as the orthodox and the eccentric, "establishment" and "periphery", "Home" and "Dominions", appear as categories of spoken and written language, or categories of discourse. The intermingling of such discursive categories or "languages" provides the polyglot ambivalence which articulates this dialectical Whitean universe.

Ambivalence is a condition which Patrick White celebrates. In this segment from his autobiographical "self-portrait", for example, he regards sexual ambivalence as his source of "insight":

... ambivalence has given me insights into human nature, denied, I believe, to those who are unequivocally male or female ... I would not trade my halfway house, frail though it be, for any of the entrenchments of those who like to think themselves unequivocal.

(FG:154)

The "perpetual dialectic" that Carolyn Bliss observes is articulated by perpetual equivocation. I suggest that White's narrative irony (which Bliss remarks is "an omni-

present possibility") derives from a conflict between, on the one hand, the monological virtues of "sincerity" and "truth", and on the other hand the writer's apperception of a discursive ambivalence which makes monology and conclusiveness an impossible and false (although popularly treasured) ideal. (Bliss 1986:193) The next two quotations from Flaws in the Glass indicate that such a conflict occurs within the author himself. Here he comments on "sincerity" and "truth":

Where I have gone wrong in life is in believing that total sincerity is compatible with human intercourse. ... My pursuit of that razor-blade truth has made me a slasher. Not that I don't love and venerate in several senses - before all, pureness of heart and trustfulness.

(FG:155)

This is a curious blend of cynicism and faith. When he writes about writing, however, the problem of human virtue is dissolved in the more textual "virtues" of protean multivalency. He observes that "truth" is "a many sided crystal" which vitiates monology, and also that a world which is discursively articulated seems to be a world that is governed by fiction (FG:151):

Double values abound amongst those I used to respect; and as for myself, 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.

(FG:153)

The final clause in this segment is a model of sylleptic conjunction. Typically, the yoking elides the boundaries between disparate lexical categories; it presents a witty illustration of the multivalency which, according to White, is a condition of being an artist.

The last term of the double (or actually triple) supply, "the demands of fiction", provides the defamiliarising force of the figure. "Time" and "climate" may conventionally be associated with changes to the aspects of a "face" and "body", but "the demands of fiction" redefines these effects as metaphorical. In the resonance of the phrase "double standards" which dominates this segment, we must accept the implication that the "face" of the artist is duplicate in a way that challenges the popular conception of sincerity. The ambiguity of the message, which is caused by the coordinating phrase, "and as for myself", seems to affirm that the artist is "two-faced", and that this condition is imposed and sanctioned by "the demands of fiction". We are led to consider that, in White's view, fiction constitutes a kind of governing dispensation, and that this governance may entail its own equivocal ethics.

Voss, for instance, is mythologised by official fiction at the unveiling of his memorial statue: he "... was by now quite safe, it appeared. He was hung with garlands of rarest newspaper prose. They would write about him in the history books." (Voss:440) Laura Trevelyan is officially

implicated in the memorial activities - in this fictionalising of Voss - and her remark on her compromising role is equivocal: "No. ... I am not dishonest, I hope, except that I am a human being.'" (Voss:441)

The next segment, from A Fringe of Leaves, represents Ellen Gluyas's induction, as Ellen Roxburgh, into an awareness of the codified nature of social discourse. This new awareness is concomitant with the fictionalising of Ellen. In that process she becomes an ambivalent persona, learns equivocation, and masters the Whitean art of a polyglossia.

She had been encouraged early to tell the truth, but found that truth did not always match what she was taught by precept or in church: it was both simpler and more complicated.

It had pained and puzzled her as a child, until as a girl she too began accepting that there are conventions in truth as in anything else. As a young wife and "lady" she saw this as an expedient she must convert into permanence, and former critics were soon applauding her for observing the conventions they were accustomed to obey.

(FL:66)

Ellen's entry into fictitiousness, or into textuality, entails her remoulding by the Roxburghs, as well as her own compliance with this process. ¹ Thus she is not only made into a fiction, but she colludes with this creation, and becomes to a great extent her own "author". Her own strength of character, and her regard for her husband, prompt her to persevere. The first two extracts to appear from Ellen's journal ("favoured by old Mrs Roxburgh as a

source of self-knowledge and an instrument for self-correction") indicate her rapid development as a self-reflexive "text":

I will make a start today at writing in this clean book which I hope not to spoil because I owe it to Them.

(FL:65)

Next she writes in "the journal which from being a virtue was becoming a vice":

"... I would like to see my husband as perfect. I will not have him hurt. I am better able to endure wounds, and wld [sic] take them upon myself instead. Women on the whole are stronger because more knowing than men, for all the knowledge men lay claim to. ..."

(FL:67)

"This clean book" patently stands for Ellen's own tabula rasa of cultural and moral innocence. The unexceptionable urge "not to spoil" this incipient text soon falls under the ironic scrutiny of the extradiegetic narrative, when writing wryly recognises its own kind. I suggest that it is the "vice" of textuality - with all the equivocations that weave the Whitean fiction - which grants to Ellen the "endurance", the "strength", and above all the "knowingness" (as distinct from "knowledge") of which she intuitively writes.

It is Ellen's faculty for matching fiction with the exigencies of experience that makes her stronger than those characters who seem merely to "read", and who thereby suffer

the interpretative delusions, or the taunts of deferred revelation, which narrative may induce or inflict. Austin Roxburgh, for instance, is so governed by his reading as to consider death to be a "literary conceit". (FL:48,67,186) The "Aborigine" spear that strikes him down is a salutary shaft of irony. Two "readers" who suffer the agonies of being incompletely informed (a case of narrative deferment) are the gossips Mrs Merivale and Miss Scrimshaw whose speculations "frame" the novel's narrative.² The final sentence of the book could be a wry comment on the futility of interpretation by the avid but misguidedly literal and material reader:

[Miss Scrimshaw] ... was too engrossed, her onyx going click click, shooting down possible doubts; for however much crypto-eagles aspire to soar, and do in fact, through thoughtscape and dream, their human nature cannot but grasp at any circumstantial straw which may indicate an ordered universe.
(FL:366)

Commenting on White's ironic point of view, Bliss writes of his "reticence to endorse unequivocally either his protagonists or the precepts they voice." (Bliss 1986:192) She presents an example of syllepsis from the early novel Happy Valley (also cited by Alan Lawson) which demonstrates White's customary ironic distance from his characters: Mrs Moriarty is described as "moulten [sic] with self-pity and sweat". (HV p.124) (Bliss 1986:188)³ The second and bathetic term of the double supply diminishes the force of the

emotional condition represented, and detracts from the valency of Mrs Moriarty's feelings. The lexical ambiguity of "moulten" compounds the witty disparagement. The narrative attitude is identical to Dickens's in his well-known syllepsis from The Pickwick Papers where Miss Bolo, a shallow creature of "an ancient and whist-like appearance", loses at cards and goes home "in a flood of tears and a sedan chair."

Bliss demonstrates that no protagonist is immune to White's "generally ironic perspective". (Bliss 1986:193) Laura Trevelyan of Voss, for instance, although she is favoured by the sympathies of the implied author, receives her share of ironic narrative treatment: ⁴

Even in the novel's final scene, where [Laura] appears as a fountainhead of knowledge, strength, and love, she is still a tiresome and dowdy woman who sermonizes and then wonders aloud about her lozenges. The juxtaposition of Laura's spiritual beauty and scratchy throat in this passage is related to the sylleptic pattern already identified.
(Bliss 1986:193) (emphasis added)

The second sentence supports my application in this thesis of the term syllepsis to broader narrative and thematic structures and not just to the formally defined rhetorical figure. In this instance the sylleptic effect is caused by the antanaclasis that turns on "air" and on the ambivalence between literal and figurative kinds of "inspiration":

"Voss did not die," Miss Trevelyan replied. "He is there still, in the country, and always will."

be. His legend will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it."

"Come, come. If we are not certain of the facts, how is it possible to give the answers?"

"The air will tell us," Miss Trevelyan said.

By which time she had grown hoarse, and fell to wondering aloud whether she had brought her lozenges.

(Voss:448)

Laura's interrogator, intent on "facts" and "answers", is another version of Miss Scrimshaw, disappointed of the "circumstantial" evidence which she needs in order to "indicate an ordered universe". Both of these literal-minded investigators suffer the delusion that text, like the concept of a universal "order", should console its reader through resolution and conclusiveness. White's sylleptic habit, and the ironic narrative stance that it exemplifies, indicates a polyphonic textuality which does not admit resolution into unequivocal closure.

Many of Patrick White's syllepses express a degree of disparagement, and even of narrative "malice". One of my premises in this thesis is that ironic detachment in his narrative voice reflects the potential for malice that White perceives in a world of conflicting and equivocal discourse. Chapter Two will specifically examine this potential. In the final chapter I shall hope to demonstrate that, for White, discursive construction of meaning is essentially a fictional practice, and that, in recognising and celebrating this, he finds a consoling (though not a resolving) vision. This is a view which translates the vicissitudes of discours-

ive conflict and unreliability into a carnivalesque laughter, such as he describes sharing, in childhood, with his family retainer Sid Kirk: "black laughter for a bleak but hilarious world which we understood in our bowels, as warm, deluded Australia could not." (FG:34) I shall argue, finally, that the consoling vision is the spirit of authorship, that it is, precisely, a celebration of fiction.

The analyses that follow are intended to establish connections between White's sylleptic patterns, his irony, his construction of a dialectical polyphony, and the moral equivocations - both in narrative and in dialogue - that reflect dialectical tension. I shall make no pretence at exegesis of White's "spiritual vision", nor of the psychological dimension of the author and his characters. My interest is in what the author calls "the black in White" (FG:33): the wit that offends, the narrative that embraces scurrilous gossip, and the fiction that denies a comfortable and complacent "read".

In the following passages from Voss an intimately pensive moment in Laura Trevelyan's thoughts is qualified by the juxtaposition of middle-class domestic discourse with the squalid but vivacious activities of low-life characters, and eventually with mysterious suggestions of Dionysian rites.

Going at once to change her dress, Laura Trevelyan regretted all picnics. A strong day was bending the trees. The garden was a muddle of tossed

green, at which she frowned, patting a sleeve, or smoothing hair. Most days she walked in the garden, amongst the camellia bushes, which were already quite advanced, and the many amorphous, dark bushes of all big hospitable gardens, and the scurfy native paperbarks. At one end of the garden were some bamboos, which a sea-captain had brought to Mr Bonner from India.

(Voss:54)

The third sentence combines two spatial contexts - Laura's room and the garden - with her own state of disturbed emotion. The intimations of the numinous that emanate from the "muddle of tossed green" correlate with her emotional confusion; her frown suggests her disapproval of these material and psychological "muddles". Her stylised grooming motions, "patting a sleeve, or smoothing hair", are formal gestures at order, but this ritual seems ineffectual in the context of the wild garden and of her implied emotional disarray.

The sentence could be regarded as implicitly sylleptic: the phrase "she frowned" would be the "supplier" term, relating with equal force to the garden and to Laura's appearance. Composed in the sylleptic formula it might read: "Laura frowned at the garden and her dress." (The spirit of sylleptic conjunction is supported by an assonant link with the "tossed green" of the garden that appears in the next paragraph: "She was pale, but handsome, in moss green.")

(Voss:54)

Laura's stylised "patting" and "smoothing" is followed by a sentence in the register and the rhythm of domestic

propriety: "Most days she walked in the garden, amongst the camellia bushes, which were already quite advanced ..." But the anaphoristic resonance between "Most days" and the "strong day" of two lines previous promises a contrasting exception - a possible contradiction and negating of the consolation sought in the idiom of propriety. And while the sentence quoted here continues describing the garden from the point of view of colonial civilisation, the combined connotative force of "amorphous dark bushes" and "scurfy native paperbarks" amplifies the promise of the contradiction.

Another hint of experience beyond the constraints of the Bonner ménage follows: "At one end of the garden were some bamboos, which a sea-captain had brought to Mr Bonner from India." Acknowledgement of the exotic is all but stifled, however, by the narrative style, particularly in the subordinate clause. Here the use of the dative preposition magnifies and solemnises Mr Bonner as the recipient. The anonymity of the sea-captain and the sense of a ritual of tribute (reinforced by the rank of the donor) represent the bamboos as subject to Mr Bonner's mercantile governance. The recitative rhythm of the clause, as well as the rather mythologising, non-nautical register of "sea-captain", suggests that this explanation of the bamboos' provenance is part of the family idiom - a rehearsed locution, to be recited on occasions. However, it might be argued that this

formal quality has an effect similar to that of Laura's grooming gestures, and to the hypnotic propriety of her walking among the camellias. As an affirmation of the proprieties it subtly fails to convince, to console, or to repress the unformulated disquiet brooding in her thoughts.

The next sentence begins in a domestic register of horticultural observation: "Originally a few roots, the bamboos had grown into a thicket ...", but it finally asserts a numinous "voice" over the domestic idiom: the prodigious bamboos "filled the air with overwhelming featheriness". The unspecified quality of this phenomenon provides a synaesthetic susurrus that is not governed by horticultural taxonomy, or by domestic order.

By now White has Laura fully steeped in her reverie. For the moment there is no trace of the tutelary domestic idiom. The frequentative mode of "Even on still evenings, a feathery colloquy of the bamboos was still audible," suggests that Laura habitually listens to this numinous "discourse". But she is represented as a dutiful character. She frowns at the turmoil in nature and in her feelings. The passage finds her in an ambivalent position which anticipates her future role both as headmistress of a school (reader of prose), and as mystic oracle ("reader" of "air"). Laura is the novel's chief seer because of her own constant "double supply" - to the realm of mystic vision and to the exigencies of orthodox social discourse.

The rest of the paragraph presents an intrusive and subversive carnival at the bottom of the garden in which the squalid activities of trespassers collude in the assault on Laura's sensibility. Syllepsis again stylises this conjunction (which is also figured in the tacit pun between "collision and collusion"):

Even on still evenings, a feathery colloquy of the bamboos was clearly audible, with sometimes a collision of the stiff masts, and human voices, those of passers-by who had climbed the wall, and lay there eating pigs' trotters, and making love.

(Voss:54)

These are the "voices" that articulate the "discourse" of the bamboo thicket. The susurrus is subversive to the proprietary values of the Bonner household; the grotesque intruders have invaded from "beyond the pale" of the private garden wall. The sylleptic conjunction aggravates their offence, which is against not only the law, but also the social codes of public morality and good taste.

The revelation, for Laura, of insights that are alien to such codes reaches two climaxes, in which she comes in for some ironic authorial treatment. The first climactic moment is her discovery of a woman's bonnet and of Rose Portion, the "emancipist servant". The narration of reverie now locates her abruptly and physically in the thicket:

Once Laura had found a woman's bonnet at the foot of the bamboos. A tawdry thing. Once she had found Rose Portion. It is me, miss, said her servant's form; it was that airless in the house.

Then Rose was pressing through the thicket of bamboos.

(Voss:54)

The first sentence and the sentence fragment involve Laura intimately with evidence of the night-trespassing. They also formulate a tension between those activities and the idiom of censure. The anaphora in "Once Laura had found"/"Once she had found" disingenuously links Rose Portion with the bonnet. The sentence fragment links the discovery of both with an intrusive vestige of the tutelary idiom: if the hat is a synecdochic substitution for Rose, its disparagement tacitly applies to her. If again, this information may be rendered in the sylleptic equation - "Once Laura had found a tawdry woman's bonnet and Rose Portion" - the suggestion is made plain.

Rose's "free direct discourse" (direct speech "shorn of its conventional orthographic cues") adds to the ambiguity that invests the bamboo thicket (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:110): "It is me miss, said her servant's form; it was that airless in the house." The utterance could be located in Laura's reminiscence, or as an element of the diagetive narrative, or attributed directly, with narrative achronicity, to Rose herself. (This sense of ambiguity is encouraged in the next sentence, "Then Rose was pressing through the bamboos", by the deictic immediacy of the consequential "then" and the continuous past tense of the verb.)

One effect of the narrative ambiguity is to reflect the troubled state of Laura's own conscience. Laura is one of those Whitean characters whom critics customarily refer to as "initiates". Rose Portion is her "guide" in the process of epistemological growth which constitutes her "initiation". But Laura's present confusion is indicated by the vestiges of socially orthodox idiom and behaviour. The maintenance of her socially dominant role is implied by her active agency in "finding" Rose. It is also conveyed by Rose's formal identification of herself, her dutiful explanation, and her immediate emerging, possibly to join her mistress. The title of rank and the synecdoche ("her servant's form") diminish Rose's independent entity and recall her to domestic governance.

Nevertheless, though Rose has not yet become Laura's familiar and her instructor in the ways of charity, her physical presence profoundly disturbs her young mistress, especially after the revelation of the servant's pregnancy which occurs just prior to this episode. Laura has been troubled by her own mixed responses to the "emancipist's" physical condition:

But Rose remained, her breasts moving in her brown dress. Laura Trevelyan had continued to feel repelled. It was the source of great unhappiness, because frequently she was also touched. She would try to keep her eyes averted ... It is the bodies of these servants, she told herself in some hopelessness and disgust ... I will put all such things out of my mind, she decided; or am I a

prig? So she wondered unhappily, and how she might correct her nature.

Now, when this calamity had felled the unfortunate Rose, Laura Trevelyan was more than ever unhappy.

(Voss:53)

The dialectical effect of the grotesque body in White's writing will be considered specifically in Chapter Four. For the present analysis it is sufficient to observe how Laura's reverie reflects her confusion between the exigencies of domestic order and the fascinations proffered by the unknown, for which the bamboo thicket is a symbolic locus, and Rose's "calamity" a moral one. Her reverie constitutes a kind of moral review, in which she is tormented by the codified constraints on her own potential for human sympathy.

The remainder of the paragraph presents the bamboo thicket, its discourse, and its denizens, as unknown territory which is both mysteriously fascinating and sensually repulsive to Laura. The second of the two climactic moments is prepared in a lyrically sensual idiom in which humanity and nature are combined in an atmosphere which is free of social and moral blandishment:

On occasions the night would be full of voices, and unexplained lights. The moist earth was pressed at the roots of the bamboos. There were the lazy, confident voices of men, and the more breathless, women's ones.

(Voss:54)

Laura's exploration has brought her from the idiom and manners of propriety to an unorthodox, even "dionysian", atmosphere in which human activity and discourse are reinterpreted as coterminous with nature. The repetition of "press" suggests Rose's part in the accumulation of sensuousness, and "breathless women's voices" transforms the airlessness that she had suffered in the house into the quick breath of sexual passion. This of course illustrates the contrast between the constraints of that establishment and the license enjoyed at the bottom of the garden. In Laura's abrupt and climactic encounter with Jack Slipper the odd-job man, this contrast is pointedly dramatised, and her exploratory courage is tested and somewhat compromised:

I have give you a fright, miss, Jack Slipper once said, and got up, from where he had been propped upon his elbow beside the darkness. He was smoking. Laura had felt quite choked.

(Voss:54)

Jack Slipper dominates the moment and the dialogue. He is not "found" by Laura, as is Rose, but actively presents himself, and insolently comprehends her uneasiness in the dark garden. He is master of the bamboo thicket, a domestic Pan. Laura's reaction to the smoke signifies emotional distress as well as physical revulsion, but most significantly it represents a contrast in values: Rose had found the house stuffy; Laura chokes in the garden.

The message is that, although Laura enjoys a penetrative vision, substantiated by illicit (though merely vicarious) experience, she is prevented either by her own nature, or by the importunities of her situation, from full immersion in this alternative realm of the senses.

Breathing, and air, are recurrent motifs in Voss. The novel opens with Rose Portion's monumentally described respirations: "'There is a man here, miss, asking for your uncle,' said Rose. And stood breathing." (Voss:1) It ends, as I have shown, with Laura mystically invoking "the air" as an oracular medium of inspiration, while needing a lozenge for her throat. ⁵

The amount of choking that Laura does seems to suggest a qualitative difference between the active protagonists, who are great "breathers", and this passive, vicarious, "visionary", and authorial character, who, as a foster mother and as a custodian of the famous explorer's memory, is a kind of trustee. Just as Laura's penetrative vision - as her reverie presents it - is stimulated by vicarious (and illicit) knowledge, so is her spiritual marriage with Voss a vicarious relationship, and her acquisition of a child occurs by proxy.

The following moral comment (from a later episode) seems to apply generally to Laura's vicarious and authorial role in the book. Voss has just been given a somewhat

strained "lift" back from Point Piper in the Bonners' carriage, and is relieved to escape the carriage party:

[He] seemed to be enjoying himself. He was drinking down the evening air, as if no one could appreciate what he had suffered. Even his nostrils despised.

...
 Laura did not speak, because she was ashamed. It was as if she had become personally involved. So the sensitive witness of some unfortunate incident will take the guilt upon himself, and feel the need to expiate it. So the young woman was stirring miserably in her stuffy corner, and would have choked, she felt, if they had not arrived ...
 (Voss:73)

This vicarious assumption of guilt (which could be seen as enacted in the adoption of Mercy, Rose Portion's illegitimate child) is a peculiarly authorial trait. Coupled with Laura's role as the steward and interpreter of Voss's memory and of his public reputation, it seems to suggest that Laura is an avatar of her own author. Laura Trevelyan represents Patrick White; she is one of the voices of Australia's historical conscience. This role seems to be fulfilled when at the end of the novel she is patently represented as an oracular figure, and attracts a group who yearn variously for material knowledge, for inspiration, beauty, love, for the spiritual succour of a "promised shore". (Voss:446)

... individuals, of great longing but little daring, suspecting that the knowledge and strength of the headmistress might be accessible to them, began to approach her by degrees. Even her beauty was translated for them into terms they could understand. As the night poured in through the windows and the open doors, her eyes were overflowing

with a love that might have appeared supernatural, if it had not been for the evidence of her earthly body: the slightly chapped skin of her neck, and the small hole in the finger of one glove ...

(Voss:444)

Laura's answers to Mr Ludlow, on the final page, include an assertion in the sylleptic spirit which seems to elide the categorical distinctions, not only of present and future, but of fiction and reality, and of protagonist and author. She dismisses Mr Ludlow's witty play on the taxonomy of grammatical tense:

"Oh, yes, a country with a future. But when does the future become present? That is what always puzzles me."

"Now."

"How - now?" asked Mr Ludlow.

"Every moment that we live and breathe, and love, and suffer, and die."

(Voss:448)

The lexical riddle that "puzzles" Mr Ludlow is solved by a bold yoking. Not only could this typify the sylleptic licence that White takes with verbal categories, but it could seem to assert a conjunction of text and life. If "the air" is a narrative agent - "the air will tell us" - then this yoking of an extra-textual future with the narrative present is a proairetic device. It implies that narrative discourse continues beyond the text of the novel; that fiction is an all-embracing dispensation which, like Voss who "is there still, ... and always will be," rejects the contrivance of formal closure.

An extensive version of "double supply", which again elides categories of narrative, occurs in Voss when Laura, in the hallucination of her "brain fever", rides off with Voss's expedition:

So the party rode down the terrible basalt stairs of the Bonners' deserted house, and onward. Sometimes the horses' hooves would strike sparks from the outcrops of jagged rock.

(Voss:358)

The subsequent spiritual conjunction between Laura and Voss, I suggest, may be interpreted also as an intimacy between an "author" and a protagonist: it may be construed as an exemplum of authorship. Laura's protective devotion to the explorer in this narrative "double supply" prefigures her stewardship of his memory and repute:

"I shall not fail you," said Laura Trevelyan.
"Even if there are times when you wish me to, I shall not fail you."

(Voss:363)

"You will not leave me then?" he asked.
"Not for a moment," she said. "Never, never."

So they rode on above the dust, in which they were writing their own legend.

(Voss:366-7)

Similarly, in Riders in the Chariot, Himmelfarb's moral unease supplies him doubly, to both the landscape of tortured memory, and the pathos of Mary Hare's stumbling compassion in her dingy drawing-room. This variant of the syllep-

tic pattern achieves an effect of intimacy between the narrative and the interior psychic condition of the protagonist. Mary Hare and Himmelfarb are at Xanadu, discussing the nature of human evil, and a passage of free indirect discourse has conveyed the refugee's thoughts on their "similar mission". This is represented in spatial and kinetic metaphor: "Approaching from opposite directions, it was the same darkness and the same marsh which threatened to engulf their movements, but ... the precious parcel of secrets carried by each must only be given at the end into certain hands." (RC:304) Diegetic narrative then takes over, and the reassertion of objective reality is sylleptically fused with Himmelfarb's emergence from reverie:

Although the Jew blundered on towards the frontier through the mist of experience, he emerged at one point, and found himself on the hard causeuse in the little sitting-room at Xanadu. There he roused himself, and touched his fellow traveller, and said:

"I am going now. I would like to persuade you that the simple acts we have learnt to perform daily are the best protection against evil."

(RC:304)

The sylleptic conjunction is fixed by the verb "emerged", which acts literally with the kinetics of "blundered", "towards", and "through", and which also acts figuratively - in Himmelfarb's "return" from thought. The adjective "hard", which signals terra firma, high ground, and safety, in contrast with the disorienting and treacherous terrain of

memory's "mist", triggers the lexical and thematic double supply.

If there is bathos in Himmelfarb's "emergence", it provides sympathetic relief, for the geography of his imaginary quest is uncomfortably reminiscent of his narrow escape from the Nazi concentration camp. (Even the passive mode of his "emergence" here - "found himself on the hard causeuse" - reflects the hapless passivity of his deliverance from Friedensdorf.) The gentle bathos of his return to "the little sitting-room" also harmonises with the tenor of his advice to Miss Hare. In this case, White has tactically used the sylleptic function in a more extended form to merge levels of narration, and to juxtapose different degrees of experience. It is also a tactic that signifies the author's intimate sympathising with a favoured character. We shall see, in the third chapter, how Himmelfarb in fact embodies the moral and spiritual responsibility and torment of an "authorial" conscience.

Another interesting variant of White's sylleptic habit occurs, in The Twyborn Affair, at Ursula Untermeyer's dinner table. The narrative focaliser is Eadith Trist:

She looked across, and found Nora Quirk looking her way, composing her blenched lips on her denture. Again Eadith looked, and Ursula suggested some oriental bird stilled by the eighteenth century on the surface of an English artificial lake. Attracted by a spectacle, cattle were descending the other side of a ha-ha, amongst them Reg Quirk, his Australian museau de boeuf parted.

(TA:388)

White invests the ambivalent Eadith/Eddie with the kind of magician's gaze ("She looked", "Again Eadith looked") which is the prerogative of an authorial imagination. Within Eadith's gaze, the descriptive language moves from the bathetic realism of Nora's denture, through an elaborate simile, to an extended metaphor, where the "look" - the authorial gaze - is ontologically transformed into a production, an "attraction", a "spectacle". It produces its own little fictional narrative. Looking and performing (the equivalents perhaps of reading and writing) are yoked together in this sequence, as are a "real" and an imaginary context. This version of "double supply" is provided by Eddie Twyborn's faculty for Whitean authorship, which comprises an ambivalent identity, and a consequent apperception of the unstable, provisional, and fictional quality of his world.

There is a distinct pattern, in White's writing, of tension between those characters (such as Ellen Gluyas/Roxburgh and Eddie/Eudoxia/Eadith) who are conscious of ambivalence, of dialectic, and of epistemological variety, and those who cleave to the constitutive and consoling familiars of fixed identity, hypostatized cultural forms and moral precepts, and a monological episteme. The latter preference is inevitably attended by prejudice, bigotry, and snobbery, racial discrimination, chauvinistic nationalism, and xenophobia. Like White himself, the fictitious characters who

understand dialectical tension, and who conduct their lives on the unstable and ambivalent limines of cultural convention, are always subject to malicious abuse by those of fixed identity. This is how Eddie Twyborn, at the docks in Perth, expresses his own estrangement from the unequivocal:

Wharfies sweating round their hairy navels. I am the stranger of all time, for all such hairy bellies an object of contempt - a Pom, or worse, a suspected wonk.

(TA:142)

In the following extract from The Twyborn Affair, White's black humour savours the naivety of an Australian couple at a weekend house party in England. The humour also explores the cruelty of an invidious social hierarchy. Eadith Trist, the ambivalent and "authorial" character, observes the malice in the amusement. Reg and Nora Quirk, the Australian guests, earnestly demonstrate "the Australian coo-ee", having been encouraged by "the English", who are syl-
leptically "quivering with daring, brandy, and malice": (TA: 388)

"Can you do it, Nora?" Maufey enquired of his still not fully controlled puppet.

"I'll say I can!" Nora nearly giggled her head off, snapping her denture shut in time to avert disaster.

Reg only muttered "I reckon ..." and plodded off in the direction of the copse below.

After ploughing through shaven lawns, shaggy with dew by this time of night, and reaching the descent into natural grass, beeches, and darkness, he turned and called, "Come on Nora, let 'em have ut!"

Nora filled her lungs, which everyone saw were considerable, and let fly through the Wiltshire dark, her navel straining at her Schiaparelli.

"Coo-ee?" she called.

And Reg called back, "Coo-EE!"

The upright English were falling about inside their skins, while the Australians called back and forth like a couple of currawongs nourished on Wahroonga milk.

(TA:389)

White's sardonic tone embraces all the parties involved here. He favours neither side in the perceived cultural gulf between English and Australian. Nevertheless, malice, the international vice, is ascribed to the English, while the Quirks are the socially ingenuous buffoons. The malice, furthermore, is cognate with the sylleptic competence of Patrick White himself, and "the English" wield a quality of control over Reg and Nora, which I shall characterise as relatively "authorial". They orchestrate the self-parody of the Australians, and they enjoy the relative aesthetic sophistication that can appreciate such parody. Their urbanitas is typified by the syllepsis that describes them: "quivering with daring, brandy, and malice". It is hardly a dazzling example of sylleptic wit; it serves chiefly to represent their flawed pretensions at social "brilliance". (It may be interesting to consider that Mrs Moriarty and Mrs Bolo, by contrast, have syllepsis wrought upon them as the dull "victims" of a more detached authorial wit.)

Eadith Trist/Eddie Twyborn (who shares both "sexual ambivalence" and "insight" with his/her author) is, however,

the truly "authorial character" in this novel. This ambiguous persona, as we shall see in Chapter Five, is an explicit vehicle for an allegory of Whitean authorship. She is the narrative focaliser here, and it is her sylleptic gaze that presents the English as "quivering with daring, brandy, and malice". Also it is Eadith, the specialist in ambivalence, both textual and moral, who interprets the event with the moral clarity of an author: ⁶

Only Eadith Trist had watched a currawong perching on an angophora's elbow, his free claw clenched on the finch whose head he was chewing.
(TA:389)

The following two analyses, of extracts from Voss, demonstrate White's interest in cultural prejudice. In the first passage, malice attends a petty social triumph; in the second example, adherence to convention results in betrayal. Much wit occurs in both passages, and at different levels of humour no protagonist is untouched. The explorer, however, is explicitly victimised, so that his embarrassment focuses the theme of conflict between habits of language behaviour.

In the first extract, Voss inconveniently interrupts the picnic party on its way to Point Piper:

Oh dear, everybody said, and even held hands.
But they pulled up. They had to.
"Good afternoon, Mr Voss," said Mrs Bonner, putting out her head. "This is a surprise. You are quite wicked, you know, with your surprises. When a little note. And Mr Bonner not here."

Mr Voss was opening his mouth. His lips were pale from walking. His expression suggested that he had not yet returned from thought.

"But Mr Bonner," he was forming words, "is not at the store no more than here. He is gone away, they say. He is gone home."

He resented bitterly the foreign language into which he had been thrown back thus precipitately.

He is gone away, certainly," said Mrs Bonner gaily, "but is not gone home."

Occasions could make her mischievous.

Belle giggled, and turned her face towards the hot upholstery of the dark carriage. They were beautifully protected in that padded box.

(Voss:55)

Voss suffers embarrassment, and his gaucherie provides some humour, but the real exposure in the passage is experienced by the carriage party, through White's sardonic parody of their manners and his final ironic shaft at their sense of security. The carriage provides circumstantial protection from the unfamiliar, but the suggestion in the dialogue is that a particular language behaviour is a more fundamental vehicle for the safe conveyance of the values it articulates.

Mrs Bonner's sentence fragments, "When a little note. And Mr Bonner not here" are typical of White's presentation of (invariably female) middle class protestations of codified propriety. The aposiopesis suggests a paradigmatic range of related precepts, beyond the immediate contingency of practical communication. (As we shall see in the next chapter, this manner of speech, when used by Mrs Jolley in Riders in the Chariot, becomes a litany of treasured images, which are invoked as the articles of her material faith.)

Later, when Voss's discomfort is established, Mrs Bonner collects herself sufficiently to exercise her wit at his expense, responding to his speech in a quasi-aphoristic manner that mirrors her self-confidence. Her correction of a fact sounds more like the droll correction of a solecism. It produces Belle's mirth, and a sense of security in the domestic language, which is attributed through an implicitly sylleptic paralogism to the haven provided by the carriage. Ironically, convention itself causes Voss's invasion of this shelter, for Mrs Bonner feels obliged to offer him a lift to Point Piper.

In the second example, an episode at the picnic particularly foregrounds this drama between kinds of discourse. Voss is to be "delivered" by Laura Trevelyan and Una Pringle to Mr Bonner and his circle, and discursive tension is anticipated:

"But I would interrupt," protested the German.
 "What are they talking about?"
 "Whatever men do talk about," said Laura.
 "Business," suggested Una.
 Some situations were definitely not his.
 "And the English packet. And the weather."
 "And vegetables. And sheep."

(Voss:60)

Laura is distinctly unhelpful, and shares an amused detachment with the narrative commentary. In the last three lines the narrative and the young women fall into a sylleptic collusion which both teases the explorer and mocks the conversation of the gentlemen. Voss is to be rendered up,

hapless, a sacrifice to the discourse maintained by the grazier class of men.

His alienation from the colonists is signified in many ways, but the exigencies of their social code, represented especially in the speech of Messrs Bonner, Pringle, and Pitt, are the most inimical to his personal integrity. Mr Bonner is represented as feeling ashamed of his protégé, for no more explicit reason than the German's difference - emphasised of course by his arrival with Laura, who is already established as unusual and unpopular with her acquaintances. Consequently, to maintain his position in the prevailing mercantile discourse, Mr Bonner is constrained first to articulate the expedition in terms of that discourse by introducing the respectable names of its sponsors, and finally to dispel the tension of incredulity with a weak and patronising jest: "It is a great event ... and may well prove historical. If they bring back their own bones. Eh, Voss?" (Voss:61) The intention is purely phatic, in the sense of reaffirming solidarity within the established code, and it succeeds, for "Everybody laughed". But it entails the diminution and petty betrayal of Voss, and the narrative records Mr Bonner's pusillanimous hypocrisy: he was "relieved to have made his sacrifice with an almost imperceptible movement of the knife". (Voss:61)

The dynamics involved here occur throughout Patrick White's writing - sometimes as betrayal of a specific value

in favour of a prevalent discourse; at other times (in pursuit of honesty) as the deflation of perceived pretention, or the exposure of a dissemblance. In the present case the draper's behaviour and awkward position are similar to the manufacturer Harry Rosetree's denial of Himmelfarb, and of Judaism, in Riders in the Chariot. Mr Bonner, the Rose-trees, Elizabeth Hunter and her children in The Eye of the Storm, The Vivisector's Ma and Pa Duffield, and the autobiographical persona in "The Age of a Wart (from Three Uneasy Pieces) are just a few who share, in varying degrees of culpability, the guilt of betrayal.

As a rule the guilty party is represented as caught in a dilemma, often between socially codified and personal values. To all of these characters, neither wholly condemned nor endorsed by their author, White's balefully aphoristic comment on Mr Bonner's behaviour may be applied:

So men will sweat for some secret gift they have failed to reveal to others, and will make subtle attempts openly to condemn what is precious to them.

(Voss:61)

The question of malice, rapacity, and betrayal as active ingredients in the language of social discourse will be examined in detail in the next chapter. A later chapter is devoted to White's attitude to fiction itself as such a discourse, and to his perception of the novelist as gossip. It will suffice here to conclude with some pointed examples

of the functional role that syllepsis and related structures play in White's representation of codes of language, and in the dialogue between the values that such codes articulate.

The figure of syllepsis may be regarded, because of its status as a "bon mot", as native to the social stratum that enjoys a degree of literary competence, or of articulacy. It is always a self-conscious utterance, which calls attention to its structure, and to the urbanitas of its conceit. Its parodic tendency, however, tends to expose the case of inflated pretension, of mannered literariness, or of petrified social convention.

In the following example from Riders in the Chariot, the limpid and effete quality of the syllepsis functions more as a reflection of the dilettante character of Norbert Hare, the builder of "Xanadu", than as an informative description of his guests:

His Pleasure dome, he called it, his Xanadu, and recited the appropriate verses to lady guests as they strolled in their veils and the afternoon, inspecting the freshly-laid foundations of porous stone.

(RC:15)

The elegant languor of the perambulation might as well have been metaphorised as "in their afternoon veils", or "in the veiled afternoon", but the specific achievement of the sylleptic formula is (while weakly denotative) its connotation of effete dilettantism. The equation presents the resources for a potential metaphor, but they remain dis-

crete, as if the working of a poetic mind is revealed, instead of the finished product. The epigrammatic quality, inherent in syllepsis, also gives this example a distinction greater than is warranted by its ostensible meaning. The formula conveys the ennui of amateur aesthetics; it is a gesture at the frustrated life and vision of Norbert Hare, for whom "The fragment, it appeared, possessed ... a greater distinction than the whole." (RC:14) Appropriately, one of the terms - "veils" - is synecdochic. (This appears to be the case in very many sylleptic equations.)

The next example shows the potential for metaphoric suggestion within the sylleptic equation. The social class to which the Hares belong is described as "those who enjoy nerves and invested income". (RC:24) As is usually the case, two semantic categories are linked: "Invested income" denotes economic status, and "nerves" denotes a finely wrought sensibility. The first term, "nerves", relates figuratively to the verb "to enjoy". As a laconic epigram it mimics a discourse of privilege; it evokes an air of valetudinous self-indulgence. As in the previous example the sylleptic formula seems both to parody and to comment on a need to fill the vacuum of ennui through the fabrication of stylistic conceit. A wry narrative intrusion is signified by the bathetic subversion of the witty metaphor through its conjunction with the more purely literal component, the enjoyment of "invested income".

A ball is held at "Xanadu" for Mary Hare's visiting cousin Eustace Cleugh. Mrs Hare engineers his partnership on the floor with the striking Miss Antill. Mary observes his timid reluctance and detachment: "Now here was her cousin, Eustace Cleugh, netted by the music and Miss Antill." (RC:31) Helen Antill's expected social triumph does not occur - "... could the bird have died before the kill?" Another syllepsis follows, in which the synecdoche radiates meaning from the dance floor into the broader fabric of social conventions: "As Miss Antill clutched her partner's expensive cloth and the travesty of experience ..." (RC:31)

The "expensive cloth" signifies Eustace Cleugh's wealth and Miss Antill's (or the general company's) appreciation of it, but also, and by so doing, it suggests the fragmented vision of a society that is accustomed to appraise the whole by the value of its parts. Even, in contrast with the context of social sublimation in dancing, and the formalised suggestions of romance, the synecdoche reduces the tone of the moment to sartory and shopkeeping. Indeed this syllepsis is very like Pope's - "Or stain her honour,/Or her new brocade" - where haberdashery bathetically subverts the moral force of "honour".

In the case of Miss Antill, though, the moral element - "experience" - is more intricately ambiguous as it is negatively qualified by "travesty", and it is uncertain from what point of view this assessment comes - from the debutante

herself, or from an alliance between Miss Hare and her author.

In either case, the voracious despair in the clutching is substantiated, but succour is denied by the undermining irony - Eustace Cleugh cannot be won, and his expensive suiting offers nothing but its own qualities. The triumph of the social coup is as hollow as an empty coat; indeed, as intimated by the little mirrors that decorate Helen Antill's dress, the successes of social discourse are tautologically located in self-reflection, in the stuff of its own fabric.

Mary Hare gives a glimpse, elsewhere in the novel, of Helen Antill in later years. Her intuitive understanding ingenuously presents Miss Antill as the trapped subject of a purely material discourse:

"She went away, and married, but somebody we had never heard of, and lived in a house, and had children, and buried her husband. Once I saw her looking out of the window at something."

(RC:11)

The story of Eustace Cleugh, the cousin who disappointed at the ball, is more equivocal and "literary" than that of Miss Antill: its "closure" is sylleptically contrived:

... soon after the ball at Xanadu, Cousin Eustace resumed his tour of the world, as had always been intended, and took refuge finally on the island of Jersey, with a housekeeper, and what eventually became a famous collection of porcelain.

(RC:32-3)

The difference between these two narratives is that the worldly Miss Antill is imprisoned in a dull monology, while the contemplative Mr Cleugh is stylised within his own elegant and contrapuntal conceit. However, both are driven into bathos by the machinations of social convention, for which Mrs Hare (the hostess of the ball), "... guiding, as she was convinced ..." is a motive force. (RC:31)

Here is a syllepsis from The Twyborn Affair which presents the usual ambivalent conjunction, but which is also compared with an unequivocal alternative that might, if attainable, transcend the bathetic imprisonment of self-reflection. Eudoxia Vatazes is the narrator:

"This," [Angelos Vatatzes] almost screams, "this French post-card is nothing! La Côte Morte!" Laughing, but unbalanced by his laughter, this horrible dessicated wretch, to whom I am committed by fate and orgasm - never love.

(TA:36)

The multiple persona of Eddie Twyborn/Eudoxia Vatatzes, I shall argue in Chapter Five, is a kind of personified syllepsis. He/she is always an ambivalent fictional construction and, as such, is ruled by a variety of "authorships", including that of Angelos. "Love" is the unequivocal and desired alternative to the syllepsis, but it is denied by the more material forces - "fate" (or authorship) and lust - which govern Eddie's life. Caught in this sylleptic double-bind, the "text" of Eudoxia can only reflect its own construction. What is more pertinent is the

The threat materialises in the arrival of Laura Trevelyan and her adopted daughter. Her appearance causes equivocal behaviour among the guests, and makes them self-conscious in their dissembling conduct. Their defence against this exposure is to "take refuge" in a malicious paralògism:

As she advanced into the room, some of the ladies ... abandoned their gauzy conversations and greeted her with an exaggerated sweetness or girlishness. Then, resentful of all the solecisms of which they had ever been guilty, and it appeared their memories were full of them, they seized upon the looks of this woman after she had passed, asking one another for confirmation of their own disgust:

"Is she not plain? Is not poor Laura positively ugly? And such a freakish thing to do. As if it were not enough to have become a schoolmistress, to arrive late at Belle's party in that truly hideous dress!"

(Voss:437)

The final sentence could be read as an implicit syllepsis because Laura's profession, her late arrival, and her clothing are yoked together, presenting the kind of false logic which is characteristic of sylleptic expression. A perceived flaw in Laura's character would be the implied supplier term.

A form of narrative "double supply" occurs here too. The generalised attribution of the direct speech weakens the mimetic illusion of a speech event. This seems to create an ambiguity in narrative levels: the women provide a collective focalisation, but their utterance is shared with the diegetic narrative. White contrives, by this ambivalence, to

implicate his narrative voice in the dissembling and equivocal discourse. The speech represents the classic form of gossip: a morally dubious confidence between narrator and narratee, which speculates unreliably about its third person subject.

Patrick White's sylleptic habits seem to articulate an apperception of narrative unreliability, which is prescribed for him by his governing "perpetual dialectic", or polyphony. His narrative typically combines a probing honesty with mannerisms, conceits, and conduct that belong to "the same high social key" in which Boo Davenport's socialite visitors in The Vivisector "chattered against one another". (V:275) ^a

I have suggested that the kind of gratuitous gossip and facetiousness in which such characters indulge is at least partly prompted by the ennui of their lives; it is a means of filling a void, of fabricating significance, of affirming identity. White's description of his original urge to write is formulated in remarkably similar terms, but with the obvious qualitative difference between an educated and earnest young man and the cynical predatory socialite:

... it wasn't so much a case of growing consciousness as a matter of necessity. Surrounded by a vacuum, I needed a world in which to live with the degree of intensity my temperament demanded.

(FG:46)

An overt parallel between White's oeuvre and equivocal social discourse is indicated in a description of Sid Kirk, the husband of his childhood nurse:

Somewhat surprisingly Sid took a dry interest in local scandal ... He stimulated my novelist's imagination in a way that Thackeray would have approved ("there's no good novelist who isn't a good gossip").

(FG:32)

That the writer's imagination is nourished by the mysteries of mundane human activity ("Trivia can be priceless trinkets") is signified by White's remark on an aunt's substitution of approved reading for the scandal paper News of the World: "She did not realise that by introducing me to Myths of Ancient Greece she was only substituting the gods' adulteries, feuds, and murders for those of the wider-ranging British social system." (FG:33)

In the final section of the autobiography White describes a neighbouring small girl: "Sara R. is a born back-fence gossip, a gift to any novelist, perhaps a novelist herself." (FG:254) It is clear that, in White's view, narrative fiction is cognate with morally dubious social discourse. The typology of "the high social key" exemplifies such discourse. The habit of syllepsis definitively locates White's authorial voice in that high-pitched "key". But the constant ironic tone, which may undermine the authority not only of protagonists, but of the narrative itself, would be

a natural consequence of his refusal to admit monological conclusiveness.

The "perpetual dialectic" is modelled by the sylleptic equation, in which characteristically the sublime and the base are juxtaposed, and compete for precarious ascendancy under an ironic narrative dispensation.

Chapter Two: The Habit of Gossip

In response to critics who complain "that my characters are always farting", Patrick White says,

Well we do, don't we? Fart. Nuns fart according to tradition and pâtisserie. I have actually heard one.

(FG:143)

This extraordinary claim is more than a defence of flatulence in fiction; it is a parody of the rules that govern conventional attitudes to veracity and probity in discourse.

White uses the conventional tactic of appealing to authoritative evidence, but this appeal is undermined by three forms of absurdity. First, the specification of nuns is patently absurd, and parodies the practice of citing a conventionally respected party to substantiate a general claim. Second, his appeal to the authority of personal experience - "I have actually heard one" - is ridiculed by the perverse nature of the auditory evidence, which entails the writer lurking, listening, and reporting from "behind the back" of a third party.

The third absurdity occurs in the syllepsis. This case corresponds with the most common definition of the figure - that a word in a sentence refers to two others, to only one of which it is properly related. "According to tradition" is standard idiom; "according to pâtisserie" entails a lexical and logical deviation.

Whatever authority is evoked by "tradition" is undermined by "pâtisserie". It would seem that "tradition" itself is the real referent of these sentences, not flatulence in nuns or in fiction. Axiomatically this response to critics addresses the broader issue of representational conventions, rather than just the specific complaint to which White refers.

"According to tradition" means according to a normative consensus which, in this case, is based on hearsay, or repute. The malicious humour that characterises this particular "tradition" places it in the register of the scurrilous joke, and as such it belongs to the idiomatic stock of popular discourse. The speculative distance from the parties concerned - "talking behind their backs" - characterises this hearsay as a form of gossip.

I have chosen to open with this analysis because the syllepsis is exemplary of its kind and it also introduces the topic of repute and gossip which will be the focus of this chapter. Gossip, for Patrick White, is the substance that "stimulated [his] novelist's imagination". (FG:32) It also appears regularly as a narrative device, as in the opening pages of A Fringe of Leaves, where Mrs Merivale and Miss Scrimshaw discuss Mrs Ellen Roxburgh.

Flaws in the Glass is, in many places, a demonstration of gossip's creative function, as well as an exhibition of

gossip in action. The latter quality led to the book's nickname in certain circles as "Claws in the Arse".

These are some interesting aspects of the reception of Flaws in the Glass as a gossiping text: one is a forensic episode - Sydney Nolan considered charging the author with defamation. However, he chose instead to respond in kind. David Marr recalls the painter, with two other famous "gossipees" (Sir John Kerr and Joan Sutherland), basking in notoriety as the celebrated subjects of literary gossip. He describes them posing for the camera "in the crush bar at Covent Garden: three of White's victims out on the town." (Marr 1991:607) This action seems to transfer control over their repute from the gossip to his subjects. Nolan's subsequent revenge was to exhibit in Australia a group of defamatory pictures on the theme of sodomy.

Another aspect, as the flatulence passage indicates, is that Flaws in the Glass is deliberately provocative. In the following extract, White seems to juxtapose the fiction of Hurtle and Hero with his and Manoly Lascaris's travels in order to savour the thought of a "disgusted" reader. White and his partner have just witnessed a peasant funeral:

It was on Patmos that Hurtle Duffield and Hero Pavloussi experienced a similar shock on being faced with an old woman's corpse. Hurtle noticed the old man pissing against the wind on their way up to the monastery, an image which so disgusted an English lady living in Vienna she wrote to tell me she could not understand how she had ever admired my books. As Hurtle and Hero we also visited the convent on the other side of the island and

were entertained by the abbess--odalisque overlooking the Asia Minor coast.

(FG:180)

The implication seems to be that the reader's moral objection is more outrageous than the incongruously juxtaposed grotesqueries of life and fiction. This fragment of correspondence quoted by Marr refers to Memoirs of Many in One, but the author's eagerness to offend could apply equally well to the "self-portrait":

"It's a very funny subject. It will offend a lot of people. Does them good. I enjoy it. It is religious in a sense; they won't like my approach to religion, the ones who are orthodox religious. And it's bawdy; the ones who like the bawdiness will be offended by the religion."

(Marr 1991:622)

A further characteristic of Whitean gossip is the creative quality of vivid, hilariously licentious, colourfully exaggerated, and often carnivalesque, humour with which White presents characters and events in his "self-portrait". He portrays his Greek "in-laws" and friends, particularly, with a colourful and gossipy zest. Gossip, indeed, is a topic in the following fragment:

Not only sugar, Mrs G. had hoarded gossip, which endeared her to a novelist. Rising to her feet unsteadily, clutching the burst packet of sugar, she returned to the fray, "... their grandmother Cleopatra went to bed with half Smyrna - which explains why the family came out slightly Jewish."

(FG:118)

And again, from an account of a party in Athens to celebrate the liberation of Greece:

The cherry ice and some of the clangers dropped by Catina, the eldest Lascaris sister, were the high moments of the party.

Another good gossip and inspired clown, Catina continually shocked her husband Dimitri by interpreting life in physical terms and imagery. Surviving the shocks his dear wife dealt him, and exile ... for his political beliefs, [he] became in old age President of the Greek Writers.

(FG:119)

The sylleptic spirit of the conjunctions - sugar and gossip, cherry ice and clangers, "his dear wife" and exile - suggests a fictionalising, a reconstruction into narrative morphology, of these characters. It is a gossiping narrative, and it reveals an appetitive relish for this mode of representation.

Yet another aspect of the "self-portrait", that touches on gossip, is the book's purpose. This, according to Marr, was to forestall biographical speculation by making "a public and dignified declaration of his homosexuality", or, in White's own words, "'To stop some other bastard getting in first.'" (Marr 1991:595) Keen on gossip as he was, and acutely aware of its narrative power, White appears to have been chary of his own personal repute in the hands of others. ¹ Marr recalls, in an afterword to the biography, why White had reversed a longstanding demand "that biographers should wait until he was dead":

He replied that he was sick of the books academics had written about him and hoped a biographer would show him as a "real" person. "And I thought it just as well to be around when that person is writing about this person."

(Marr 1991:645)

Finally, White's explanation of the book's success ("the bestseller of [his] career" according to Marr) refers to the vicarious thrill, such as gossip provides, of gazing at the absent party, at the third person subject of narrative: "'People wanted to have a perve'". (Marr 1991:607)

As in life, the dynamics and the ethics of gossip when conducted by White's characters vary from innocent pleasure, and informative narration, to malicious damage and the provoking of evil conduct. My premise in this chapter is that narrative and gossip, for White, are cognate forms of discourse, and that in his hands, gossip serves to call attention to the ethics of narration. ²

Exactly as White's sylleptic habit entails a wryly amused distance from its subject, so do the practitioners of gossip distance themselves from the "gossipee" even while appropriating him. This discourse of repute is essentially unreliable; it entails, in varying degrees, the fictionalising of the third party. It is a highly subjective discourse; it is conducted primarily for the vicarious satisfaction of the speakers, and it is tailored to their prejudices. The analyses in this chapter are intended to

display White's sense of the equivocal ethics that trouble this form of narrative.

This sylleptic construction, which was quoted in Chapter One - "most [of Belle Radclyffe's guests] took refuge immediately in their own chatter and the destruction of their friends" - is a wonderful example of narrative puissance both in action and as a described topic. The sylleptic shock evokes the morally equivocal character of the guests' conversation. Power - vested here in narrative and discursive control - is intimately linked with moral corruption.

In the following description of Voss, gazing complacently upon the town of Sydney, the discourse of repute is ironically manipulated, so that the narrative subtly undermines the explorer's arrogance even while gratifying it. In the power struggle over discursive control, it is the greater narrative capacity for irony that finally prevails:

So Voss walked quicker through the streets of Sydney all those days preceding the departure of the great expedition, of which that world was already talking. Men of business would take him by the shoulder as if they would have had some part of him, or intended to share a most earnest piece of information. Young girls, walking with servants or aunts, looked at the hems of their skirts as they passed, but identified him to their less observant companions immediately afterwards. That was Mr Voss, the explorer.

So that, for the explorer himself, the whole town of Sydney wore a splendid and sufficient glaze.

(Voss:50)

Voss regales himself on the talk and the wondering gaze of the inhabitants. As an outsider - a foreigner, as well as a lone wanderer for whom the heide rather than the marketplace was his boyhood haunt - he is naive in social discourse. He is unaware that he is, to the inhabitants of Sydney, little more than a property of discourse, a temporarily engaging subject of narrative or gossip. The phrase "Men of business" suggests that it is a tendency of such discourse to desire the object of its gaze as a material appropriation, "as if they would have had some part of him". (Voss's successful appropriation by his patron, Mr Bonner the draper, would establish his "currency value" among these merchants.)

The ambiguity of Sydney's "splendid and sufficient glaze" submits the explorer's satisfaction to a controlling irony. The paronomasia of "glaze/gaze" corrupts the clarity of vision, both of Voss, and of the citizens. "Glaze" also implies a superficial pleasure, a surface decoration, as well as, possibly, the longeurs of "that world", for which the expedition is a temporary relief.

The next segment exemplifies the dynamics of appropriation. Mr Bonner desires to "own" Voss as a discursive property which will enhance his own repute:

It pleased him to have bought something he did not altogether understand. Refinements are acquired in this way, and eventually clothe the purchaser like skins, which he will take for granted, and

other people admire. Mr Bonner longed to experience the envy of others.

(Voss:20)

Mr Bonner's view of his protégé is later described, after the expedition's departure, in terms of the textuality of "history":

Now he could enjoy its purpose, now that it was becoming history, hence impersonal. To such as Mr Bonner, the life we live is not a part of history; life is too personal, and history is not.

...
[He would] proceed to hold forth, between the chinking of money in his pocket, on the historical consequences of such an expedition. But thanks be, it no longer directly concerned him.

(Voss:155)

We may confidently vouchsafe the premise that, for Patrick White, "history" is text, story, or "histoire", just as Laura Trevelyan, his "alter-author", grants Voss a textual immortality ("Voss did not die ... He is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it." (Voss:448))

Nevertheless, we must avoid a complaisance towards the authority of text. An amusing little cameo at the embarkation of the expedition contributes flatulence to the air motif of the novel, and a sylleptic speaker translates Sydney's "splendid and sufficient glaze" into an appetite for scandal. The official "owners" and patrons of the expedition have dispersed and left the occasion to the vulgar

throng and their own carnivalesque constructions of the event:

All that forenoon the crowd loitered, waiting for the wind. Some were swearing at the dust, some had got drunk, and were in danger of being taken up. One individual in particular was falling-drunk.

... He would be ashamed in the morning, one honest body remarked.

"It is me own business," he heard enough to reply, "and this is the last time, so let me alone."

"It is always the last time with the likes of you," the lady said. "I know from experience and a husband. Who is dead of it, poor soul."

... The lady, morbidly attached to a situation over which she had no control, was sucking such teeth as remained to her.

It is a scandal, she said, of that which she could not leave be.

... [Harry Roberts appears:] "We had all forgot you, Mr Turner, an' if the wind had rose, you would have had no part in the expedition; the ship would have sailed.

"It is not my fate," said Turner. "The wind is with me. Or against, is it?"

Either way, he blew out such a quantity from his own body, that the lady who had been solicitous for him, removed herself at speed.

(Voss:118-9)

Turner's fart provides a Swiftian deflation of the fair wind of voyaging, and, conceivably, of Laura's spiritually communicative "air". Bowel wind is White's salutary bathetic complement to the sublimity of authorial narrative. That such a conjunction is more than fanciful is suggested, after Osprey has sailed, by an intriguing synchronicity between Laura and Turner. Turner dreams of a knife cutting butter:

"... he rose up in a dream and cried: 'Mr Voss, you are killing us! Give me the knife, please. Ahhhhh! The butter! The butter! It is not my turn to die.'" Simultaneously, Laura, for whom the afternoon is like "an unpleasant dream", "slashes" the butter at lunch:

But the dream persisted disturbingly. Laura Trevelyan, drawing back her lips to bite the slice of bread and honey, saw whole rows of sailors' blackened teeth gaping from a gunnel. The knife with which she slashed the butter, had a mottled, slippery handle, and could have been made from horse's hoof.

(Voss:119)

Possession of the knife, it seems, invests the holder with a baleful power over the fate of others. For Laura, I suggest, this turns out to be her powers of textuality - her imaginative insight, her faculty for spiritual "readership", and her "authorial" role as the steward and trustee of Voss's "legend".

White seems generally to present two kinds of "authorial" character in his fiction. The spiritual "initiate", such as Laura, is one. The other, its worldly and bathetic complement (often its deadly foe) is the malicious gossip. To these latter, who are mostly women, the term "pythoiness" is applied in at least three of the novels.³ Miss Scrimshaw of A Fringe of Leaves is a "professional pythoiness", Rhoda Courtney in The Vivisector, who exercises a perverse influence over Hurtle Duffield, is painted by him as the "Pythoiness at Tripod", and Mrs Flack, the master-gossip of

Riders in the Chariot, is called a "pythoness". These characters are, like Laura, cultural custodians, but their interest is narrow and selfish. They manipulate social information and discourse for gain - to dissemble and conceal their own flaws, to bend others to their will, and to persecute the perceived outsider, who becomes the third and absent party, the victim of gossip.

In the next extract, from The Solid Mandala, White presents a wryly benevolent view of gossip as an instrument of solidarity between participants. Mrs Poulter and Mrs Dun, newly met on the 'bus, are tentatively exploring one another's character: "Each of the ladies sat rather careful, because they had not known each other all that long, and the situation had not been proved unbreakable." (SM:11) The brothers Arthur and Waldo Brown become the topic of conversation, and this narrative comment appears "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." (SM:14-15) The gently ironic tone conveys amusement rather than censure; it is the same tone with which Mrs Poulter, a character favoured by the author, is generally treated. Perhaps the real source of amusement is the irony that the eccentric brothers might play such a central role in the establishment of such a conventionally codified friendship.

The authorial humour in the following dialogue tacitly compares the qualities of the veranda and the patio as vantage points for the gossip's gaze, and the more hypocritical aspects of the discourse emerge:

Mrs Poulter sighed. It was so important to be decent.

"What, I wonder," she asked, "made you," she coughed, "come to live down Terminus road?"

"Mr Dun took a fancy to the veranda."

"You've got a nice veranda all right. I like a veranda. A good old-fashioned veranda."

"I'll say!" said Mrs Dun.

"Nowadays it's all payshows. You can't sit on a payshow."

"Exposin' themselves!" said Mrs Dun quite vehemently.

"In all weathers."

(SM:12)

"Decency" is a key word for these "ladies", but this virtue is made equivocal by the vernacular corruption of "patio". "Payshow" evokes "peepshow", and the vice of spying for vicarious thrills. Mrs Dun's oddly emphasised "vehemence" suggests her own guilt as a neighbourhood spy. "Exposin' themselves!" is an hypocritical attempt to transfer the guilt.

The raised eminence of a veranda, of course, would provide a gossip's gazebo. Moreover, its "old-fashioned" virtue locates the discourse of gossip in the traditional, or conservative, or even "reactionary" code of values to which these women cleave for consolation and identity in a world of threatening change and discomfoting strangeness.

When Mr Poulter, addressing his wife, refers to the twins as "that pair of poofteroos across the road", his intention is less to defame the twins than to goad his wife over a quality of friendship that excludes him and is founded on an understanding remote from the vernacular principles of "mateship". (SM:18) It is an attempt, through the assertion of familiar idiom, to reaffirm his own code of values.

An outstanding example of vernacular gossip occurs in The Vivisector, when Hurtle Duffield, seated in his shrine-like "dunny", overhears two women discussing him in Chubb's Lane, the alley behind his house:

As the sounds of life flowed along the lane behind him, breaking, and rejoining, his only desire was to mingle with them. He did, for an instant or two, and was rewarded with a gentle content, behind closed eyelids, in his secret shrine: till the woman's voice began.

(V:397)

The spiritual and communicative significance of Hurtle's lavatory will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four. One aspect, however, which is related to the gossip that he overhears, is the dunny's function here as a kind of secular confessional. Hurtle is the priest-manqué, himself in need of a purging (he is presently constipated). Frustrated by this and by his unfinished aphorism written on the lavatory wall, he turns from the metaphysical to the human, seeking vicarious content in "the sounds of life" from the adjacent lane, when this dialogue reaches his ears:

"See in there, Ida? That's where the artist lives - Wotchermecallum - Duffield."

"Go on! The one that makes all the money?"

"That's what they say. Never seen a sign of it meself. Look, Ida! Look at this fence!"

He was wide-eyed for what they were going to see.

"Ooh, dear! Don't Jean! Don't!" Ida was giggly. "You'll have the rotten old thing come down."

"Don't worry. The vines 'ull always hold it up. Look at the bloody cracks in the walls. Look at the down-pipes! No one 'ud think Mr Duffield was 'is own landlord."

"Arr, dear!" Ida giggled.

"They say there's cockroaches flying around inside as big as bloody rats."

"Oh, peugh!" Ida shrieked. "I don't believe yer, Jean. You're layun it on!" Then she said with conventional reverence: "Must be old, isn't 'e?"

"Yes, 'e's old all right - and crazy as a cut snake. That's what art does for yer."

He was so fascinated by what he was overhearing it scarcely referred to himself.

(V:397)

What Hurtle hears is a vernacular judgement on eccentricity and art. His response indicates a disinterested fascination, which blinds him to the impact of the commentary on his own life. As so often occurs in Hurtle's human relations he remains emotionally detached, while those who intersect with his life expose themselves in their efforts to come to terms with him. His initial impulse to "mingle" with "the sounds of life" in Chubb's Lane - to join in vicariously - is ironically thwarted, not only by the alienating effect of gossip, but also by the isolating detachment of his artist's perception.

The remaining part of the dialogue demonstrates, through prurient detail, the tendency for gossip to formulate vicarious thrills:

" 'E's old," continued Jean, and seemed to be spitting something out. "But not so old, mind you. I was walkun down Flint Street the other mornun ... and old Duffield come runnun down the steps laughun and talkun at everyone and nothun."

"Might 'uv been for you, Jean."

"Nah. Duffield's a nut. But this is the point, madam. 'Is bloody flies was all open. Greasy old flies!"

"Ooh, dear! What did I tell yer? Might 'uv dragged yer in! Might 'uv raped yer!"

"It 'ud take a better man than nutty old Duffield. I didn't tell my hubby, though."

"Don't blame yer. I was never raped - except nearly - once."

(V:397-8)

The dialogue exemplifies White's virtuosity at vernacular speech, and it signifies a fascination with this register, which is paralleled by Duffield's own interest. The absence of authorial comment leaves the artist and the gossipers in a curious discursive equilibrium, with the lavatory wall as its pivot, and as an auditory membrane.

As in the case of Mrs Poulter and Mrs Dun, these women seem to be favoured by the author's amused indulgence. They are too ingenuous - and too engrossed - to formulate malice from their perceptions. If they take licence with Duffield, it is an hilarious carnivalesque licence of a saturnalian kind.

The simple candour of Ida and Jean contrasts sharply with White's presentation of Mrs Horsfall, Mrs Halliday, and

Mrs Trotter, when Duffield calls on Olivia Davenport. The artist is shown into a salon where "two of [these ladies were] discussing their friends while the third listened, brightly erect." (V:272) Hurtle's response to the situation is quite different from his response to Ida and Jean. "He might have to use his wits" indicates his discomfiting sense of latent malice.

In this extended scene (of three and a half pages) Mrs Horsfall and Mrs Halliday repeatedly test Mrs Trotter's social poise and credentials, while basking in their own sang-froid. Reference to a mutual friend is found in the pages of Vogue magazine, and that person is facetiously traduced: "'Here's Maggie Purser going as Emma Hamilton!' 'Don't slay me! ... At least it'll come natural.'" Mrs Trotter is the victim of the next barbed example of the social identification and exclusion practiced by these women:

"I'm mad about Mrs Davenport," Mrs Trotter clumsily confessed.

Mrs Horsfall sat turning the pages. "I'm going through a sort of depressive phase."

"Oh, neoh, Jo darling! Mrs Halliday tried to assist. "All you need is a change of something."

Mrs Horsfall closed the glossy pages and let the magazine fall plunk on the pearl-shell table. "Charitable, Moira, this afternoon." She sat back, grinning and basking.

(V:273)

The implication of the last two ambiguous remarks is that they need a change of company. Mrs Trotter is the outsider,

the untalented neophyte, in this exclusive and malicious milieu. When Hurtle is identified to the ladies ("Oh, ohhh? Neoh! Not the artist - the painter? Duf-field!") Mrs Trotter conclusively exposes her social and cultural naivety:

"I adore paintings," Mrs Trotter said as she had been taught. "I'm going to get one - when we've properly settled in."

Mrs Halliday and Mrs Horsfall were left fishing for their compacts.

(V:275)

Olivia enters and engages Duffield in conversation, while "the three visiting ladies chattered against one another in the same high social key: of their regrets for their hostess' neglect, of the races and the cricket, of Maggie Purser." (V:275)

For Olivia Davenport's visitors, gossip is a pastime, and a means of vicarious and vicious pleasure, which compensates for an endemic ennui. They assume, in their social conduct, an habitual pose of amoral and frivolously critical detachment. The Chubb's Lane gossips, by comparison, express a vigorous interest and a real pleasure in their discourse. Their vicarious interest in Duffield is less to appropriate, or gratuitously to destroy, than to confirm a local mythology through a relatively "down to earth" and exploratory experience. Moreover, their gossip, and their exchange of confidences, are a confirmation of friendship.

Olivia's own case is particularly significant. The behavioural tendencies that are characteristic of gossip - to relate vicariously, and to appropriate the topic - are practiced by her in her patronage of Duffield's love affair with Hero Pavloussi and in her collection and disposal of his paintings. Olivia personifies the dynamics of gossip. She is an incisive protagonist, and even at times potentially sinister, because she translates a morally equivocal social discourse into calculated personal action.

The "high social key", and the sophistication of Olivia's milieu, seem to be the natural home of sylleptic brilliance. At her dinner party, where Duffield meets Hero, Olivia deftly translates a crisis of the backstairs into a witty fiction: "I've discovered tonight that I'm both a locksmith and a plumber.' ... But there won't be any prawn cutlets.'" (V:317) The yoking of Olivia with these trades is so implausibly remote that it emerges as a bold yet elegant conceit, composed in the sylleptic spirit.

The centre-piece of the table, a crystal bird, is described as a "conceit". It faces Hero Pavloussi, as though "contemplating flight" in her direction. Hurtle observes Hero's moment of "childlike pleasure in the pretty-coloured stones" before she withdraws into herself. She then sits "rather glumly looking at her own hands, her chin drawn in as though suffering from indigestion, or a surfeit of English." (V:317) This syllepsis, which entails an amusing

choice of conjecture, seems to formulate Hero's oppression under the discursive governance of "the high social key" which prevails at Olivia's table.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to the role of gossip in Riders in the Chariot. The dialectical tension and moral conflict in this novel occurs between two sets of "authorial" characters. One set is the quaternary of "initiates" - Mary Hare, Ruth Godbold, Dr Mordecai Himmel-farb, and Alf Dubbo. They share a faculty for reading the discourse of "air", of spirituality, intuition, and natural instinct. Their mutual bond is a quest for spiritual purity which urges them beyond the material life to a sublime state of selfless love and devotion. I grant them a quality of "authorship" because these four characters behave in harmony with the values of the "implied author".

The four "initiates" exist, if we may expand the personification of that concept, under the "implied author's" patronage. Among the toils of narrative irony their presence orientates the reader with the homogeneous moral "consciousness" of the "implied author".

The other "authorial" set comprises, chiefly, Mrs Jolley the bigoted "cake and steak" Philistine, and her friend and mentor Mrs Flack, the gossiping "pythoiness" of Sarsaparilla. These two are "authorial" in the sense that their conducting of gossip determines the fate of the "initiates"; it orchestrates a season of misrule in Sarsaparilla,

and provokes the grim risus pascalis, the fateful parody of the Crucifixion, which kills Himmelfarb. Their discourse is wholly material, self-centred, malicious, suspicious, and hypocritical. Between them they translate the discursive characteristics of gossip and repute into a prejudiced campaign of attrition, with evil and deadly consequences. In narratological terms, these two may be more closely associated with the tactics of the narrative, as distinguished from the concept of the "implied author".

My purpose in the analyses is to demonstrate White's perception that an apparently innocuous indulgence in "idle chatter" may easily turn sinister, and lead to real destruction. On a more theoretical level this means that the gossips, as narrators, dramatise the moral ambivalence which White seems frequently to ascribe to narrative practice. Theoretically, the discursive conflict that occurs between the "initiates" and the gossips is a model for the tensions that occur between the paradigmatic norms - the langue - of the "implied authorship" and the reprobate parole of an ironic and ambivalent narrative. ⁴

The novel opens at the Sarsaparilla post office, where the threat of gossip hangs over Mary Hare:

"Who was that woman?" asked Mrs Colquhoun, a rich lady who had come recently to live at Sarsaparilla.

"Ah," Mrs Sugden said, and laughed, "that was Miss Hare."

"She appears an unusual sort of person" Mrs Colquhoun ventured to hope.

"Well," replied Mrs Sugden, "I cannot deny that Miss Hare is different."

But the postmistress would not add to that. She started poking at a dry sponge. Even at her most communicative, talking with authority of the weather, which was her subject, she favoured the objective approach.

... To tell the truth, Mrs Colqhoun was somewhat put out by the postmistress's discretion, but could not remain so indefinitely, for the war was over, and the peace had not yet set hard.

(RC:7)

Although the threat of gossip is averted by Mrs Sugden's reticence, the last paragraph seems to imply the possibility of sinister developments, which would depend on future indiscretion. The qualifications to Mrs Colqhoun's pique seem to form a baleful consolation to an undefined but vaguely malevolent post-war order. These cryptically ambiguous clauses depend on the deprecation of "discretion", and suggest a time of flux, and of subtle licence, in the narrative present. The implication is that war-time public values had set a constraint, now removed, on malice, and that the civil order of peace-time, with its implicit commonweal, is not yet reasserted. But the unusual idiom of "the peace had not yet set hard" also conveys a cynical narrative comment on "peace", which is implied to entail its own invidious qualities of cold cruelty. The overall rhetorical effect suggests that circumstances in Sarsaparilla are receptive to an order of subtle and malicious licence.

The discreet postmistress herself is a kind of official "sibyl", or "pythoness", a bearer of messages, a custodian

of secrets. As an ex officio fate figure, she prevails over Miss Hare's equanimity:

Miss Hare said you could learn to do anything provided you wanted to, but there were an awful lot of things you did not want enough.

Like learning to love a human being. Like the housekeeper, whom the telegram and her own increasing infirmity were bringing to Xanadu.

(RC:18)

The syllepsis conveys White's sense of the hapless and vulnerable individual, who is subject to baleful forces both inherent to her and external. The double supply conveys her naive and confused reasoning by which her own decision to employ a housekeeper has been transformed into the mechanics of an inscrutable fate. The similes express an almost paradoxically independent strength, an honestly formulated disenchantment with the exigencies of human intercourse. But all of this is steeped in the characteristic bitter irony: Mary Hare's egregiousness is fettered to her subnormal nature as a "mad, botched creature" (RC:94); her strength of detachment is based on weakness; her distrust of the world is less heroically opposed, than haplessly subject, to material conditions.

The language of social discourse is a material condition under which Mary Hare is particularly hapless. To *Himmelfarb* she cries, "'Oh, words, words!' ... brushing them off with her freckled hands. 'I do not understand what they mean.'" (RC:155) Her own converse is habitually with the

numinous. She flounders in dialogue with conventional idiom and behaviour, but reveals a degree of penetrative insight which prompts Himmelfarb to call her "the hidden zaddik", one of an order of "holy men who go secretly about the world, healing, interpreting, doing their good deeds." (RC: 155)

Secrecy, of course, is ironically denied this timid and wild creature, through her exposure in narrative. A remark in an obituary review of Patrick White recalls the amusing exposure of Mary Hare ensnared, on the first page of the novel, by blackberry bushes:

... lolling and waiting in rusty coils, [the bushes] suggested the enemy might not have withdrawn. As Miss Hare passed, several barbs of several strands attached themselves to the folds of her skirt, pulling on it, tight, tight, tighter, until she was all spread out behind, part woman, part umbrella.

(RC:7)

"Camp's the word," says the reviewer, of this narrative manner. "A closed-circle illumination. An aperçu for two. Fastidiousness being handed back and forth, all the while taking on the spiritual exclusiveness of mysticism." ⁵ The third sentence here seems meaningless, but "an aperçu for two" seems to be a strikingly good formula for the ethically dubious characteristics that narrative revelation may share with gossip.

The next passage exemplifies the ironic command that narrative puissance exercises over Mary Hare. While it

indicates the degree of intimacy that may occur between the "implied authorship" and a favoured character, it also exposes her vulnerability to the exigencies of practical quotidian discourse. She is showing Mrs Jolley, her new housekeeper, round Xanadu. The decaying interior of the house (which Mary has inherited from her father Norbert Hare) is described in vivid metaphor that expresses the assertion of nature over cultural form:

On one side of the dining-room, where weather had torn the slates from an embrasure in the course of some historic storm, an elm had entered in. The black branches of the elm sawed. The early leaves pierced the more passive colours of human refinement like a knife. The little rags of blue sky flickered and flapped drunkenly. In places the rain had entered in, in others trickled, down the walls, and over marble, now the colour of rotten teeth.

"Or places where dogs have pissed," Miss Hare noticed and sighed.

"I beg yours?" asked Mrs Jolley, wondering.
(RC p.42,43)

The appendage of Miss Hare's contribution to this passage is tacitly sylleptic; it indicates an apparent intimacy between her and the narrative voice, which would signify the author's favouring of her discourse. This effect is achieved not only by the stylistic conjunction, but also by the sense of Miss Hare's remark, which accords with the general intrusion of nature into the house. If Mary's observation is read as an alternative metaphor to describe the stained marble, her intimacy with the discourse of her author is

"telepathically" acute, and constitutes a partnership which significantly excludes Mrs Jolley.

But White's ubiquitous irony intrudes: Miss Hare's contribution is coarse and bathetic after the previous elegiac mode. (While "the colour of rotten teeth" introduces grotesque bathos, it still shares the resonance of baneful decay expressed in the description; the tenor of the metaphor asserts this.) The ironic treatment of Miss Hare derives, further, from the humorous situational cameo: her comment is rational only in response to the narrative and must sound absurd to her addressee, Mrs Jolley. Through her naive inability to adjust her discourse to contingency, she betrays herself to an unsympathetic ear.

Mary Hare is simultaneously treated with irony as the eccentric chatelaine of Xanadu, and with sympathy as a champion for the discourse of "implied authorship". What is even more interesting is White's tacit comment here on the nature of narrative, and of its reception. Mary's utterance issues from the perspective of the "implied author", and both the narrator and the protagonist here speak in sympathetic harmony with that construct. But the narrative also "betrays" the trust forged by these harmonics; it exposes the speaker to ridicule from an uncomprehending audience.

Consequently the narrative dispensation itself is implied to be flawed - to be unreliable, even treacherous - so that it tactically undermines the authority of the im-

plied authorship. This anticipates the assertion of the mediocre and the quotidian which dominates the end of the novel, just as it finally appears to prevail over Laura Trevelyan in Voss, and over Ellen Roxburgh in A Fringe of Leaves.

We may expect that, for Patrick White, a finally transcendent vision is no more possible under material conditions than is a sustainably transcendent - or authoritative - discourse of authorship. "I beg yours?" is how the material world responds to the harmonics of the implied authorship and its protégée.

Mrs Jolley cleaves firmly to her own belief in a material world, and her discourse reflects this materialism:

There was always the veil of conversation - Miss Hare dreaded it most of all: the piles of brick that Mrs Jolley built to house her family in, the red brick boxes increasing and encroaching, the sons-in-law, all substantial men it appeared, straining at their clothing, mopping up their gravy before they retired to the pleasures of chenille and silky oak. And the children: too good, too clean, too nice - too bad in fact.

Nothing but faith could have resisted such very material opposition, and Miss Hare did have hers

...

(RC p.61)

This "material opposition", which signifies Mrs Jolley's discourse, is exemplified in the episode of the cake:

At what stage she had begun to fear Mrs Jolley, Miss Hare was not sure, though she thought it probably dated from the morning when the house-keeper had presented her with a pink cake, and on

it written, really most beautifully, in fancy script: For a Bad Girl.

(RC p.60)

The macabre ambiguities of this cake reflect Miss Hare's hapless vulnerability to dialectical narrative puissance. A cake from a housekeeper to her mistress is unexceptionable; a touching gesture, if anything. The written message, however, is unequivocally insolent. What is worse, the contrast between its tenor and the semiotics of pink sweetness are calculated to confuse, as Miss Hare's response indicates: "'What a beautiful cake!' Miss Hare had exclaimed, with something like horror." (RC p.60) The ambiguity constitutes a semiotic manipulation of Mary Hare, who has little capacity for irony, or for verbal fencing, but for whom language is a function of truth. ("I believe. I cannot tell you what I believe in, any more than what I am. ... I have no proper gift. Of words I mean.") (RC p.58)

For Mrs Jolley, on the other hand, language is a material consolation; her personal idiom is a shopwindow of reified words which she stacks around her, like bricks, against discomfiting truth. Her ambiguous cake is such a construction; it is baked after a moment of tension when she has been frightened by Miss Hare's spiritual intensity: "She hoped Miss Hare might die, even. Then all that was bright and solid, all that was known and vouched for must prevail." (RC p.59)

So Mrs Jolley rushed at the oven, to bake a cake, ... a pink cake for choice, with ... something written on it. With the Mothers' Union and the Ladies' Guild ... pink was always popular, and what is popular is safe.

Mrs Jolley sang and baked. She loved to sing the pinker hymns. ... She sang and baked. And saw pink. ... All was right then. All the homes and kiddies saved. All was sanctified by cake.

At Xanadu the great kitchen almost cracked black open.

Mrs Jolley sang and baked. Brick by brick her edifice rose, but a nice sandwich, of course. Round. Whereas it was the square brick homes which she celebrated. And populated. With her mind she placed the ladies and the kiddies - not so many gentlemen - as if they had been sandwich flags ...

(RC p.59)

Mrs Jolley reconstitutes herself through a collocative edifice of metonymic fragments which are like the articles of a materialist faith. The use of assertively repeated fragments and of intransitive verbs formalises the language and ritualises the action. These aposiopetic tactics suggest (with the help of metonymy) an unspoken nexus of values. Aposiopetic expression lends itself to euphemism, periphrasis, and suggestive ellipsis, all of which assert the speaker's values as universally current, and which, in White's narrative deployment, signify the speaker's prejudice and bigotry. Fragmentary expression achieves the same motific effect as Eustace Cleugh's sleeve, and the broadcloth on the backs of Voss's graziers: it indicates a social discourse of piecemeal materialistic values.

The "trial by Mrs Jolley" to which Miss Hare is submitted comprises a test of integrity and faith. (RC p.62)

It is the more difficult for Mary Hare to endure because she has no capacity for understanding equivocal discourse:

Days after the lettering had been consumed, Miss Hare was haunted by the pink cake. She must, she would understand it, though there were pockets of thought which her mind refused to enter, like those evil thickets in which might be found little agonizing tufts of fur ...

(RC p.61)

Even when Mary Hare expresses her intuitive understanding of Mrs Jolley's idiom she still appears ridiculous, and is once again cruelly teased by narrative exposure, although she is constant to the values of her "implied authorship". She denounces the material goods, in which Mrs Jolley takes consolation, as the articles of an evil discourse:

"For all I know, Xanadu, which I still can't help loving, is evil itself."

"It is that all right!" cried Mrs Jolley, ...

"Like certain things made of plastic," Miss Hare added. "Plastic is bad, bad!"

(RC p.81)

And later, in an allusion to the material attraction, for Mrs Jolley, of Mrs Flack's house and furniture, she sounds even more ridiculous: "'Eiderdowns,' Miss Hare clattered. 'Evil, evil eiderdowns!'" (RC p.294) It is only at the level of "implied authorship" that these childlike utterances may enjoy the proper sympathy and understanding.

"Trial by Mrs Jolley" does, however, sharpen Miss Hare's awareness of discursive malice. This is expressed in

the following extract which alludes to Mrs Jolley's plan to leave Xanadu and to lodge with her new friend Mrs Flack:

"You know," said Miss Hare, "I think I am now strong enough if you decide to go to your friend."

Mrs Jolley was all murmurs.

Friendship, she said, sometimes involved a plunge.

"Friendship is two knives," said Miss Hare.

"They will sharpen each other when rubbed together, but often one of them will slip and slice off a thumb."

At this point Mrs Jolley flew into such a rage she tore down a curtain in the dining-room, and Miss Hare no longer minded. She sensed that for the moment she had the upper hand. Or was it that she, too, contained something evil ...? Some human element. Now she recalled with nostalgia occasions when she had ... entered into the minds of animals, of which the desires were unequivocal or honest.

(RC p.82)

Mary Hare becomes conscious of the proprietary urge in the materialistic gossip discourse of Mrs Jolley and Mrs Flack. Here she warns Mrs Jolley against her friend's predatory nature, and against the false consciousness of material consolation:

"You will go, I suppose, to Mrs Flack?"

Mrs Jolley blushed.

"For the time being," she admitted.

"For life, I expect," Miss Hare murmured.

Mrs Jolley hesitated.

"It is very comfortable," she said.

But did falter slightly.

"What makes you say," she asked, "you speak as if," she raised her voice, "as if I was not my own mistress?"

Miss Hare, who had arranged her crumpled skirt, was looking, not at Mrs Jolley.

"There is a point," she said, "where we do not, cannot move any farther. There is a point at which there is no point. Who knows, perhaps you

have reached it. And your friend is so kind. And her eiderdown, you say, is pale blue."

(RC p.293)

This is Mary's apprehension of the meaninglessness to which Mrs Jolley, through material cupidity and discursive hypocrisy, is condemned. She even colludes, in her sarcasm, with narrative irony, and it is, perhaps, a faint sense that her own equivocal medium is turned against her, that makes Mrs Jolley "falter" and become querulous.

"But it may suit me to move," Mrs Jolley insisted, stretching her neck.

"You will see no more in other parts - I know, because they took me as a girl - than you will from Mrs Flack's. And through Mrs Flack's eyes. The two of you will sit in Mrs Flack's lounge, watching us behave. Even directing us.

"Have you met her?"

"No. But I know her."

(RC p.293)

This is Mary Hare herself in oracular mode. She recognises that the conduct of Mrs Flack is "authorial", that her prying gossip is akin to narrative omniscience, and that a narrative "aperçu for two" is focused from Mrs Flack's house. The phrase "even directing us" expresses her sense of hapless subjection to a "text" which she has no power to influence.

White describes Mrs Flack as an omniscience which enjoys the "authority" of a monumental and respected authorship:

... even when she had not been there, [she] was remarkably well-informed on everything that had happened. Indeed, it had been suggested by those few who were lacking in respect, that Mrs Flack was omnipresent - under the beds, even, along with the fluff and the chamber-pots. But most people had too much respect for her presence to question her authority. Her hats were too sober, her reports too factual. Where flippancy is absent, truth can only be inferred, and her teeth were broad and real enough to lend additional weight and awfulness to words.

(RC p.73)

The gossipier embodies the vigorous movement of narrative parole, and, what is perhaps more sinister, this faculty is at the disposal of an influential, credible, and systematic "authorship".

The motif of the knife, by which White signifies an authorial incisiveness (we recall Laura Trevelyan's butter knife, and the scalpel of the vivisector) recurs in the following extract. ⁶ Miss Hare's metaphor for friendship is partially realised, though at this stage Mrs Jolley is still the novice pythoness and the knives are not yet turned upon each other:

As tea and contentment increased understanding of each other, as well as confidence in their own powers, it was only to be expected that two ladies of discretion and taste should produce their knives and try them for sharpness on weaker mortals.

(RC:75)

"Discretion and taste", and "tea and contentment" - a weak and "unexceptionable" syllepsis - make a stark contrast with the stropping of knives, or of malicious tongues.

Whenever Mrs Jolley and Mrs Flack appear together in conversation the narrative presents this contrast between ordered domesticity and attrition. In this way the narrative voice articulates the dissembling ambiguity of the two women, and at times it even seems to partake of their spite and innuendo, of social "bitchery". Here, for instance, the narrative voice appears to collude with the hypocrisy of Mrs Jolley and the lying of Mrs Flack:

"Ah," Mrs Jolley had to protest, "I am a mother."

Mrs Flack would pause, pick a burnt currant from a scone and appear to accuse it terribly.

"I cannot claim any such experience," she would declare.

Then, after frowning, she would fall to laughing, but feebly - she was an invalid, it had to be remembered - through strips of pale lips.

(RC:74)

The dissembling of the speakers is represented as a "collusion" in ambivalence, which White mordantly describes in the register of a spiritual experience:

At that moment something would happen, of such peculiar subtlety that it must have eluded the perception of all but those involved in the experience. The catalyst of sympathy seemed to destroy the envelopes of personality, leaving the two essential beings free to merge and float. ... This could have been the perfect communion of souls, if, at the same time, it had not suggested perfect collusion.

(RC:74)

For Mrs Jolley, who is undertaking her novitiate as a pythoness, this "collusion" is tantamount to a perverse spiritual regeneration:

[She] would be going down the street, still holding her head in a chastened way, like a communicant returning from the altar, conscious that all the ladies, in all the windows of all the homes, were aware of her shriven state. For there was no doubt friendship did purify.

(RC:78)

The following extract satirically celebrates the omniscient power of the gossips. A safe domestic mediocrity elevates them to their oracular eminence, and clerical idiom - "their antiphon was always bronze - conveys their subtlety. Their purpose, however, is unambiguously malevolent:

Seated above the world on springs and petty point, [sic] they could lift the lids and look right into the boxes in which moiled other men, crack open craniums as if they had been boiled eggs, read letters before they had been written, scent secrets that would become a source of fear to those concerned. Eventually the ladies would begin. Their methods would be steel, though their antiphon was always bronze.

(RC:75)

This is a very different kind of gossip from the "idle chatter" at Belle Bonner's party, and from the virtuositities of Olivia Davenport's "high social key". It is remote from the laughter of the market-place kind of gossip that entertains Ida and Jean. This collusion is presented as a deliberate and practiced ritual, which partakes of a quasi-spiritual "communion".

White deliberately represents the dialogue between Mrs Flack and her novice as a ritual in which Mrs Jolley is "taking instruction". Here Mrs Jolley warily answers her catechism. Himmelfarb is the subject of the gossip:

"They say," [said Mrs Flack] "there is a foreign Jew, living ... below the post office ... in a weatherboard home" - here she drew back her strips of palest lips - "a home so riddled with the white ant, you can hear them operatin' from where the kerb ought to be."

(RC:212)

The ritual opens with the conventional cue for the discourse of repute - "They say". While the charge against Himmelfarb is his foreignness and Judaism, the moral premises of the gossip narration are hypocritically established on the unexceptionable grounds of domestic values.⁷ This is rhetorically contrived through the selection of "home" for "house". The infestation of white ant may then be charged upon the occupant as a betrayal of domestic norms. Mrs Jolley's role is to "confirm" the evidence, while encouraging the discourse with intensifiers:

"In Montebello Avenue," Mrs Jolley confirmed. "I did see. Yes, a funny-looking gentleman. Or man. They say, a foreign Jew. And for quite some time."

(RC:212)

Her fragmented syntax indicates diffidence, obedience, and a tentative practising of the "antiphon". In her next turn of the dialogue she makes the wrong response, by offer-

ing an ambiguous statement which does not advance the per-verse liturgical ritual:

"Mind you the home is rotten," Mrs Flack pursued, "but you cannot tell me, Mrs Jolley, that a home is not a home, with so many going roofless, and so many returned men."

"Preferential treatment is to be desired," said Mrs Jolley, "for everyone entitled to it."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs Flack.

Which was terrible, because Mrs Jolley was not at all sure.

"Well," she said, "... Well, I mean to say ... a returned man is a returned man."

"That is so."

Mrs Flack was mollified.

(RC:212)

On a later occasion Mrs Jolley, anxious to prosecute Himmelfarb's trial by gossip, nearly offends the oracle by speaking too directly, and in an amateur gossip's idiom:

... they sat, and waited for the furniture to give the cue.

It was Mrs Jolley, finally, who had to ask:

"Did you hear any more about, well, You-Know-Who?"

Mrs Flack closed her eyes. Mrs Jolley shivered for fear she had broken an important rule. Mrs Flack began to move her head, from side to side, like a pendulum. Mrs Jolley was reassured. Inwardly, she crouched before the tripod.

"Nothink that you could call Somethink," the pythoiness replied. "But the truth will always out."

"People must always pay," chanted Mrs Jolley.

She herself was, of course, an adept, though there were some who would not always recognise it.

"People must pay," repeated Mrs Flack.

And knocked over a little ashtray ...

(RC:225)

The dialogical tension in this passage entails a power struggle between the gossips. The "collusion", or "commun-

ion", of their partnership is cemented by their mutual ap-
 perception of deceit. Each dissembles the truth about her-
 self: Mrs Flack is, in fact, the mother of an illegitimate
 son; Mrs Jolley the sententious mother is, in fact, rejected
 by her daughters and sons-in-law. This suggests that their
 campaign of attrition against the "initiates" is prompted by
 the hypocritical urge to make atonement vicariously; to pro-
 ject onto others their own secret imperfection and guilt,
 and to persecute the third party as the embodiment of these
 flaws.

Eventually, when each has discovered the secret of the
 other, Miss Hare's prediction of the "two knives" is ful-
 filled. The gossips' aperçu is reversed upon themselves;
 they mirror one another, and their narrative structure col-
 lapses into a barren and condemned authorship - "the origins
 of darkness":

Night thoughts were cruellest, and often the two
 women, in their long, soft, trailing gowns, would
 bump against each other in the passages, or fing-
 ers encounter fingers, and they would lead each
 other gently back to the origins of darkness.
 They were desperately necessary to each other in
 threading the labyrinth. Without proper guidance,
 a soul in hell might lose itself.

(RC:477)

A special circle in Hell, it seems, is reserved for
 gossips. In the remaining chapters we shall consider
 White's recurring theme of culpability in narrative, and the
 ethics of vicarious authorship. I shall conclude the pre-

sent section with an account of the carnivalesque properties of Sarsaparilla's season of misrule.

We have observed the tension, between responsible discretion and scurrilous gossip, with which the novel opens. In that passage there is also the hint of a time of licence, of the inversion of order. If Mrs Sugden, the postmistress, is Sarsaparilla's official "oracle", then the malevolent governance of Mrs Flack and Mrs Jolley - "... watching us behave. Even directing us" - could be seen to entail a carnivalesque inversion of order. Tension between these two orders of "authorship", or of governance, is implied in this passage where the telephone (controlled by the post office) is a match for Mrs Flack's own powers:

Because the telephone is the darkest, the most sepulchral oracle of all, Mrs Flack would stalk around that instrument for quite a while before she was persuaded to accept the summons. Although a considerable pythoiness herself, it might have been that she felt the need for invocation before encounter with superior powers. Or was it, simply, that she feared to hear the voice of doom addressing her personally?

(RC:395)

And this dialogue conveys Mrs Flack's fascination with the official seat of information, as well as her resentment:

"There is the post office," Mrs Flack continued. "There is that Mrs Sugden."
"Ooh-hoo! Mrs Sugden!" she had to call. "How are we today?"

Mrs Sugden was good, thanks.

Mrs Flack hated Mrs Sugden, because the postmistress would never be persuaded to tell.

(RC:213)

A grimly carnivalesque disorder is symbolised by the collision of a circus procession and a funeral train outside the factory where Himmelfarb works. (RC:403-5) It is like the ambiguously foreboding festivity of a James Ensor painting, and like the unnatural prodigies before the death of Caesar. The macabre conjunction anticipates the Easter ambivalence in which a murder offers atonement, and death offers regeneration.

The Christian theme of Himmelfarb's death by "crucifixion" is patent. One aspect, which is not as obvious as others, is the significance of his employer's name. Rose-tree, (originally Rosenbaum), evokes the "Rosy Cross" - the cross or "tree" of the crucifixion. Because Harry Rosetree and his family have fictionalised themselves as Australians and Roman Catholics, this implies that the "cross" upon which Himmelfarb is sacrificed is constructed of dissemblance, equivocation, and ambiguity - which are the qualities of ambivalent narrative. The fiction of Harry Rosetree is the final catalyst for Sarsaparilla's conspiracy of attrition.

The mock crucifixion, which is instigated by Mrs Flack's source of secret shame - her illegitimate son, Blue - exemplifies White's understanding of the dangerous prejudice that may underpin a discourse of social identification. Indeed, it indicates how closely the principles of "mateship" may resemble the principles of the Third Reich's

National Socialism from which Himmelfarb, ironically, has been offered haven in Australia. On Himmelfarb's "deposition" from the jacaranda tree, the factory foreman Ernie Theobalds asserts normality over the carnivalesque hysteria that prevails. He interprets the incident as innocuous horseplay, and he appropriates it to the democratic and vernacular principles of "mateship":

He walked over and kicked the arses of a couple of lads who were standing at one side.

... "What is going on 'ere?" asked Ernie Theobalds, jovial like.

As if he did not know. As if nobody knew.

(RC:416)

Through his rescue, Himmelfarb feels humbled by a sense of failure: by failing to die (at this stage) he has failed in the roles of scapegoat or of redeemer. His survival of the ordeal also subjects him again to the discourse of vernacular "normality". After what has passed, such discourse appears macabre: Himmelfarb is "persuaded to attempt a laugh", and civilly says "'Thank you, Mr Theobalds'". Then this courtesy prompts the foreman to deliver a salutary speech on the principles of democratic Australian behaviour:

"Something you will never learn, Mick, is that I am Ernie to every cove present. That is you included. No man is better than another. It was early days when Australians found that out. You may say we talk about it a lot, but you can't expect us not to be proud of what we have invented, so to speak. Remember that," advised Ernie Theobalds, laying the palm of his hand flat against his mate's back.

"Yes," Himmelfarb said, and nodded.

But was unsteady at the level of reality to which he had been returned.

... "Remember," Ernie Theobalds continued, "we have a sense of humour ... It has to play a joke. See? No offence can be taken where a joke is intended."

(RC:417)

Even the moral virtue of resentment is denied the mortally injured man and is co-opted by the representative of a vernacular freemasonry. Asserting the popular code of values, for which the "pythonesses" have exerted themselves, this shop-steward speech wrests the moral initiative from Himmelfarb so that the climax of the allegorical drama is undermined and appropriated by the equivocal discourse of Sarsaparilla.

I shall close with a look at the extraordinary luncheon dialogue of the "Bon-bon", the "Crabshell", and the "Volcano". These three ladies, nicknamed for their outrageous hats, provide a gossiping analepsis to the story of Sarsaparilla's "initiates".

Soon the ladies were as comfortably arranged as their clothes and their ailments would allow. All three had accepted advice to order lobster Thermidor, in spite of an heretical gaucherie on the part of the Satin Bon-bon, who had to remark on the popularity of shellfish.

"Dare we?" she had sniggered. "Is it tactful?"

Too pleased for her provincial joke.

The Crab-shell saw that the Bon-bon had a natural gap between her centre, upper teeth, which gave her an expression both vulgar and predatory.

(RC:480)

Here is syllepsis home again in its natural milieu of the "high social key". Mrs Chalmers-Robinson - the Volcano, and at one time the employer of Ruth Godbold - has "brought together" Mrs Wolfson the Bon-bon and Mrs Colqhoun the carapace. (Mrs Wolfson is Harry Rosetree's widow; Mrs Colqhoun is the same who appears at the post office on page one.) The ladies "chatter against one another" in the fashion of Boo Davenport's guests, and the narrative voice participates in their social "bitchery":

"Jinny is a darling. But an idealist. Isn't that pure idealism, Mrs Wolfson?" the Crab-shell asked, turning to the Bon-bon, not because she wanted to, but because it was part of a technique.

[She] went off into a studied neighing, which produced in her that infusion of redness peculiar to most hard women. The whole operation proved, moreover, that her neck was far too muscular.

(RC:480)

Their conversation proceeds, from the topic of fashionable religion, to events in Sarsaparilla:

"Speaking of miracles," Mrs Chalmers-Robinson said, "Mrs Colqhoun lived for some years in Sarsaparilla."

The informant advanced her face over the table to the point at which confidences are afterwards exchanged.

(RC:483)

The narrative indicates that this is the cue for the discourse of repute and gossip, and Mrs Chalmers-Robinson urges the topic of Himmelfarb's death. But Mrs Colqhoun - who had sought gossip at the beginning of the novel - is now in favour of discretion; the topic, with which she is evid-

ently familiar, is offensive to her taste. Mrs Wolfson, as the widow of Himmelfarb's betrayer, is intimate with the facts, but is tortured by her concealed past.

"There was no miracle." Mrs Colqhoun frowned.

"I understood," Mrs Chalmers-Robinson murmured, her smile conveying disbelief, "something of a supernatural kind."

She was too old, too charming, to allow that indiscretion on her part was indiscretion.

Mrs Colqhoun was almost shouting.

"It is much too unpleasant to discuss."

"But the Jew they crucified," Mrs Chalmers-Robinson insisted in a voice she had divested deliberately of all charm; she might have been taking off her rings at night.

"Oij-yoij-yoij!" cried Mrs Wolfson.

"You know about it?" Mrs Chalmers-Robinson asked.

Did she know! In herself, it seemed, she knew everything. Each of her several lives carried its burden of similar knowledge.

"I warned you!" shouted Mrs Colqhoun.

(RC:484)

Their discourse makes an unreliable narrative not only because it is mostly based on hearsay, but because each of the ladies harbours her own intensely personal interpretation of the events. Mrs Chalmers-Robinson's insistence is prompted by her appetite for religious mysticism. It is she who connects her ex-maid, Ruth Godbold, with the mysterious events in Sarsaparilla, and she senses a miracle story which might gratify that appetite.

Mrs Colqhoun's "shout" signals the climax of this investigative but flawed analepsis; it warns against a gossip

narrative which might expose too much concealed pain and self-knowledge, and the upsetting of a coffee cup provides a fortuitous distraction.

It seems to me that White's purpose in this luncheon dialogue is to reveal the forensic character of narrative. Narrative, it seems, exposes guilt, it distributes guilt, and it shares the taint of guilt with all who participate in diegesis. We recall the description, in Voss, of the "authorial" Laura: "It was as if she had become personally involved. So the sensitive witness of some unfortunate incident will take the guilt upon himself and feel the need to expiate it." (Voss:73) The Bon-bon, the Crabshell, and the Volcano, however, do not achieve Laura's degree of redemptive "authorship". Even though Mrs Chalmers-Robinson makes a final attempt to share vicariously in the "miracle" she has heard of, she "come[s] no closer to understanding". (RC:486) If we may embroider on the conceptual relations between "implied author" and narrative, we might call her a narrator without the guidance of authorship. With no authority but their own torments, White finally represents these ladies as both spiritually and discursively lost: their "high social key" is their limbo; it offers no proairetic future. The urbanitas of their hats is no more than a pathetic conceit, a high-pitched and hysterical carnivalesque which mirrors their own bathos:

"Oh, I do wish I could see her," Mrs Chalmers-Robinson murmured, craning in hopes that saving grace might just become visible in the depths of the obscure purgatory in which they sat. "If only I could find that good woman, who knows, who knew even then, I am sure, what we may expect!"

The old thing had exhausted herself, Mrs Wolfson saw. At her age, it was unwise.

Indeed, Mrs Chalmers-Robinson's crater was by now extinct. She continued to sit for a little, however, together with her companions, while each of the three tried to remember where she should go next.

(RC:486)

This is the "extinction" of a powerless narrative; it feebly echoes the labyrinthine "hell" to which the powerful, but evil, narrators Mrs Flack and Mrs Jolley are consigned.

In the next chapter I shall consider the carnivalesque properties of White's narrative irony. I shall focus particularly on the kind of malicious carnivalesque which, as in Himmelfarb's mock crucifixion, may be related to the more invidious aspects of gossip narrative. As the title of this thesis is meant to imply, the sylleptic spirit, when exercised in a morally questionable discourse, (as White seems to view narrative practice) tends to collapse the spiritual - or perhaps the sublimely authorial - to a level of material degradation. Mrs Colqhoun demonstrates this: "A saint? My poor Jinny! A saint in the pantry! How perfectly ghastly for you!" (RC:485)

Chapter Three: The Habit of Carnival

The premise in this chapter is that a carnivalesque quality is habitual in Patrick White's composition and that it articulates his "perpetual dialectic". I shall draw eclectically on M.M. Bakhtin's theory of carnival in order to analyse this characteristic and to argue, convergently with Carolyn Bliss's thesis of "fortunate failure", that a rhetorical carnival of acknowledged failure is strategic to White's expression.

The preceding chapters have been devoted to evidence of the stylistic and narrative habits which I consider to be epitomised by the sylleptic formula. Because Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque appears to offer a creative framework for articulately reconstructing White's "vision" from this evidence, my analyses in this chapter will be informed by this theory, and by related material. For this reason it is necessary to present the theoretical prolegomenon that follows.

In his analysis of Gargantua and Pantagruel, Mikhail Bakhtin examines the relations in that text between aspects of medieval carnival (exemplified by the popular language and manners of the marketplace), and aspects of what he terms "official culture". His concomitant analyses of "the history of laughter" in narrative humour are based on his

theory of the carnivalesque and the "aesthetic concept of grotesque realism" which he attributes to this genre.

By representing medieval carnival as a phenomenon that embodies popular as opposed to "official" culture, Bakhtin invests it with the political attribute of an ideology. This ideology is "utopian and universal" in character, and it also sustains the Saturnalian qualities of hierarchical inversion and cyclic renewal which are characteristic of carnival ritual.

In Rabelais' text, Bakhtin asserts, the language and ideological formulae of the popular carnivalesque were inducted into the higher cultural stratum of serious literature. This literature had primarily reflected, until the Renaissance, the orthodox idiom and allegory of the "official culture", in which the authority of Church and principality was encoded. Rabelais' "heteroglossia" - a text that comprises intermingled and mutually redefining idioms - is considered by Bakhtin to reflect a cultural revolution, which makes the Renaissance a climactic stage of what he calls "the thousand-year-old development of popular culture". (Bakhtin 1968:3) ¹

Bakhtin argues that after this sixteenth-century intermingling of what had previously been two separate cultural strata, or "languages", the quality of carnivalesque laughter diminishes; it becomes eroded, for instance, through the modifications required by the newly ascendent genres of lit-

erary realism, and much of its idiom and imagery is marginalised or banished from respectable "bourgeois" orthodoxy.

Rabelais' "grotesque realism", in which the "material bodily lower stratum" features prodigiously, embodies (according to Bakhtin) the popular ideology of a vast buoyant body politic that is all mouth, bowels, and genitals. This "grotesque body" of the people is essentially egalitarian, joyous, impious, and regenerative. "The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed." (Bakhtin 1968:19) Copiously appetitive bodily behaviour indicates the human urges to survive, produce, and reproduce.

Bakhtin's "utopian symbolism" of the "grotesque body" presents "not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits." (ibid:26) It is an "ever unfinished, ever creating body", which relates to the world through its appetitive orifices and protuberances - "the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose". (ibid:26) Rabelais' images "are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook." (ibid:3) The "grotesque body" works parodically as a "humorous corrective of all unilateral seriousness" (ibid:379); its purpose is to degrade, and laughter is its tone.

On these theoretical principles Bakhtin makes an interesting comparison between the "laughter" of modern literary humour and that of medieval parody:

"[Carnavalesque] degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one.

...
Grotesque realism knows no other level [than the lower bodily stratum]; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving.

...
This is the reason why medieval parody is unique, quite unlike the purely formalist literary parody of modern times, which has a solely negative character and is deprived of regenerating ambivalence."

(ibid:21)

Treating of "the history of laughter", Bakhtin argues:

The disintegration of popular laughter, after its flowering in Renaissance literature and culture, was practically completed, [in the 17th and 18th Centuries].

...
The genres of reduced laughter - humour, irony, sarcasm - which were to develop as stylistic components of serious literature (especially the novel) were also definitely formed.

(ibid:120)

Bakhtin demonstrates how the erosion of the popular "ideology" that is embodied in degrading and regenerative laughter is reflected in the changing representations of the "lower bodily stratum" in modern literature. The fundament of the perceived decay in the use of grotesque imagery seems to be the loss of its traditional "universal" symbolism.²
Rabelaisian city walls constructed from piles of genital

organs, phallic church steeples, and Gargantuan diuresis are patently impossible in the modes of realist fiction which emerge in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. In Bakhtin's terms, "universal" imagery was displaced in the seventeenth-century through the rise of "generalisation, empirical abstraction, and typification" as the prevailing methods of thought and of representation. (Bakhtin 1968:115)

The particularly urban social principle of individual privacy, with its special codes of taboo, contributes a material restraint on literary representations of the lower bodily stratum. These become confined to places and times that are not only plausibly realistic, but also "proper", such as the bedchamber, the lavatory, the hospital ward, and the hours of darkness. As a consequence, the Rabelaisian grotesque embodiments are rendered down to euphemism or to prurient erotic curiosity, or they are divested of symbolic meaning through "naturalism."³ An entire range of carnivalesque valencies consequently becomes identified as the "low-other", and is displaced into a culturally marginalised position, beyond the pale of manners, and beyond the bounds of rational seemliness in representational fiction.

Before we return to Patrick White, it will be useful to consider three particular aspects of this degeneration of the carnivalesque in post-Renaissance literature.

First, Bakhtin considers dialogue in the seventeenth-century novel to have been transformed from the "frank talk

of marketplace and banquet hall" into the "novel of private manners of modern times." Furtive gossip appears to be an essential kind of dialogue in the latter, and it is clear that Bakhtin sees it as generically opposed to the public openness of his conceived marketplace carnivalesque. He exemplifies "The Cackle of the Confined Woman" (Caquet de l'accouchee) (1662-3) as a story whose circumstance is traditionally carnivalesque, with a gathering of the community "marked by abundant food and frank conversation", in which "the role of the material bodily lower stratum" is emphasised by "the acts of procreation and eating". Nevertheless, he indicates that the focalisation of the narrative undermines these traditional carnivalesque qualities: "In this particular piece the author eavesdrops on the women's chatter while hiding behind a curtain" and "the theme of the lower bodily stratum ... is transferred to private manners."

This female cackle is nothing but gossip and tittle-tattle. The popular frankness of the marketplace with its grotesque ambivalent lower stratum is replaced by chamber intimacies of private life, heard from behind a curtain.

(Bakhtin 1968:105)

Bakhtin describes another example from the genre of gossip narrative - "The Loves, Intrigues, and Cabals of the House Servants in the Mansions of our Time" (Amours, intrigues et cabals des domestiques des grandes maisons de notre temps) (1625):

The entire work is based on eavesdropping and voyeurism and frank discussion of what was seen and heard. Compared to the dialogue-containing literature of the sixteenth century, this work shows the complete degeneration of marketplace frankness: it is nothing but the washing of personal unclean underwear. Seventeenth century literature with its dialogue was a preparation to the "alcove realism" of private life, a realism of eavesdropping and peeping which reached its climax in the nineteenth century.

(Ibid:106)

We may recall Patrick White's appreciative quotation of Thackeray - "there's no good novelist who isn't a good gossip". For Bakhtin such a narrator is a peepshow operator, and the reader is an accomplice in voyeurism.

In his study of the English eighteenth-century novel, Ian Watt attributes this effect to the development of "formal realism" during that period. The realist principle of convincing character identification leads to increased sympathy for the protagonist from the reader, and "makes possible the novel's role as a popular purveyor of vicarious sexual experience and adolescent wish-fulfilment." (Watt 1957:228-9) Watt's following remarks on the Georgian "closet, or small private apartment usually adjoining the bedroom", indicate the middle-class transference of gossip dialogue from the communal places of Bakhtin's "popular tradition" to the privy written word, in diary and correspondence:

Typically, [the closet] stores not china and preserves but books, a writing desk, and a standish; ... and it was much more characteristically the locus of women's liberty and even licence than its French equivalent, the boudoir,

for it was used, not to conceal gallants but to lock them out while Pamela writes her "saucy journal" and Clarissa keeps Anna Howe abreast of the news.

(Watt 1957:213)

Bakhtin's caquet, or gossip genre, thus finds a new vehicle in written correspondence, and literature discovers the potently vicarious effect of the epistolary novel, and of the private confessions of the diary. (Watt's remarks also seem to describe literate society's sublimating transcription of the corporeal, the non-verbal, or the pre-verbal, into verbal text.)

The following quotation from Maurice Charney's study of erotic fiction elaborates on the function of formal realist conventions in that genre (though I believe that his thoughts are widely applicable to narrative fiction generally). Charney also returns us to the field of the lower bodily stratum:

Sexual fiction obviously lends itself to the genre of true confessions. One of its most established conventions is for the author to take the reader into his confidence and to give him a glimpse into his Pandora's box of guilty and perhaps also debasing secrets. The illusion of confidence must pass muster for the illusion of reality, and the confessor bears strong resemblance to the literary type of the confidence man. In sexual fiction the reader stands in a naturally voyeuristic relation to the book, so that authors and readers alike are made to share a sense of complicity toward their subject.

(Charney 1981:7)

My second example of the "degenerated" grotesque, John Clelland's Fanny Hill, combines this voyeuristic invitation with Watt's sense of the licentious literary closet. The narrative device of a fictitious woman's memoir sets up the contract of confidentiality described by Charney, while it also proclaims the "literariness" of its homodiegetic narrator. As the supposed author and ornate stylist of her own tale Fanny is the "low-other" made commercially palatable and socially acceptable through her literary competence.

In Fanny Hill the imagery and the activities of the lower bodily stratum are almost completely severed from Bakhtin's "tradition of popular laughter". Fanny's descriptions of "those parts so admirably fitted to each other" bear no relation to the prodigious Rabelaisian embodiments which, in Bakhtin's words, "bring Heaven down to the bowels of the earth" and by defamiliarising the relations between language and the objective world, renew them in the manner of carnival. ⁴

Diminished vestiges of the carnivalesque are apparent in Fanny Hill's "pastoral buoyancy", as Charney describes it, as well as, conceivably, in "the satirical self-awareness" with which Clelland "overturns decorum by elevating a low subject" through ornate style. But Clelland's style banishes the language of the marketplace, and through the flowery rhetoric and intricately metaphorical euphemisms the

venereal is appropriated to mere consumer amusement as an extended rhetorical conceit.

It is also arguable that Charney is inaccurate in perceiving a "satirical self-awareness" in Cleland. I suggest that the enervated humour in Fanny Hill expresses no more than a cultural complacency; that "decorum" successfully maintains itself, and it is the "low subject" that is made comical by being dressed in the manners, proprieties, aesthetics, and even the moral precepts of a commercial middle class. I agree, however, with Charney's following description, which seems to contradict his notion of satire:

Fanny Hill strives for an elegance, ease and insouciance that have nothing to do with the heroine's humble origins. It is in some sense a conduct book designed to show us the luxury and high tone that a successful whore can command, who mixes freely with the best society and who, by her natural wit and intelligence, is the darling of so many wealthy gentlemen. Fanny Hill assiduously cultivates the illusions of polite society: the dress, the manners, the style. Refinement and modesty are crucial to the theatrical effect.
(Charney 1981:76)

As in the case of the performing ape, or the Victorian exhibition of the "Elephant Man", Fanny offers no satirical and discomfoting threat of hierarchical inversion. She is the "low-other" that has been fetched from its own beyond-the-pale locus and exhibited in the library of the gentleman's club. This vicarious appropriation of the "low-other" eliminates the Bakhtinian grotesque with its carnival of degrading and regenerating laughter. Indeed, there is no

ideological tension in this book, and without such dialectic there can be no satire.

The first examples, taken from Bakhtin, indicate not only a spatial narrative distancing from the subject matter, achieved by a curtain and by the "green baize door", but also a distinct ideological positioning in this stance. Unlike the dynamic intermingling of cultural idiom which Bakhtin describes in Rabelais, a "high" narrative culture defines itself here through an amused, lofty, and isolating distance from its "low" subject. In the case of Fanny Hill the low is brought within the pale, but is so morally and aesthetically sterilised as again to confirm the (largely commercial) values of the dominant "high" culture. All the examples indicate a perversely vicarious fascination with the "low-other", as well as the use of vicarious narrative devices (furtive lurking, eavesdropping, and confession-reading) that seem to be cognate with this distanced interest.

My third example of modified grotesque imagery is its prodigious appearance in Augustan satire. Book II of The Dunciad provides this example, from the race between Curl and Lintot:

Full in the middle way there stood a lake,
Which Curl's Corinna chanc'd that morn to make,
(Such was her wont, at early dawn to drop
Her evening cates before his neighbour's shop,)
Here fortun'd Curl to slide; loud shout the band,
And Bernard! Bernard! rings thro'all the Strand.
Obscene with filth the Miscreant lies bewray'd,

Fal'n in the plash his wickedness had lay'd;
 (The Dunciad:65-72)

Curl then appeals to Jove, who is hearing petitions, and:

In office here fair Cloacina stands,
 And ministers to Jove with purest hands;
 Forth from the heap she picked her Vot'ry's
 pray'r,
 And plac'd it next him, a distinction rare!
 Oft, as he fished her nether realms for wit,
 The Goddess favour'd him, and favours yet.
 Renew'd by ordure's sympathetic force,
 As oiled with magic juices for the course,
 Vig'rous he rises; from th' effluvia strong
 Imbibes new life, and scours and stinks along,
 Re-passes Lintot, vindicates the race,
 Nor heeds the brown dishonours of his face.
 (Ibid:89-100)

The images of excrement and of the lower bodily stratum that enrich these lines are unmistakably associated with the turpid and undesirable. Even though the filth has redemptive value for Curl, this is only a confirmation of his "dishonoured" state. The regenerative quality of carnivalesque debasement, which Bakhtin finds in Rabelais, is presented here as an unambiguously vulgar feature of the rejected "low-other".⁵ In his footnote to line 71 Pope carefully distances himself from the grotesque imagery, and explains the purpose of his "billingsgate" expression:⁶

.... I have often heard our author own, that this part of his Poem was (as it frequently happens) what cost him most trouble, and pleas'd him least: but that he hoped 'twas excusable, since levell'd at such as understand no delicate satire: Thus the politest men are sometimes obliged to swear, when they happen to have to do with Porters and Oyster-wenches.

In their study of the marginalising of the carnivalesque in post-Renaissance culture, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White observe that eighteenth-century satire represents "the production of identity through negation, the creation of an implicit sense of self through explicit rejections and denials" (Stallybrass and White 1986:89). In the "vicious competitive circumstances of the literary market", they suggest, the tossing about of dung marks the need of "aspiring poets [to] denigrate each other by trying to associate everyone else with the vulgarity of the fair whilst repudiating any connection which they themselves might have with such a world". (Ibid:104)

Stallybrass and White (who apply Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque in their analyses) argue that this aspect of Augustan satire reflects the eighteenth-century suppression of "fairs, mops and wakes" - of the sites of popular vulgar discourse. In a paradox of cultural expression, the terms of this discourse reappear in the "classical body", but are now "transcoded" as alien and demonised, and deployed solely for repudiation. I feel it necessary to quote the following passage at length, because it seems to form the kernel of their very interesting thesis, to which much of my later analysis will be indebted:

Precisely because the suppression and distancing of the physical body became the very sign of rationality, wit and judgement, the grotesque physical body existed as what Macherey calls a

"determining absent presence" in the classical body of Enlightenment poetic and critical discourse, a raging set of phantoms and concrete conditions to be forcefully rejected, projected, or unacknowledged. Hence the apparent paradox that writers who were the great champions of a classical discursive body including Dryden, Swift and Pope spent so much time writing the grotesque, exorcising it, charging it to others, using and adopting its very terms whilst attempting to purify the language of the tribe. The production and reproduction of a body of classical writing required a labour of suppression, a perpetual work of exclusion upon the grotesque body and it was that supplementary yet unavoidable labour which troubled the identity of the classical. It brought the grotesque back into the classical, not so much as a return of the repressed as a vast labour of exclusion requiring and generating its own equivocal energies. Quae negata, grata - what is denied is desired: Augustan satire was the generic form which enabled writers to express and negate the grotesque simultaneously.

(Stallybrass and White 1986:105)

In Augustan satire the "determining absent presence" of the grotesque is embodied in the satirised party and a collusive contract between poet and reader renders this third, "absent" party as an object of gossip. ⁷

It was always someone else who was possessed by the grotesque, never the self. In this way the bourgeois public sphere, that "idealist" realm of judgement, refinement, wit and rationalism was dependent upon disavowal, denial, projection.

(Ibid:108)

From the Enlightenment perspective, the fundamental transgressions committed by the grotesque - whether in the form of symbolically vulgar cultural loci such as Smithfield and Bartholomew fair, or in the persons and behaviour of satirised individuals - are the offences against measured

2) This mood is reinforced twenty lines on in a candidly morbid picture of the poet as a harassed victim of his readership:

Friend to my Life, (Which did not you prolong,
The world had wanted many an idle Song)
What Drop or Nostrum can this Plague remove?
Or which must end me, a Fool's Wrath or Love?
A dire Dilemma! either way I'm sped,
If Foes, they write, if Friends, they read me
dead.

(Ibid:27-32)

Considered in this mood, the second couplet of the poem could bear a resonance that penetrates deeper than the superficial description of universal "scribbling":

"The Dog-star rages! nay 'tis past a doubt,
All Bedlam, or Parnassus, is let out".

(Ibid:3-4)

Cosmic association with the art, and the ambivalent copulative, "or", suggest a depth of suspicion (beyond the confined vision of satire) that the Augustan ideal of lucid and measured proportion is but artificially distinguished (and protected) from the compromising "Bedlam" of a broader and competitive literary marketplace. This sense of a momentary defencelessness is also rhetorically supported by the sylleptic effect in "All Bedlam, or Parnassus, is let out". (I claim this to be a sylleptic construction because the setting at large of confined inmates applies less properly to "Parnassus" than to a madhouse. Even though both terms are used symbolically, "to let Bedlam out" is idiomatically nor-

mative, while the other term is strange, defamiliarising, and causes the "equivocal energy" that is generated here.)

The sylleptic construction, with its categorically differing terms, is obviously suited to condensed expression of a high\low duality within the taut couplet form. As in this case, the ambiguity offered by syllepsis also suits the satirising of a perceived confusion of values. But, as this example indicates, it is arguable that the figure is also stylistically subversive to a classical ideal of highly wrought, firmly enclosed, and unequivocal lucidity.

It appears to me that, even despite the obviously intended meaning, the sylleptic conjunction maintains a vibrant ambivalence that troubles both the structural finality of the couplet, and the unequivocal expression that is required of Augustan discourse.

Construed in this way, the figure of syllepsis reflects the compromising of the "classical body" by its grotesque or ambivalent contents. On the one hand it seems to reflect the diminished kind of "laughter" that Bakhtin perceives in the satiric genres. But then again, it also presents a rhetorical, stylistic, and semantic "carnival", whose ambivalent "ever-unfinished openness", to borrow Bakhtin's own phrase, challenges the apparent closure of its highly-formed artistry. Syllepsis is an instance where "Wit", in its Augustan sense, contains and uneasily relates to its own subversively heterogeneous and destabilising constituents.

It seems perfectly to illustrate what Stallybrass and White mean by the "equivocal energies" which are generated by the "classical body's" "labour of exclusion".⁸

In summary, Bakhtin's history of the "carnavalesque" in literature indicates the (politically) dialogical coexistence of two sets of language - a language that implicitly defines itself as "official", as the identifying code of a dominant "high" and orthodox culture, and an opposing popular idiom that parodically challenges the integrity of the dominant cultural system. These two linguistic and cultural idioms are met and intermingled in Renaissance literature (Bakhtin exemplifies the work of Shakespeare and Cervantes, as well as Rabelais), but from the seventeenth-century onward the popular idiom (along with its principles of the grotesque and of regeneratively degrading laughter) is increasingly cast as alien and inimical to the values of urban commercial society. This leads to a "demonised" re-coding of the perceived "low-other" (for example, "There's a Chinaman jumping on girls out at Watson's Bay" (V:151)), or to the vicarious thrills of peeping into the loci proscribed by taboo (the "lower bodily stratum"; the servants' hall; Rhoda Courtney's ablutions (V:131)), or to satiric appropriation of the grotesque in order to derogate another, as occurs in Swift, Dryden, and Pope.

Although Bakhtin describes a limited "rehabilitation" of the grotesque in Romanticism, it is sufficient here to

present the basic dialectic between the two cultural modes of the grotesque and the orthodox. Patrick White himself "rehabilitates" the carnivalesque, and I believe that this long prolegomenon will offer a useful language for analysing the relations in his writing between the orthodox and the grotesque, which are often epitomised in sylleptic conjunction, and which contribute thus to his narrative irony.

The following quotation from Flaws in the Glass indicates the intimately personal valency to White of his habitual conflation of the physically base with epiphanic moments of sincerity and "vision". The description of the Aegean at Salonika is about as unsavoury as he can get, but no material object of satire or contumely is specified, and indeed the context is Greece, the author's spiritual home. The rhetorical effect - greater than the sum of its parts - seems to constitute a kind of carnivalesque manifesto:

During the night [at an hotel], a French letter in the lavatory bowl refused to be flushed by either of us. Then in the morning we had our first glimpse of Olympus through the haze above the curving bay. Any true Grecophile will understand when I say that the unsinkable condom and the smell of shit which precede the moment of illumination make it more rewarding when it happens.

(FG:157)

In this instance the grotesque is not invoked as an agent of repudiation, but as an assertion of sincerity. The assertion works by challenging the conventional idiom of the "travelogue". By parodying this idiom, degrading and defam-

iliarising it through contiguity with the grotesque, White regenerates a forceful sincerity of description.

The degree of aggression in this undoubted challenge to the reader is also of interest. It is calculated to shock; it is much more outrageous than the fictitious flatulence that White defends elsewhere in Flaws in the Glass. The exclusive qualification, "Any true Grecophile", defiantly challenges the reader to cross his own threshold of inhibition and participate in this textual carnivalesque; the price of recalcitrance is exclusion from a vantage of visionary perspective. It is a perspective that requires a bold and unorthodox readiness to acknowledge the base as a generator of the sublime; and it requires a capacity for sylleptic humour in order to yoke these categories in the manner of carnival.

But this cryptic and visionary message also veils an ironical bathos, which qualifies the aggressive rhetoric of sincerity: a "Grecophile", however "true", still fails to be a Greek. It defines White's own foreignness, to which in every land of sojourn he is sensitive. This intimation of a dislocated sense of identity is concomitant with the habitual value he puts on ambivalence as a perspective from which to observe "the illusion of reality life boils down to."

(FG:154) Sincerity, for Patrick White, does not entail the unambivalent and "closed" forms of expression with which that virtue is customarily associated. I will examine, in

my closing chapter, how this belief in ambivalence extends to personal identity and even to semiotic principles.

In statements of personal value such as the Salonika passage, where satire and vitiation are absent, and grotesque ambivalence provides a renewal of perception, White seems convincingly to "rehabilitate" the carnivalesque. A remark by Nadine Gordimer in her review of Flaws in the Glass appears to confirm this impression: "The bobbing, oversize heads are recognisable everywhere. Like the spirit of carnival, he carries them through the streets, dancing beauties and vomiting drunks, in celebration of life; and in the knowledge that King Carnival is always to be killed." (Gordimer 1982:14) But Gordimer's final clause sounds a note of caution: carnival is conducted in the ironic understanding that it is contained and finally eliminated by a dialectically opposed agency. What follows in this chapter is an attempt to demonstrate White's deployment of the grotesque in an ironic carnival of acknowledged failure which, at times, gravely questions the buoyant optimism of Bakhtin's formulae.

Many of White's most memorable characters tend to be imperfect - physically, or mentally, or in the more general sense of being not complete, neither absolute nor absolved. They resemble, in varying degrees, the "grotesque body" of Bakhtin's carnival theory, which is forever unfinished, which is not sleek and sealed like the polished marble of a

classical sculpture, but rough-hewn, open-pored, orificial, and inelegantly protuberant. Physical disabilities count among these imperfections, as well as mental conditions like retardation, eccentricity and madness, haunting guilt, crises of identity, and of inadequacy. The "low-other" upon which, according to Stallybrass and White, a derogatory and "demonised" interpretation of the carnivalesque is projected by middle-class society, is well represented in White's novels by homosexuals, aborigines, prostitutes, tramps, refugees, convicts, transvestites, and the servant class. Unlike the cast of Rabelaisian prodigies, they populate a representation of the "real world", in which the grotesque tends to be marginalised, or discriminated against, as an embarrassing and threatening aberration.

The places associated with White's "grotesque body" are also beyond the pale of polite culture, such as the lavatory in many guises, rubbish dumps, hovels, brothels, and egregious houses that carry the taint of eccentricity. The outback and the "Dead Heart" - the arid centre of the Australian continent - may also be located in this category. The "feathery colloquy" that disturbs Laura Trevelyan in her uncle's bamboo thicket articulates the subversive force of this kind of grotesque and marginalised space.

Both the spatial and the human forms of White's grotesque body are perceived, however speciously, by his representatives of social orthodoxy as a threat to their social

and moral fabric. Mary Hare, Alf Dubbo, and Mordecai Himmelfarb are prime examples, and Mr Poulter's homophobic remark about the "pair of poofteroos across the road" indicates prejudice against a perceived "low-other". As I shall demonstrate in analysis, the efforts of the orthodox to defend its integrity against contamination by the "low-other" produce a kind of "counter-carnival", whose tone of laughter is both neurotically ironic and malicious.

In political terminology the urge of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque is revolution, while the urge of this "counter-carnival" is reaction. But although human oppositions and tensions in White's fiction are frequently delineated by social class differences, and by taboos, transgressions, prejudices, and aspirations, White is obviously not a social commentator in the sense of representing political or class conflict. The real division among his protagonists is determined by degrees of moral, metaphysical, and spiritual cognition. Where White is often misunderstood, I think, is in the expectation of a "progressive" message. There is no doubt that he understands and acknowledges "evil" - as in Riders in the Chariot - but he may disappoint a material and political expectation of justice.

The description by Carolyn Bliss of the metaphysical processes that White's "initiates" undergo in their spiritual tempering includes the central idea of the protagonist's necessary failure to become individually complete. This

failure is "necessary", "efficacious", and "redemptive", in that it finally allows the initiate to merge with "one great, unified self or consciousness" (Bliss 1986:11).

This transcendental universalism, with its principles of failure, incompleteness, and the never-concluded process of "becoming", and with its valorising of the ill-favoured, seems to constitute a spiritualised version of Bakhtin's materialist utopian universalism. Bakhtin's concepts of regenerative degradation and the "grotesque body" have their counterparts in the Whitean "redemptive failures" and deformed or trammelled bodies.

A concept that is central to both the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, and to White's spiritualising of what Bliss presents as a traditional Australian "mystique of failure", is the principle of incompleteness, of "ever-unfinished openness". Bliss quotes Le Mesurier of Voss on the value of incompleteness: "The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming." (Voss:271) (Bliss 1986:11)

Bliss also suggests that the principle of a perpetual and failing struggle is sustained by White in his authorship itself: "[He] appears convinced that his medium will always be inadequate to his message" (Bliss 1986:12). And, to return to the theme of this thesis, this principle is reflected in his stylistic habits, in the ambiguities and uncert-

ainties of syllepsis, aposeiopsis, synaesthesia, and shifting stances in narrative level and focalisation.

If the textual equivalent of well-defined completeness, or of the "classical body", may be seen as grammatical, stylistic, and schematic closure, then White's stylistic ambiguities and open-ended statements - his avoidance of closure - suggest the reasonable application of the term "carnavalesque" to his style itself.

Before we consider detailed examples of White's grotesque in the next chapter, it is necessary first to establish how his rehabilitation of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque is qualified (or flawed) by constant irony.

The fact that the Whitean carnival, whether it occurs in characterisation, action, imagery, or style, is never joyously buoyant as in the Bakhtinian ideal, and indeed is mostly salted with black humour or tinged with a fatalistic pessimism, reflects an empirical aspect of carnival which Bakhtin's utopian theory appears to suppress. This is the fact that carnival is always restricted, contained, and curtailed. ⁸

Unlike classical comedy, whose plot structure contrives that comic confusion is formally closed through resolution into order, the carnival has no such inherent closing formula. It does not close, but is enclosed - it is licensed, and even defined, by the dominant authoritative structure that it parodies, and after its season of misrule it is

resubmitted to governance. This is why "King Carnival must be killed". In this regard, Umberto Eco makes the following salutary observation:

Bakhtin was right in seeing the manifestation of a profound drive towards liberation and subversion in Medieval carnival. The hyper-Bakhtinian ideology of carnival as actual liberation may, however, be wrong.

(Eco, Ivanov, Rector 1984:3)

This structural paradox in the phenomenon of carnival accords with Bliss's concept of paradoxically "fortunate failure". She demonstrates for instance how the Australian consciousness has traditionally been defined by the image of the "Dead Heart" of the country, which presents a sinister demonised void that limits human aspiration. This wilderness "suggests a boundary beyond which the self cannot push, something insuperable and indomitable, something which will impose failure." (Bliss 1986:4) In this guise the Outback is a colonial version of the carnivalesque loci of Western urban culture upon which mercantile society projects its aversion to the alien and the grotesque - such as fairs, markets, and sites of vulgar entertainment; prisons, asylums, slums and sewers, and tracts of "waste" land.

Nevertheless, the Outback enjoys an ambiguous status in Australian cultural tradition, because it has become "internalized" by the Australian consciousness (Ibid:3). As such its intractability informs the kinds of national myth expressed for instance in the ballads of "Banjo" Paterson: a

pride in tribulation, a suspicion of success, and a tenacious egalitarianism - in short, the constituents of "mateship".

In Patrick White's representation, the Outback as a locus of the alien and the grotesque is "rehabilitated" to the further, spiritual, extent that it is the site, as in Voss, of a redemptive process of exploration, failure, and transcendence. This is to say that White's carnivalesque (at least in his "revolutionary" version) is the site of failure, vision, and a transcendental redemption, for the participants. By contrast, the "reactionary" counter-carnival, which entails macabre and degenerate forms of the grotesque, succeeds materially but offers no transcendence of its tautological, self-parodying, and malicious vision. Himmelfarb's crucifixion by his "mates" exemplifies this.

The paradox formulated by Bliss is therefore akin to the empirically obvious paradox in carnival "proper" - that because carnival is a sanctioned activity it must necessarily fail in its revolutionary dis-crowning urge, although within the structural constraints the revellers ritualistically recreate themselves. Terry Eagleton (quoted by Stallybrass and White) confirms the perception which Eco intimates, of carnival's failure to breach the boundaries that contain it. He also implies that, under these conditions, the "regeneration" itself is limited to a conventionalised (or perhaps rhetorical) ritual:

Indeed carnival is so vivaciously celebrated that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all, is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. As Shakespeare's Olivia remarks, there is no slander in an allowed fool. (Eagleton 1981:148)(Stallybrass and White 1986:82)

The sense, conveyed by Eagleton, of an actual powerlessness in carnival provides a further kinship between this genre and the theory of fortunate failure. White's initiates and also the minor protagonists who serve as their "guides" are invariably hapless figures. Generally they acknowledge and are tormented by this flaw, which may be inherent to them as in Mary Hare, Arthur Brown, and Eddy Twyborn, or which may be largely imposed by circumstance as in the case of Himmelfarb.

Bliss describes one of the "crucial failures" of this powerlessness as "the incapacity to love sufficiently or to express that love in positive action" and she links this to "a closely related theme in White's fiction [which] is the failure to save." (Bliss 1986:7-8)

Most often this takes the form of the inability or unwillingness to keep from injury or death someone for whom the character feels morally responsible.
(Ibid:8)

She cites as an example Alf Dubbo's failure to save Himmelfarb from "crucifixion" by his workmates. Harry Rosetree is also responsible, through hapless inaction, for Himmelfarb's

death; acknowledgement of his Judas-like guilt leads to his suicide.

But perhaps one of the most chilling examples of powerlessness occurs, also in Riders in the Chariot, when Himmel-farb witnesses the death of the "Lady from Czernowitz". This episode, and events that lead up to it, display many elements of the carnivalesque, but it proves to be a grim carnival, whose tone is balefully ironic. It is a structural inversion of the Bakhtinian ideal, because it is conducted by an "official culture". Misrule is literally the rule, and unconstrained licence reveals itself as moral licentiousness.

This reactionary "counter-carnival" establishes the macabre conditions under which the Bakhtinian "grotesque body of the people" - in this case the Jewish community - is suppressed. (In terms of Stallybrass and White's analyses it might be reasonable to suggest that the intense atrocity of this particular suppression was triggered by the unprecedented degree of demonising the perceived "low-other" in Nazi ideology's "labour of exclusion".) I shall examine these events in some detail, because the dispensation that produces them - what White calls "the conventions of hell" - is grotesque and absurd, but also evil and deadly. (RC:184) I mean to demonstrate that, for White, the Nazi order is a logical extreme of the usual ironic dispensation under which the individual subject struggles for expression, while the

social structure seeks to maintain its orthodox identity.

Himmelfarb's apprehension of his own pastoral inadequacy among his people becomes subsumed under the greater powerlessness against Nazi anti-Semitism. The loss of his wife (in his absence) during "kristallnacht" atrocities, his temporary haven with friends, his subsequent arrest and transportation, and his escape from death in the Holocaust all contribute materially to the sense of powerlessness, failure, and guilt, which he expresses later to Mary Hare:

If ... I revert to the occasion when I betrayed my wife, and all of us, for that matter, you must forgive me. It is always at the back of my mind. ... And so I still find myself running away, down the street, towards the asylum of my friends' house. I still reject what I do not have the strength to suffer. When all of them had put their trust in me. It was I, you know, on whom they were depending to redeem their sins.

(RC:154)

At the Friedensdorf concentration camp Himmelfarb is a powerless witness of the fate of the "Lady from Czernowitz". Her last shred of dignity is horribly denied when the door of the gas chamber accidentally swings open, exposing her in an image that plumbs the nadir of White's repertoire of grotesque bathos.

"Yes," whispered [Himmelfarb's] new friend. "The gas will be pouring soon. When it is over, we shall drag the bodies to the pits."

It suggested a harvest ritual rather than the conventions of hell.

But just then the door of the women's bath-house burst open, by terrible misadventure, and there, for ever to haunt, staggered the Lady from

Czernowitz.

How the hands of the old, helpless, and furthermore intellectual Jew, her friend, went out to her.

"God show us!" shrieked the Lady from Czernowitz: "Just this once! At least!"

In that long, leathern voice.

She stood there for an instant in the doorway, and might have fallen if allowed to remain longer. Her scalp was grey stubble where the reddish hair had been. Her one dug hung down beside the ancient scar which represented the second. Her belly sloped away from the hillock of her navel. Her thighs were particularly poor. But it was her voice which lingered. Stripped. Calling to him out of the dark of history, ageless, ageless, and interminable.

(RC:184-5)

No redeeming laughter attends this degradation. There is no hint of a Bakhtinian rebirth from the grave; there is no regenerative principle in the grotesque images of "the lower bodily stratum". In this scene (and by extension, in all the history of persecution) the grotesque has crossed the threshold of taboo and become the orthodox norm in an inversion of order which translates the rigmarole of carnival into a fiendish danse macabre. The narrative comment that "It suggested a harvest ritual rather than the conventions of hell" defines an inverted world in which the demonic is the orthodox, and in which a grotesque ambiguity violates the terrain of the familiar.

We may trace this defamiliarising ambiguity from the moment Himmelfarb leaves his friends' (the Stauffers) country house to return home to Holunderthal and internment.

When Himmelfarb leaves the house and meets a soldier on

the terrace - his first encounter with Nazi authority - he maintains his sense of distinction between the familiar and the imposed abnormal. He smiles at the soldier, who

wondered whether to challenge the elderly gentleman, so evidently discreet, so obviously stepped out of the life of kindness which he understood. In the circumstances, his own always dubious authority dwindled. The gun wobbled. He gave a kind of country nod.

(RC:169)

Nevertheless the abnormal dispensation looms: "But the strange morning was already unfolding, in which any individual might have become exposed to contingency". (RC:169)

Himmelfarb himself takes leave of "the framework of actuality" (RC:168) although he does not capitulate to "contingency", but deliberately sets out to meet his fate. He believes that the loss of self through a sacrificial surrender indicates the way to absolution and fulfilment. Self-abandonment also leaves him detached from the war-time chaos through which he walks; he is neither a participant in these new "conventions of hell" nor is he presently cast as a hapless victim. "It seemed as though he had abandoned the self he had grown to accept in his familiar room ... The winter air cleared his head wonderfully with the result that he found himself observing, and becoming engrossed by the least grain of roadside sand ..." (RC:169).

While walking through an air raid on Holunderthal, "It did not occur to him to feel afraid" and his state of spir-

itual sublimity converts the grotesque mechanics of war into a vision of Ezekiel's chariot:

Then wheels were arriving. Of ambulance? Or fire-engine? The Jew walked on, by supernatural contrivance. For now the wheels were grazing the black shell of the town. The horses were neighing and screaming, as they dared the acid of the green sky. The horses extended their webbing necks, and their nostrils glinted brass in the fiery light. While the amazed Jew walked unharmed beneath the chariot wheels.

(RC:170)

As well as being physically unscathed, Himmelfarb also remains cognitively immune to the contingent grotesque chaos. These circumstances are described by the narrative commentary in terms of a protean and destabilising carnivalesque:

The riot of fireworks was on. Ordinarily solid, black buildings were shown to have other, more transcendental qualities, in that they would open up, disclosing fountains of hidden fire. Much was inverted, that hitherto had been accepted as sound and immutable. Two silver fish were flaming downward, out of their cobalt sea, into the land.

(RC:170)

By virtue of his detached spiritual grace, Himmelfarb is also immune to any sense of irony. This could be taken to imply that a sense of irony is cognate with acknowledgement of disorder and of the absurd, an acknowledgement which could impute collusion in such a dispensation. The policeman, for instance, to whom Himmelfarb surrenders himself, expresses irony: "They are belting hell out of the glove

factory,' the man on duty informed the stranger. 'For God's sake! The glove factory!'" And he acknowledges chaos, with an absurdly dislocated sense of priority: "'Now there is only disorder!' complained the policeman. We no longer have the time even to water our flowerpots.'" (RC:171)

Steeped as he is in the ironic and absurd situation that "contingencies" produce, the official almost fails to do his statutory anti-Semitic duty towards Himmelfarb:

"I am a Jew," Himmelfarb announced.

Offering the paper.

"A Jew, eh?"

But the policeman was too distracted by his inability to lay his hand on some other document.

"Well," he grumbled, "you will have to wait. A Jew!" he complained. "At this time of night! And on my own!"

So Himmelfarb sat down and waited on a bench against the wall.

(RC:171)

He is eventually confined in a railway shed with a group of internees destined for a concentration camp.

At this point it would be as well to restate the focus of this analysis. The premise was that powerlessness is an aspect of carnival. Under this demonically grotesque dispensation - "the conventions of hell" - the structure of carnival is inverted; the grotesque is embodied in and orchestrated by a dominant and unconstrained "official culture". In other words, this is a variant of carnival which is "reactionary" instead of "revolutionary", which is

powerful instead of powerless, and whose boundless licence emerges as licentiousness.

As in the case of the policeman, neurotic irony is the particular form of "reduced humour" that is expressed by the participants in this inverted (or absurd) version of carnival. Implication in contingent absurdity generates an ironic consciousness which signals an acknowledgement of ambivalence, ambiguity, and equivocation. As I shall show in due course, White grimly perceives narrative practice to be an accomplice in such ironic consciousness.

The Jewish internees, on the other hand, who are subject to this carnival of the absurd, display no sense of irony under the ambiguous conditions that prevail. They embody pathos in degradation and in forlorn hope. Yet they are nevertheless subsumed, in innocence, under irony.

The narrative commentary deepens the pathos of the interned Jews' situation by restricting their consciousness to limited discomforts and needs which are consequently rendered absurdly insignificant under the circumstances. The following description, for instance, of an innocently domestic sense of loss mordantly echoes the greater absurdity in the destruction by bombing of a glove factory:

There was a woman, too, crying for something she had left behind in the shed which had become her home. How she cried for the bare boards, which her mind had transformed, and the loss of one woollen glove.

(RC:175)

This ironically charged pathos establishes an ambivalent atmosphere which is sustained by the narrative up until the scene of mass murder at the concentration camp.

A particularly cruel twist is given to this ambivalence when the Jews are embarked on a passenger train instead of on the expected cattle-trucks. This generates a deluded optimism with which the narrative often ironically colludes, contributing to the ambiguities and building up the macabre atmosphere of an inverted carnivalesque. A deceptively salubrious atmosphere is, for instance, evoked by descriptions of scenery on the train journey to the gas-chambers:

And the numb landscape actually thawed. The naked branches of the beeches appeared to stream like soft hair ... A little girl, as pale as sprouting cress, danced in a meadow, holding out her apron to catch what she might not have been able to tell.

... And the landscape flowed. The sky showed, not the full splendour of sky, but intimations of it, though rents in the cloud.

(RC:176-7)

This atmosphere of illusion is personified in "the Lady from Czernowitz" who doggedly sustains the social finesse of cultural refinement, and the delusion of a safe passage to Palestine. When deaths occur among the prisoners and prompt a companion to question her optimism, her pretentiously urbane response is grotesquely ironical in the context of genocide:

[She] averted her face. It was her habit to ignore the insinuations of common persons. And how was she responsible for official omissions? Dedicated to music and conversation, all else bored her, frankly.

...
One would, perhaps, be better dead, mused the mother of the sick child.

"Death!" The Lady from Czernowitz laughed, and announced, not to the rather common woman ... but to some abstraction of a perfectly refined relationship: "Oh, yes! Death! If I had not suspected it involved des ennuis énormes, I might have used my precious little cyanide ..."

(RC:178)

Ironically manipulated narrative ambivalence reaches a peak when the train arrives at the Friedensdorf concentration camp. An illusion of rustic charm paradoxically confronts us with all that is grotesque in the Nazi regime. Similarly, in macabre pantomime, the camp appears as a kind of Teutonic Butlin's:

[The train] stopped ever so gradually at a little clean siding, paved with sparkling flints, and aggressive in its new paint, if it had not been so peaceful.

...
And German voices came. ... and much official instruction.

"Welcome! Welcome!" announced the official voice, magnified, though muffled. "Welcome to Friedensdorf!"

(RC:179)

At this point the ambivalence, which has so far been nothing much more than a narrative device that establishes a grim absurdity, now becomes a deliberate tactic of deception in the hands of the camp authorities. They orchestrate a

charade of holiday festivity mixed with firm benevolence as they guide the prisoners to their death:

There was even music. Towers of music rose above the pointed firs. The giddier waltzes revolved glassily on discs, or alternatively, invisible folkdancers would tread their wooden round, with the result that the seed was in many cases sown, of credulity, in innocence.

See, some of the passengers were prepared to believe, ... this was a kind of transit camp, for those who were taking part in the organized migration to the Land. Here they would be fed and rested ...

(RC:179-80)

The charade succeeds in its deception. However, a more profound rationale for the elaborate pantomime lies in the structural inversion that is brought about when "carnival" is conducted by a dominant "official culture". I suggest that the real purpose of the charade is licentiously to legitimize the camp authorities' proceedings. In the looking-glass world of specious ambiguities over which they hold sway, it is expedient for them to resort to the absurd in order to sustain a semblance of reason in mass-murder. Thus the "bath-house" deception - "the baritone voice of an iron tower, which urged order and cleanliness on the guests of Friedensdorf" - is redundant, except as a self-deluding imitation of good order.

In the inverted carnivalesque with which White endows life under the Third Reich, the death-camp is an essential locus of grotesque ambivalence. From the official point of view, the Jewish people are the "low-other". They are the

alien and demonised grotesque which threatens to contaminate the integrity of this fascist version of the "classical body". Their destruction is therefore expressed as a clinical purifying ritual - as a decontaminating purge. And in this process the traditional idiomatic valencies of cleanliness are redefined, or defamiliarised; they are equivocally collocated with the anathema of mass-murder. With its gas-chamber in the guise of a bath-house the Holocaust has established a grotesque ambiguity of immense historical resonance.

All that is macabre, grotesque, and ambivalent is therefore produced by the "official culture" parodying itself and its values in order to sustain itself as a constructed identity. This is analogous to Stallybrass and White's paradoxically troubled "classical body" which embraces the grotesque to protect its own integrity.

The participants in this sinister "counter-carnival" enjoy power and privilege, and in wielding these they achieve a contrived closure - a sense of completion - which contrasts with the "ever-unfinished openness" that Bakhtin ascribes to the true popular carnivalesque. When their victims, for instance, are finally "eliminated", the charade can be switched off along with the gramophones and loudspeakers. (An encoded sense of contrived closure in the hypostatized identity of the fascist body could also perhaps be perceived in the infamous phrase, "Final Solution.")

The "laughter" of this inverted form of carnival emerges as irony because the "official culture", as in Himmel-farb's policeman, is nervously conscious of the ambivalence in applying "the conventions of hell" to sustain a parodic illusion of good order. In the following extract, White's deliberately aposeiopic manipulation of the death-camp's tannoy system expresses this consciousness:

"Achtung! Achtung!" the official voice prepared to inform, or admonish. "After disrobing, guests are requested to hang their clothing on the numbered hooks, and to pile any other belongings tidily on the benches beneath. Everything will be returned aft ..."
 But there the system failed.
 "Achtung! Acht ... On numbered hooks ... Will be return ... Ftt ... Ftt ..."

(RC:182)

We may also infer, from the scene of the gas-chamber which introduced this analysis, an implicit Whitean comment on moral equivocation in narrative practice itself. Himmel-farb's last-minute reprieve from death sets him apart from his doomed companions; it combines with his intellectual superiority to deny him the innocence of the pure and sacrificial victim, of the paschal lamb, which ironically he had sought. Marked in this way as not among the innocents, he is then implicated in the event as a narrative (and moral) focaliser. The last glimpse of the Lady from Czernowitz is therefore shared between him and the reader in a ghastly version of the "aperçu for two", or of Bakhtin's "caquet". It is a shocking exemplar of the vicarious narrative and

reading experience that I have described earlier in this chapter. Even the elevated vicariousness, for instance, of tragedy's "pity and fear" is denied here, by the starkly grotesque qualities of the bathos.

The scene remains monstrously discomfoting because it transgresses privacy and propriety without satisfying either a prurient or a noble horror. No mediating and mitigating narrative commentary is offered us as a boundary between the grotesque and the ghastly, or between the event and its telling, because the focalising protagonist has already forfeited, through failure to love or to save, the prerogative and the power to redeem, to moralise, or to reassure.

Likewise, the extradiegetic narrative itself is unremitting because it is consciously implicated in the equivocations of a grimly absurd reality; it too, fails to redeem, because it fails to be innocent, and because irony will permit none but a contrived closure.

At the end of the passage no extenuation is conceded to this carnival of ironies; vituperative gall is heaped upon the un-innocent victim - not by narrative jurisdiction, but (in the following extract) by other and less equivocal voices:

And [Himmelfarb] felt himself falling, falling, the human part of him. As his cheeks encountered the stones, the funnels of a thousand mouths were directed upon him, and poured out over his body a substance he failed to identify.

(RC:184)

World War and genocide must obviously be a special case, but within the analytical approach of this thesis it is arguable that this section of Riders in the Chariot represents a starkly extreme example of Patrick White's habitual view of the world. This is a perception that the contingencies of material reality are (often dangerously) absurd, that the cultural orthodox which is established in this social reality sustains itself by a charade of elaborate self-deceit, and that a universal dispensation of grimly carnivalesque irony ensures that all attempts to find an unequivocal and redeeming assurance in the material world must fail.

In the next section I shall continue to study aspects of the carnivalesque in White's writing. Specifically I shall consider the relation of his grotesque "low-other" to the cultural "orthodox", and in the case of Hurtle Duffield we shall see how the artist's appreciation of the apparently "regenerative" grotesque entails moral equivocations. I shall finally consider in Chapter Five how The Twyborn Affair, through its "writerly" theme of naming and identity construction, is a particularly effective vehicle for White's rhetorical carnival of "fortunate failure".

To end this chapter, Lotte Lipman's song from The Eye of the Storm seems to express the ambivalent episteme by which White appears to formulate his view of regeneration in

a world that is absurd, grotesque, and bathetically rather than heroically tragic:

"When Mother rode into the ring,
How my heart sang at every step and caper,
until the scales fell from my eyes
and I saw the dreck on all the sawdust
floors.

It's the old worn-out song;
Nothing makes a difference any more.
It's a world full of hollow men,
A circus full of dressed-up apes,
The lion and the lion cubs,
The lady with no torso.
This finishing school with all its tricks -
What's it for? Only to pass the time!"

...
"Every night, since I was born, my soul has
lost its innocence.
Don't condemn it, just understand,
The created soul was flawed -
That's how it is in nature.
On the same spot where they wither,
There will grow other carnations;
They are never lost,
They're always born anew."

...
"The roses cannot pass away,
Love resurrects them ..."

(EOS:428-30) (translated from the German)

Chapter Four: Grotesque Personal Habits

Guilt, which is the burden of Himmelfarb's message to Mary Hare, is a fundamental concern for Patrick White. It is a regular theme in the more ostensibly autobiographical writing, where White presents it as a condition that compromises sincerity.

The analyses in this chapter will focus on his representation of the artist who is trapped between the exigencies of this compromising reality and the imperatives of his work and "vision". As the fiction in these cases is close to autobiography, I shall begin by establishing some topoi from Flaws in the Glass. Bakhtin's carnival theory and the observations of Stallybrass and White will continue to provide an analytical terminology.

I shall examine the author's interest in the carnivalesque "low-other", the moral dilemmas which this interest entails, and its effects on his cognition. I shall argue that his interest, from early childhood, in the "low-other" is cognate with the development of a narrative imagination. These topoi will then be developed in analysing Hurtle Duffield's relations with the grotesque in The Vivisector.

White's memoirs indicate that he became aware of the grotesque "low-other" at an early age, and that its influence simultaneously expanded his vision and troubled the innocence of a child's homogeneous outlook.

The "Mad Woman", whom the young Paddy encounters "in our back yard rootling through the garbage bins", as well as in "my private territory the lower garden" (FG:20), is an example of the "low-other" that challenges the integrity of the orthodox. In crossing the boundary which separates private garden from public street, she violates the symbolic barrier between the "official culture" of suburban orthodoxy and the "popular culture" of the carnivalesque. The young Patrick, whose imagination is not yet troubled by orthodox taboo, is susceptible to the exciting allure of the transgression. White's adult hindsight interprets this allure as a key to creative vision. The trappings of the grotesque, whose presence temporarily suspends normality, are recognised by him, "years later as the paraphernalia of the illusion referred to as art" (FG:20).

White has also called life an "illusion of reality" (FG:154). I suggest that his habit of describing both art and life as "illusory" has a logical rationale in the carnivalesque intersection of the grotesque and the orthodox, which he is in the habit of noticing. This is because such a perspective focuses on the dialectical energies between categories of meaning. As in Bakhtinian carnival, opposed categories are mutually redefined, all is seen as ambivalent, and fixed categorical meanings appear illusory. This is the perspective that leads to White's sylleptic habits, and which creates the ironic dispensation that governs the

lives of his fictitious characters. It is also this habitual perspective that sustains his own sense of being distanced from all forms of orthodox and fixed identity, whether it is sexual, religious, political, or national.

For example, after the Mad Woman's fight with Solomon the gardener, Paddy is taken to see a musical comedy - but finds himself remote from the show and from the audience:

As the heroine sang about the silver linings she saw while washing up the dishes I could see only the Mad Woman, the snowy bracts of guelder roses falling in a storm as she wrestled with Sol. All round me in the plush tiers of the theatre, families were offering one another chocolates and smiles and enjoying the predicaments [of the heroine]. For the first time I was a skeleton at the Australian feast. I could not have told about it, and went out of my way to present the normality and smiles expected of me, while drawn back into the dusk, and storm of shattered guelder roses enveloping the Mad Woman and myself.

(FG:21-22)

White's emphasis on the aesthetic impact of the Mad Woman interestingly echoes Bakhtin's definition of grotesque realism as "the aesthetic concept" which is peculiar to the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1968:18). The Mad Woman appeared to Paddy "in dreams and waking fantasies", and "even by daylight she seemed to belong to some nether world rather than the realities of poverty and hunger" (FG:20). Bakhtin's cosmic and ideological interpretation of the body and "bodily life" in its carnivalesque form also transcends such economic exigencies as poverty and hunger:

Manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egotistic, "economic man", but to the collective ancestral body of all the people.
(Bakhtin 1968:19)

Nevertheless, White's aesthetic response to the Mad Woman is tinged with guilt by the social conscience of the rich. The empathy that he expresses for her is therefore the result not only of imaginative excitation, but also of a real fellow-feeling which disturbs the aesthetic perspective. She initiates the young Patrick into the conditions of a morally equivocal reality that looms beyond the sheltered and homogeneous experience of childhood.

White records this initiation in a memory of petty betrayal: when Paddy encounters the Mad Woman in "my private territory the lower garden", she smiles at him, and an empathetic intimacy seems to be established:

The strange thing was that she took it for granted that this part of the garden, which I considered mine and resented other children entering, was hers as well, perhaps even more essentially hers. The terrier seemed to accept it. He didn't bark or attempt to attack."

(FG:21)

But then the child goes to tell "them" about the Mad Woman's presence and thereby reneges on this empathetic compact. Although the sentence that follows this is disingenuously noncommittal, a sense of guilt is implicit: "I stayed behind when [the dog] ran down with them to chase the intruder, but by then she had disappeared, except from my mind" (FG:21).

When White recollects the climax of the macabre fight between the woman and the gardener (her skirt falls off) he recalls a mixture of guilt, fear, and stimulated perception:

I did not see what happened after that. I ran away. I ran upstairs. I lay on my bed. The glass above the dressing-table showed me palpitating in green waves. My heart was beating, a wooden, irregular time, as in another situation the hooves of Voss's cavalcade drummed their way down the stairs in this same house.

(FG:21)

The sylleptic eliding of the categories of reality and fiction, of Paddy's fright and Laura Trevelyan's fever, signals that this was a moment of visionary commitment which was as intense, as discomfoting, and as regenerative, as Laura's apprehension of love. Laura puts off the innocence of maidenly pride, and Paddy loses the innocence of childish simplicity.

The life of the middle-class child is straitly bound by walls and fences and by timetables of tutelage, but White recalls many incursions which, though less dramatic, are no less incisive than those of the Mad Woman. These are all moments of disturbing or forbidden perception that invade the officially decreed perimeter of his youthful world, and which influence the development of a narrative consciousness. On holiday from his English school, for instance, he is troubled beyond comprehension by

... the voices of the Welsh miners, their high harmonies as they tramped the Brompton Road in

greasy raincoats. Straining towards an unattainable Jerusalem they reached me in depths I would not have known how to explore. Afterwards I lay on my bed, tossed on a sea of Welsh voices and some unreasonable unhappiness.

(FG:2)

Although this moment of extra-liminal perception is not of the forbidden sort, an implicit sense of transgression prompts the boy to suppress his formless (and sylleptically expressed) intimations in a ritual of correct behaviour: "I got up and washed my face and hands, and went down with my family to the grillroom, to a dinner of fried whitebait in little potato baskets." (FG:2) ¹

The following extract, from reminiscences of his Australian boarding school, describes a more explicit infiltration of the officially protected zone by distinctly forbidden and grotesque knowledge. It also indicates a structural parallel between such intelligence and story-telling:

A murder was committed the other side of the wall of pinus insignis. He rode into town with a prescription; his wife was sick. He bought her a bottle of eau-de-Cologne, drank the eaudy on the way home, then shot her, and a few of those who came out to take him in charge. We were not supposed to know. I experienced it along with everything else.

(FG:28)

What the schoolboy "experienced", apart from the general sensation of crime and news, is - judging by the way in which the facts are related - also an act of narrative. I have already suggested a link between gossip or repute and

the practice of narrative, and I have suggested that White is highly conscious of a kinship between these kinds of discourse. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, as I have shown, lists gossip as a "species of narrative". The "eau-de-Cologne" extract illustrates the truth of this, and also reveals White's narratological cast of mind, in the manner in which he recalls learning about the murder. He represents the incident as a paradiagnosis - an incidental narrative - which is pitched at a different level from the narration of his memoirs. The part that this little story plays in the construction of a "self-portrait" is to indicate the making of a novelist; it is a demonstration of narrative practice, and of Thackeray's precept that "there's no good novelist who isn't a good gossip". The fact that the story comprises forbidden knowledge indicates the morally equivocal dimension of fiction that White so often seems to hint at.

In a final example, we may discern the moral question of the perceiver's vicarious appropriation of grotesque knowledge. The bounds that are transgressed here take the form of a schoolboy's tutelary routine. White represents himself gazing at prostitutes while on his way to a private class.

The most fascinating part of the French lessons was my dawdling approach ... up Woolcott Street observing the early risers in their lace gowns ... discussing details of their trade with a colleague. What I sensed intuitively was fleshed out from the guarded remarks of virtuous adults, none of whom knew what I knew. As I walked past the

terrace of sleazy houses in the early light I often experienced a jealous thrill, half fear, half possessiveness ...

(FG:35)

Once again, illicit perception is cause for secrecy. But in this instance the feeling of "possessiveness" and the "jealous thrill" expand the cell of secrecy from an inward-looking negative realm of fear and guilt into a positive and unbounded realm of desire. By this I do not mean physically sexual desire, but the desire to possess knowledge of the "other", which motivates the child's explorations in the topography of human behaviour.

Stallybrass and White write of the fascination and "desire" with which the child of the "bourgeois" household gazes upon the other or "nether" world of courtyard, street and city. They demonstrate how the "low-other", in the form of the nurse, the governess, and the housemaid, facilitates the middle-class child's transgression of its own class taboos and guides its explorations of the "grotesque body". In the form of the nursemaid, for instance, the "low-other" penetrates literally to the cradle of "bourgeois" society.

Gratification of desire is promised by "the maid who, 'belonging' both to the bourgeois family and to 'the nether world', mediated between the home and the lure of the city."

(Stallybrass and White 1986:150)

Patrick White's memoirs reflect these observations. I have intimated in Chapter One how he established life-long friendship with several of the White family servants, and how it was they, not his parents, who introduced him to the world of sensation, scandal, gossip, and the macabre, which "stimulated [his] novelist's imagination" (FG:32).

In Flaws in the Glass, the walls and hedges that physically divide the domestic and the orthodox from the cultural "other" present a spatial analogy for the limits of cognitive perception. They symbolically delineate the range of the perceptual paradigm, and they define its focus. Orthodox education, which may be termed "licit knowledge", formally extends the range of its paradigm, but there is always a boundary in place to control its focus, such as the garden wall, the hedge of a school playing-field, a code of behaviour, or an imposed time-table.

Illicit knowledge or "grotesque education", on the other hand, violates those boundaries from "outside". (Indeed if we adduce Bakhtin's formula of "ever-unfinished openness", the paradigm of illicit knowledge is "without bounds" in both senses of the phrase.) Like the trespassing "Mad Woman", or the servant's "infiltration"; like scandal, gossip, or haunting music that penetrates from without, the illicit or low "other" transforms the closed limiting boundary into an open liberating "threshold" of renewed percept-

ion. The enclosing wall becomes a perceptory device, as if it were an ocular lens, or an auditory membrane.

This threshold, on the boundary between opposed cultural energies, is the site of carnivalesque inversions and renewals which entail, for the perceiving subject, a blend of transcendent vision and disturbing guilt. Like himself, the complicated artist personae of White's fiction are "constructed" through location in this Januine portal where boundaries and categories overlap and dissolve. Such characters are nourished and energised by ambivalence. On the other hand, the more monadic character who seeks unequivocal confirmation of a hypostatized perspective, is prone to disappointment and to bathos. For this kind of character, the dissolution of a boundary, and of the containment and assurance that go with it, may reveal a void, or even a dangerous abyss.

The "grotesque body" and its related excremental and somatic imagery are blatantly present throughout The Vivisector. But although the grotesque fulfils the degrading function that Bakhtin describes, the realist mode of the novel obviously proscribes the cosmically proportioned valency of symbolic degradation that he finds in Rabelais. Patrick White's version of the grotesque might rather be described as a systematic supporting structure of dramatic or rhetorical props, which, like Paddy's "Mad Woman", or like the "smell of shit" at Salonika, facilitate an altered,

expanded, or chastened perception. In this way the people who enter Hurtle Duffield's life in The Vivisector are presented as his sources of grotesque inspiration. Usually such inspiration is also troubled by guilt, because the dialectic between the dialogical vision of the artist and the monological world of his subject compromises discursive homogeneity in the human relationship.

Duffield represents the type of the artist who is different from his species; who is always an outsider separated from his kind by material and psychological boundaries; and who transforms these boundaries into thresholds of perception. It is invariably the grotesque that facilitates this transformation, by subverting the orthodox or by exposing its flaws. Incisive perception inevitably causes offence, and the artist is charged with cruel, perverse, and vicarious exploitation. The obverse of the artist-type's offence is the alienation he suffers - he himself is a distinct "other".

Descriptions of this condition abound in the autobiography and in the fiction. For example White recalls being frightened by an intimation of it in his childhood - by "... the remark overheard in a discussion between other people's mothers ^... can't help feeling he's a little changeling ...'". (FG:5) In The Vivisector the young Hurtle exemplifies this kind of displacement. Even before his

sale, he is represented as an enigma to Cox Street and his biological family:

There was so much of him that didn't belong to his family. He could see them watching him, wanting to ask him questions. Sometimes they did, and he answered, but the answers weren't the ones they wanted. They looked puzzled, even hurt.

(V:14)

Further egregiousness is forced on him by his sale to the Courtneys for five hundred pounds. As the object of an illicit transaction he is initiated into betrayal, guilt, and hypocrisy, as well as the "changeling's" sense of not belonging. After adoption by the Courtneys he realises that he has become completely displaced: "He didn't belong anywhere: that was what frightened; although he had wanted it that way." (V:86) When he routs a group of mocking "larrikins" he is desolate at having his displacement proved:

Then ... he ran after them ... " 'Ere! Hey! Wait a mo! I got somethun ter tell yez," he called in the remembered language.

Unconvinced, the pack ran on ... So Hurtle Courtney Duffield gave up at last. He stood in the street, the two languages he knew fighting for possession of him.

At the worst, though brief moment, when it seemed unlikely he would ever succeed in communicating through either tongue, he heard himself blubbering.

(V:124-5)

Hurtle is therefore "constructed" on the boundary between two cultural strata - "two languages" - to neither of which he quite belongs. His position is carnivalesque in

that he embodies this dialogical and ambivalent intermingling of Duffield and Courtney cultures.

Rhoda Courtney, whom Hurtle, cuckoo-like, threatens with displacement as the favoured child, is also a "change-ling" type who inhabits and tests the brittle perimeter of her family's social culture. Her faculty for incisive and discomfiting perception is nourished by her family and friends' dissembling responses to her deformity. Their petty dishonesties reveal to her their masked fears and revulsions; they signal to her that she is a grotesque "other", which her society tries to exorcise from its conscience through a charade of gestures and formalities. As outsiders in their respective ways, Hurtle and Rhoda are able to see through the deceptions that social orthodoxy practices to maintain its structural integrity. This faculty makes them both "vivisectionists", incising, dissecting, and revealing, with a curiosity that is prompted by their own scantily clad flaws.

In the analyses that follow I shall consider White's use of the grotesque and the ambivalent as correlatives for Hurtle Duffield's aesthetic vision and his moral development.

The shrine-lavatory embodies the carnivalesque dichotomy of the sublime and the base that is typical of White's sylleptic rhetoric, and the Delphic qualities with which he invests the "dunny" indicate its significance as a percept-

ory threshold. It makes four significant appearances in the novel. Its smell and its blowflies dominate Hurtle's shack at Ironstone, where he also applies excrement to his self-portrait. On the Greek island of Perialos it occurs as a holy shrine, and this has its domestic equivalent in the artist's "dunny" at Flint Street. Iron tripod bidets are a central image during the young Hurtle's stay at a French hotel, and they provide an iconic motif for his painting.

We shall first establish the significance of the lavatory as it appears in the incident of Rhoda and the tripod bidet, because this item provides Hurtle with an iconography and a series of works that could be read as indices of his professional and moral development.

During the Courtneys' overseas trip their sojourn at St Yves de Trégor in Brittany is dictated by the exigencies of the "lower bodily stratum" in the form of a diarrhoea epidemic. The Breton littoral is reminiscent of the Boudin seascape which had fascinated Hurtle on an early visit to the Courtneys' Sydney house, "Sunningdale":

It had a mournfulness of mud and gulls, of wind
blowing across stony fields out of the Atlantic.
All its colours were water-colours.

(V:128)

It could be a prototype of the "wet sand and pale water" of the Boudin, whose textures had stimulated the young Hurtle's sensory appetite. (Years later, discovering this painting on Boo Davenport's wall, Hurtle "would have liked to explain

to her how the Boudin had become a reality of his own at St Yves de Trégor, where he had noticed for the first time, flat, firm sand lying like flesh under a white muslin of sea. (V:279))

Pale wateriness is a familiar sign of spirituality, revelation, and epiphany in White's descriptive repertoire. In the following extract the coastal expanse correlates with Hurtle's perceptual receptivity, which is encouraged by the "ever-unfinished openness" of loose bowels:

All night he listened to the sea advancing over mud encroaching on his room a voice the voice of a woman rinsing crashing laughing the bidet must have. Somewhat early the diarrhoea came over him again. He had to get up. As he crouched and shivered on the raised foot-prints above the hole, a crying of gulls blew in at him. He looked out, and a liquid light had begun to sluice the estuary.

(V:130)

The style of the first sentence, with its rhythmic crescendo and open-ended conjectural cadence, sets a mood of liquefaction. Constraints are dissolved; the aperient body and the lavatory's aperture are concomitant with the boundless "encroaching" of the tide and with the penetration of seabirds' cries and "liquid light". The dissolution of limines is attended by illicit knowledge of the "other" - a woman at her toilet, and the grotesque collapse of an iron bidet. The agglomeration of "crash", "laughter", and a foul degrading mishap recall the theoretical formula of Bakhtin's carn-

ivalesque, and the open-ended aposeiopsis emulates the "ever-unfinished" and ambivalent quality of carnival.

This atmosphere of revelation and dissolution seems to determine Hurtle's invasion of Rhoda's privacy, when he discovers her naked beside the bidet in her hotel room:

He had decided to go into Rhoda's room, for no clear reason: he was drawn in that direction. As soon as he began to make the move he tried to stop himself, but couldn't. The loose knob on Rhoda's door was already rattling. Like his voice offering unconvincing excuses in advance. Before he positively burst in.

Rhoda was standing beside one of the spindly iron-legged bidets. She was naked down to the soles of her feet. She was trying to protect her privacy from this too sudden invasion of light. She was holding in front of her thighs a sponge which only half hid the shadow of pink hair.

(V:131)

The child's urge to transgress correlates with the carnivalesque incursions and dissolving of limines described earlier. All of these are implied to be the conditions that generate creative vision, for Hurtle's transgression leads to his painting of the estuary at St Yves. But this creativity is compromised with ambivalences which adumbrate the moral and metaphysical dilemmas of his adult career.

The "shock" that Hurtle feels on seeing Rhoda is not specifically qualified; thus it may be taken to register a mixture of perceptual excitation, aesthetic wonder, guilt, embarrassment, and revulsion. His initial reaction is to seek refuge in dismissive vulgarity:

Because he was so shocked he began to point, to grind his foot into the floor, to laugh his crudest and loudest. Before backing out. The rattling door slammed shut but only thin between them.

He ran into his room and squashed his face into a disgusting eiderdown, to try to blot out what had happened.

(V:131)

Hurtle consequently paints a picture which combines the vision of Rhoda's nakedness with the morning's vision of light and liquefaction: "He painted the silver light sluicing the grey mud as he saw it from his window, and as focus point, the faintest sliver of pink shining in the fork of the estuary." (V:131) But the picture is a "botched thing"; it is "too unsuccessful, or too private", and he attempts to dismiss it, just he tried to "blot out what had happened" after seeing Rhoda: "His crude attempt made him whinge. In the end he hid his failure under the bed. He thought he wouldn't look at it again." (V:130-1)

The revulsion that grips Hurtle at the sight of Rhoda's nakedness thus becomes reformulated as aesthetic distaste for his picture; this implies that painting is his way of cathartically sublimating the grotesque which, because it mirrors his own apostate ambivalence as a "changeling", is at once a stimulant and a source of anxiety. (An earlier example of this trait is his intuitive knowledge of his Latin tutor's suicide, and the mural on his bedroom wall that recodes this insight into an aesthetic problem.) (V:100)

The young Hurtle cannot countenance the instinctively empathetic recognition which the grotesque induces in him: while the dissolution of limenes grants perception, it also threatens him with disturbing self-knowledge. His self-protective vulgar laughter at the sight of Rhoda's nakedness fails to shield him from his grotesque alter-ego: her bedroom door remains "only thin between them".

But aesthetic appetite prevails over revulsion; the sensory stimulation of the train journey out of Brittany restores Hurtle's composure. He is able to reconstruct the sight of Rhoda in the objective language of composition, as a study in form, light, and colour:

As the train ran lurching through the fields, he saw her very vividly: the ribs of her pale body beside the iron framework of the collapsible bidet, her naked face, and the tuft of pink in the shadow of her thighs. Courage was taking hold of him again. He began to try her out in his mind in several different attitudes and lights. Invaded by his vision of flesh, he forgot the botched estuary.

... He would do all that he had to do. But not yet. It was too luxurious thinking about it.

(V:131-2)

Only years later, during his Flint Street period, does Hurtle, on "an impulse", revive the personal and moral implications of the vision of Rhoda, naked beside the tripod bidet.

It was curiously weightless relief: to draw his sister Rhoda Courtney standing beside the bidet ... at St Yves de Trégor. If he had betrayed a timid, wizened tenderness by raucously breaking

open the door protecting her nakedness, the drawings were at least a kind of formal expiation:
Rhoda's hump sat for moments on his own shoulders.
(V:269)

The active relation that Hurtle conceives between Rhoda and the iron convenience is suggested by the deixis in the title, "Pythoiness at Tripod". This relation is revealed when Hurtle, invited to call on Olivia Davenport, nearly chooses instead to stay at home with his painting: "Rhoda was parading such an air of tenderly rapt dedication to her oracles, she could have won [his attention]." (V:270) Finally Hurtle has acknowledged the communicative (and discursive) force of his illicit vision of Rhoda: he conceives her as a Delphic seer consulting the auspices, which, implicitly, consist of excrement. But even so, the oracular significance of the original vision is diminished and made impotent; time and distance from his original shock have enabled Hurtle to translate Rhoda into an innocuous and "formal" theme, instead of a disturbing and accusing presence.

The painter's "formal expiation" is readily subordinated to his aesthetic passion; and Rhoda is appropriated as a subject of the amoral realm of colour and light:

... he was so pleased with what he had done, he caught himself standing back, his mouth furled in a juicy funnel as though to suck up the milky tones of Rhoda Courtney's sickly flesh. He left off as he began to dribble.

(V:270)

The vulgarity is exacerbated by the vicarious nature of this new uninhibited relationship with Rhoda; it severely questions the probity of the "expiation". Even the bearing of "Rhoda's hump for moments on his own shoulders" is facile rhetoric, generated by sentiment and his habit of objectifying the grotesque and sublimating it into an aesthetic abstraction. Duffield's crypto-orgasmic behaviour is not a response to the actual Rhoda, whom he has always found repulsive; instead it expresses a sensual infatuation with his medium, and with a creative concept.

Although Hurtle lacks the cool poise of Boo Hollingrake, his new relation to Rhoda echoes Boo's sensual behaviour behind the "Monstera deliciosa" during a childhood party at "Sunningdale". (V:153) The repetition of a glottal "funnel" and the dribbling emission point to a structural similarity in their characters: both Hurtle and Boo find stimulation in the grotesque; both are independent characters, whose relation to others is mediated by their gaze of detached fascination. Their removed stance tends to cast them both as voyeurs, whose human relations tend to be conducted vicariously.

The difference between them is indicated by the relation between artist and patron. As Rhoda's childhood observation implies, Boo is perfect ("`Boo,' she said, still remembering, still entranced, `is gold - a sort of golden colour.'") (V:148); in her person she is impeccable, and her

life is conducted with the deliberation of perfect craftsmanship. Absolute as she is, like the sealed and highly-finished "classical body", she can only gaze upon the somatically open carnival of bodily relations. Duffield is the medium through which she conducts this vicarious life, and her successes are defined by appropriation and ownership, most notably in her purchase of his works.

The painter himself presents a flawed version of Boo's authority. In his work he feeds off the "low-other" with an aesthetic detachment that parallels her vicariousness. But he is also subject to the demands of the orthodox. His own carnivalesque ambivalence is licensed, delimited, and often interrogated by the exigencies of the public gaze, and of patronage. In other words Olivia/Boo, as a paragon of social orthodoxy, wields the controlling power that is mandated to licence the carnivalesque. For his own part, Hurtle exercises such a governance over his lovers Nance Lightfoot and Hero Pavloussi, but he remains genuinely ambiguous in his own identity and values.

His relationships with Hero and Nance are compromised by his aesthetic interest in the women. Nance appeals as the grotesque "low-other", from whose degradation he is able to formulate the aesthetically sublime qualities that invest the painting entitled "Marriage of Light". This is how he sees his relationship to Nance:.

It seemed to him that he loved this woman he hardly knew as a person: at least he loved and needed her form. Whether he desired her sexually was a matter of how far art is dependent on sexuality.

(V:189)

Hero's attraction is the "simplicity of spirit" that he ascribes to her (V:322); it satisfies his aesthetic appetite by dialogically offsetting her propensity for self-destruction in martyred debasement. He acknowledges to himself that "he had been feeding on her formally all those weeks, and that the least related corners of his vision borrowed her tones of mind, the most putrescent of which were often the subtlest." (V:373)

We shall next consider the lavatorial putrescence at Hurtle's "Ironstone" shack, in which the excremental circumstances of Nance's death reveal the destructive face of the grotesque Janus.

Hurtle Duffield's smearing of his self-portrait with his own faeces is a ritual of carnivalesque ambivalence. The balance between degradation and creativity is described by the narrative:

He began very patiently and seriously to smear all that he repudiated in himself. He had thought he knew every inch of that painted board, till working over it now. With enlightened fingertips. As he worked, he bubbled at the mouth, wondering wondering what would be left.

(V:249)

Nevertheless this is an ineffectual ritual - it amounts to no more than a rhetorical gesture. The force of "repudiation" is neutralised by the creative act. Excrement sheds its fully degrading significance; it becomes just another painting medium. Hurtle's technical absorption implies that the excremental is appropriated to art, and to an undiminished egotism. The artist in Duffield is not repudiated but sustained by this new painting technique, and Nance's comment on a prior version of the self-portrait could still apply: "There ... that's Duffield. Not bad. True. Lovun 'imself.'" (V:248)

Her irritation at Duffield's self-obsession remains, implying that the experiment is pathetically futile: "Leave it!" she moaned in the end. "For Chrissake leave ut!" The artist's response, "But I stink!", is left unqualified by the narrative and seems to return him pathetically to a debasing and unredeemed reality (V:249). In circumstances that are already bathetic, the protestation is too weak and rhetorical to serve as an idiomatic metaphor for his psychic condition, or for his artistic talent. Nance has already pre-empted, or extracted, the full symbolic force of excrement through her genuinely degrading rebuke to Hurtle's limp attempt at conciliation:

He heard himself, like the worst of captions at the flicks: "We still have each other, Nance."
 "Like shit we have!"
 She made it splatter brown across his forehead.
 (V:248)

All that Hurtle achieves, then, in his own dung-tossing, is to translate Nance's simile into reality. By making love to her in his noxious condition he literally endorses her excremental definition of their relationship. The narrative confirms this: "By now they had both reached the depths." (V:249) Dialectical tension becomes temporarily suspended because the condition of the "low-other" is now the only reality; they are momentarily united in a "grotesque body" whose "aesthetic principle", with its redemptive symbolism, has been vitiated by unambiguous debasement.

It is Nance, the genuine "low-other", who ruptures the aesthetic illusion of degradation in which Hurtle had sought to immerse himself. She seeks material assurance, where Duffield's quest is rhetorical self-repudiation: "... she was ticking off an inventory ... 'That ring,' she was mumbling and fumbling." (V:249) Hurtle, sustaining his mode of heroic repudiation, responds to her importunities by throwing away Pa Duffield's signet ring. Nance's material values are affronted, and Hurtle is privately afflicted with the pain of guilt and betrayal:

... all he wanted was to get up off the shuddering bed not to harm anybody but reach the door to fling the ring.

"There!" he croaked, after his moment of triumph.

"Wadderyerdone?" Seemed to need confirmation of what she had been watching.

"Nothing to hurt anyone living." It was a lie of course: he could feel the wound deepening in himself.

...
 He could hear the shock in Nance ... "Throwun
 away a valuable ring yer grandad solid gold!"
 (V:250)

White parodies offended sensibility in Nance's garbled clichés, but he also ridicules Hurtle's false heroism through the comic rhyme "fling the ring", and the hyperbolic "moment of triumph". These narrative qualifiers signify that the artist's essays in transgression fall bathetically short of the Bakhtinian regenerative grotesque.

Although Nance is formally an embodiment of the "low-other", she cannot see herself as "the aesthetic principle of grotesque realism"; this is a quality that is only appreciated by the observing artist. She perceives and resents Duffield's aesthetic distance from "human" sympathies:

" ... you aren't a 'uman being."
 "I'm an artist." It sounded a shifty claim.
 "You're a kind of perv - perv'ing on people ..."
 (V:224)

In the self-portrait passage she elaborates on the theme of vicarious exploitation by specifying the grotesque as Duffield's perverse source of inspiration:

" ... with an artist you're never free he's makun
 use of yer in the name of the Holy Mother of
 Truth. He thinks. The Truth!"
 She spat it out on the floor.
 "When the only brand of truth 'e recognises is
 'is own it is inside 'im 'e reckons and as 'e digs
 inter poor fucker you 'e hopes you'll help 'im let
 it out..."
 ...

"By turnun yer into a shambles," she trumpeted. ...

"Out of the shambles 'e paints what 'e calls 'is bloody work of art!"

(V:247-8)

"Shambles" could describe Duffield's house, lifestyle, and environment at "Ironstone". Like his fascination with the degraded Nance, his house on the brink of "The Gash" locates him on the boundary of the grotesque. The local name for the gully suggests the violence of his attempts on inner truth; it conveys the unrelenting harshness of this threshold of perception. For Nance, who seeks the stability evoked for her by the Duffield signet ring, the revelations of the grotesque expose her to an abyss of insight that undermines her "monology" of precariously established material values. For Duffield "The Gash" is a vital and ambivalent site of dissolution, renewal, and perceptive development, but for Nance it only offers destruction. While Duffield passes out drunk, Nance searches in darkness for the ring and falls to her death into the gully below the house.

After Nance's death this section of the novel ends with Duffield casting his debased self-portrait into the gully, in a further attempt at repudiation. Described as a "scarred monster", which is "still encrusted with his own faeces as well as paint", the work is of the same species as the likeness of Dorian Gray. (V:253) It reproaches the subject for his moral ambivalence, "eyeing him to the end". The

rejection of the painting could signify Duffield's resolve to reject aesthetic self-absorption, but the closure which such a neat moral resolution might effect is denied by the equivocal statement that ends this section of the book: "At least in this instance nobody would enquire whether it was murder or suicide or accidental death." (V:253)

Our next locus for the grotesque and the excremental is the island of Perialos. Hero Pavloussi, after her failed pilgrimage, expresses disillusionment and self-loathing by invoking excrement: "Dreck! Dreck! The Germans express it best. Well, I will learn to live with such Dreck as I am: to find a reason and purpose in this Dreck." For all her vehemence and emotional sincerity however, this again is only the rhetoric of degradation; it is a conventional idiomatic gesture, and has no defamiliarising or renewing force. The unequivocal meaning and tone of her utterance denies any symbolic ambivalence; its flat closure predicates the bleak finality of her lonely death.

For Duffield, the habitually artistic perceiver, Hero's excrementalism is readily linked to a redeeming image. More mature, and more sympathetic than the young Hurtle of "The Gash", he tries to employ his moment of spiritual and aesthetic perception for Hero's therapeutic benefit. The object of his vision is "a little golden hen":

The warm scallops of her golden feathers were of that same inspiration as the scales of the great

silver-blue sea creature they - or he, at least - had watched from John of the Apocalypse ...

"See - Hero?" he began to croak, while pointing with his ineffectual finger. "This hen!" he croaked.

Hero half-directed her attention at the hen; but what he could visualize and apprehend, he could really only convey in paint, and then not for Hero. The distressing part was: they were barking up the same tree.

Their lack of empathy was not put to more severe tests ...

(V:392)

"Lack of empathy" between Hurtle and Hero is signified by discursive and perceptual divergence. The parenthesis in the first sentence conveys the isolation of Hurtle's vision. Set apart by his capacity for apprehending carnivalesque ambivalence, Hurtle fails to provide unequivocal love or salvation. The failure is sadly ironic, for Hurtle comprehends Hero's condition - it is a discomfiting echo of his own excremental nadir at "The Gash". This knowledge, rather than verbal inadequacy, might cause the diffidence expressed by the "croak" and the "ineffectual finger".

Hurtle is also set apart from his lover by his professional gaze - by the constant gleaning of images for his mental sketch-book. For example, Hero's "Dreck" outburst is triggered by a grotesque incident at breakfast, to which Duffield privately responds with a dispassionately aesthetic interest:

Forgetting she had finished it, she took a mouthful of her coffee, and now had to spit out the muddy dregs; however he remembered Hero ... this might remain the key version: the black lips

spluttering and gasping; the terrible tunnel of her black mouth.

(V:392)

If it is impossible for Hurtle even "in paint" to communicate his perceptions to Hero, it is because she is one of White's hypostatized or monological characters. She does not have the capacity for sylleptic, or for carnivalesque, ambivalence. Like an archaic sculpture, she is without plasticity. At their first meeting her pose is described as "Cycladic", evoking the hieratic rigour of ancient and tragic fixity. (V:313) Later, at Duffield's studio, Hero appears "luminously tragic, though possibly this was what Greek convention demanded." (V:332).²

On her resolute pilgrimage to Perialos ("`Why will [grace] not be given,' she shouted, `if I am determined?'") Hero's fixity brings bitter disillusionment. (V:374). It prevents her sharing and finding regeneration in Hurtle's ambivalent and creative observations. Her determined idealism is contrasted with Hurtle's imaginative elasticity when they first encounter girls from the island's Convent of the Assumption:

"They are some of the orphans these good nuns are taking care of." Hero spoke with a sentimental sententiousness; but to him the disappearing girls had the look of sturdy, hairy animals bounding among the rocks and thyme.

(V:383-4)

When her spiritual disillusionment emerges at the convent its expression is equally unequivocal: "`All these

girls are whores. They have all had bastards, or are in process of having them.'" (V:387)

In contrast with Hero's pilgrimage discourse - "the tongue peculiar to Greeks and Saints" (V:384) - Hurtle defines his imagination as "the language in which he communed with devils". (V:384)

This could be his definition of the "paradigm of illicit knowledge" that I have described earlier. That transgressive paradigm depends dialectically upon the presence of a delimited orthodoxy. On Perialos Hurtle's perception of grotesque ambiguities depends on the postulation of God as the hieratic apex of the orthodox:

He was conscious of God as a formal necessity on which depended every figure in the afternoon's iconography: goat-troglodytes; the old man pissing against the wind; orphan-whores; the procession of mourners; a martyred Hero.

(V:388)

In other words, the formalities of the trip to Perialos - the religious motivation, the island's "iconography", the orthodox attitudes - dialectically provide the lineaments of a carnivalesque threshold that admits the grotesque. Indeed this particular "threshold" is patently open. Unlike the dissembling that Boo Davenport's socialites or Mesdames Jolley and Flack commit to sustain their orthodoxies, the "official culture" on Perialos is blatantly intermingled with the grotesqueries of a Bakhtinian "popular culture".

Corruption blends with office, Christianity with Dionysian paganism, sanctity with excrement, and death with life, in a carnival of confident "popular laughter". A description of the Chapel of St John conveys this Bakhtinian blend of degradation and sublimity. The holy shrine is presented as an open port through which nature unadorned is free to enter, as are also the archaic deities and the ancient enemy from Asia Minor, as well as the importunate and corrupting bowel. Rhetorical questions and conjectural subjunctives also stylistically formulate the ambivalent openness of carnival:

All but one of the icons had been prised away from the crude iconostasis, and the eyes of the survivor gouged out: by Turks from across the channel? or the devils of Perialos? The sound of birds' wings might have soothed; light might have furnished the abandoned chapel with a panoply against corruption, if one remorseless spear hadn't struck at a subsiding mound of human excrement beside the altar.

(V:389)

The village funeral that confronts the pilgrims before they ascend to the mountain shrines is both ritualistically formal and buoyantly grotesque. It is presented as a truly demotic festival: "What must have been practically the whole population of the port chattered and jostled ..." (V:381) The gathering is buoyed up with a kind of cosmic and ancestral awareness, which recalls the "universality" of Bakhtin's carnivalesque:

Greeks, the peasants at least, all seemed to understand whatever there is to know in their sphere of life, as well as in the greater sphere described with geometrical precision behind it. Only the rich and the foreigners didn't know: so the peasants were sorry for them, the confident black glances and glistening smiles seemed to imply.

(V:381)

On learning the purpose of the gathering, Duffield comprehends its ritual ambivalence: "The procession parted slightly, and he realised this was not only a matter of life." (V:381)

In true Bakhtinian fashion, the funeral-carnival opens itself to relationship, engulfing Hero and Hurtle in its midst and challenging their autonomy: "The tattered priests and their tallow-faced acolytes obviously intended the two lost souls to participate in the mystery of which they were the guardians." (V:382) Significantly Hero fails to appreciate and rejects an opportunity to attain "grace". It comes in the form of a grotesque and somatic invitation:

A middle-aged woman with a beard spoke to the foreign lady, whose mouth couldn't cope with the reply. Soon afterwards the procession wobbled on, with laughter and prayers.

"What did she say?"

"When we have come for such other reasons, she wanted me to kiss the corpse!" Hero could have been spitting out the sensation.

(V:382)

The conjunction of "laughter and prayers" is sylleptic in spirit and exemplifies the formula with which White apprehends life's ironic contingencies. But the Bakhtinian

aspects of the funeral suggest that in this instance the conjunction transcends the toils of irony. It is a sacred conjunction; it is the formulaic key to the "mystery" that excludes the two "lost souls". Ambivalence in this pastoral place does not signify absurdity, dissembling, or moral equivocation: it indicates the rhythmic cyclicity of an organic cosmos which is comprehended by the folk culture of the peasants. Hurtle, like "any true Grecophile", knows this. His "goat-troglodytes", for instance, recall a Dionysian culture that is pre-tragic and pre-Christian: "Troglodytes, variously bearded, scampered out of their caves and off amongst the olives, scattering dung." (V:382).

For Hero, on the other hand, the pilgrimage to Perialos is a failure because she polarises the base and the sublime; for her the grotesque is an obstacle to the spiritual grace that she covets. This is indicated in her motive for the pilgrimage: "I feel the devils may be cast out in the holy places of Perialos." (V:373) In the end she presents her disillusionment as a martyrdom; she is a martyr to her own rigidity of perspective, and a tragic cynicism is her final, conclusive, and unrelenting tone: "... I will learn to live with such Dreck as I am: to find a reason and purpose in this Dreck." (V:392)

Finally it must be noted that although Hurtle comprehends and is inspired by the ambivalences of Perialos, he remains the detached and observing artist - not a Greek, but

a "true Grecophile". Not a celebrant, but a spectator, he is separated by his appreciative gaze from both the "popular laughter" of Perialos and Hero's personal tragedy. Even though the folk culture on Perialos may exemplify the Bakhtinian formula for the carnivalesque, it remains for Hurtle a foreign, though revealing, experience.

When Hero had first proposed the pilgrimage of expiation, Hurtle's response was "'And what about my devils? ... What if I want to hang on to them?'" (V:374) Self-repudiation is no longer a valid course for Hurtle: this was proved by its destructive consequences at "The Gash". He recognises now that ambivalence and equivocation are unavoidable and that these are the conditions that generate his creativity. For Hurtle the ritual absolution that Hero seeks is artificial and sterile; it also poses a threat to the licence of carnival and art:

"I'm an artist," he had to say, though it sounded like a vulgar betrayal. "I can't afford exorcism. Is that what you've sensed? Is that why you want it?"

(V:374)

Duffield's thoughts on leaving Perialos echo Rhoda's remark on the Courtneys' grand tour that "'Wherever you go, you've still got to go on being yourself'": (V:138)

He might have told [Hero] that, in his case, the only life he could recognize as practical was the one lived inside his skull, and though he could carry this with him throughout what is called the world, it already contained seeds created by a

process of self-fertilization which germinated more freely in their natural conditions of flaking plaster, rust deposits, balding plush, and pockets of dust enriched with cobweb.

(V:391)

This, of course, is a description of Hurtle's house in Flint Street, Sydney, which is my fourth example of an excremental locus. The house matches the ambivalence - the carnivalesque yoking of decay and regeneration - which is inherent in Hurtle, and which he needs to preserve for his imaginative sustenance.

The house also reflects Hurtle's carnivalesque mingling of Duffield and Courtney cultures or fields of discourse. It opens in front onto Flint Street, and at the back onto Chubb's Lane, forming a "threshold" between a suburban middle class and a nether class of society - "The two faces of the house complemented each other". (V:264) Decayed splendour is Duffield's birth-right, the changeling's dual inheritance. As the passage quoted above suggests, decay is a necessary grotesque condition for his creativity, as is the retention of his "devils" - the moral dilemmas and lapses that torment him.

In this house all forms are subject to ambivalence, dissolution, and grotesque restructuring. An amusing instance occurs on Olivia/Boo's first visit to Flint Street. Both characters feel obliged to make adjustments mutually to accommodate each other. The meeting of their two "worlds" is reflected in White's manipulation of idiom - when Olivia

arrives she uses the "high social key", but quickly corrects herself to suit the occasion:

"I feel horribly guilty taking up any of your precious time." It might have been sincerely meant, but she had forgotten to change her voice: this was the one she used in the other world.

She seemed to realize her oversight at once, for he detected an irritated preoccupation.

(V:285)

As the dispenser of carnival licence, and a cultivated afficionado of the grotesque genre, Boo consciously adjusts her code of behaviour to suit the occasion. During the visit Hurtle becomes aware of her disingenuousness: "It became obvious that Mrs Davenport was the most insidious kind of deceiver." (V:287) On her departure she resumes "the affectations and inflections of the class to which he had been given the opportunity of belonging." (V:294) Constructed as he is in ambivalence, Hurtle's own attempt at linguistic code-adjustment emerges as a comical hybrid:

... he'd better put on a smile while dragging the door open for her; but he could feel the smile thinning into a simper as he gurgled and glugged inanely in the idiom used by the Davenport world: "Bye bye Boo bye dear see you next time watch where you're going Boo that's where the dogs do it," his mouth stretched like a piece of elastic about to perish ...

(V:295)

Olivia is but a dabbler in ambivalence, and her essays in the grotesque are consciously scripted and finite imitations of the genre. She is remote from the material degrad-

ation and the somatic openness that characterise the true carnivalesque. Hurtle's gaucherie over dog mess signals this difference between them: it is the kind of grotesque image that he would notice, in the same way that his author is in the habit of noticing the grotesque, the vile, and the "low-other".

Dog mess returns us to the lavatory as the site of the grotesque, the excremental, and the "lower bodily stratum". Like Elizabeth Hunter's commode in The Eye of the Storm, Hurtle Duffield's "dunny" at Flint Street is a patent focal point for the carnivalesque.

The house itself is described in the beginning as inviolable: "Nobody would invade this one ... The masked houses had a secretive air which didn't displease him: he wasn't one of those who resented lowered eyelids, for he had usually known what lay behind them." (V:264) Invasion is contrived, nonetheless, by Olivia. However, neither she nor her protégée Hero penetrates to the dunny at the rear; this remains Hurtle's private fastness - his inner sanctum.

Described as "vine-hooded" (V:396) and "his secret shrine" (V:397), this lavatory shares the "masked" and "secretive air" of the house, as well as echoing the Cycladic significance of the desecrated chapel on Perialos. It is the protective carapace of the eccentric artist (who is referred to by his neighbours as "Turtle") and also it constitutes a perceptory device - an auditory and olfactory

membrane between Hurtle's privacy and the vulgarly public and carnivalesque riot of Chubb's Lane:

Here the clothes lines and corrugated iron took over; ladies called to one another over collapsing paling fences ... There was a mingled smell of poor washing, sump oil, rotting vegetables, goatish male bodies, soggy female armpits, in Chubb's Lane.

(V:264)

Within the constraints of realism White is able to approximate the full symbolic significance of the "lower bodily stratum" by shifting the locus of the excremental (the lavatory) from beyond the pale to the focal centre of the book's topography.

The dunny is even instrumental in the plot structure. It brings together Hurtle and Hero, because a lack of toilet paper forces Duffield to open a letter from Olivia inviting him to meet the Pavloussis at dinner. In a realist version of Rabelais' prodigious bum-swab symbolism, Hurtle's application of the letter to his behind predicates the depravities practiced by the artist and his "spiritual bride", Hero. Because the letter is Olivia's text, this action also implicates her in the excremental and foreshadows her vicarious involvement in the relationship.³

The social gush of the letter, which includes facile sylleptic brilliance - Cosma's eyelids are "grown blacker from Vichy, and hypochondria, and toast" - is pointedly contrasted with Duffield's immediate situation and his in-

different response to the communication: "When he had read the letter, he wiped himself with it, not from malice, but because there was no other way out." (V:306) This act of degradation erases the social code that the letter represents and accordingly we are given no sign of Hurtle's response to the invitation. His lavatory thus provides an apparent refuge from the exigencies of social propriety and of moral conscience. It is described as a lyrical pleasaunce, whose denizen enjoys indemnity from the ethics, the compromise, and the equivocations of human contract:

The dunny at the back, though pretty thoroughly trussed with bignonia, enticed the morning sun through its open door. In this shrine to light it pleased him to sit and discover fresh forms amongst the flaking whitewash, to externalize his thoughts in pencilled images, some of these as blatant as a deliberate fart, some so tentative and personal he wouldn't have trusted them to other eyes. ... On the whole it didn't disturb him not to know what he believed in - beyond his powers, the unalterable landscape of childhood, and the revelations of light.

(V:306-7)

Naturally this kind of indemnity is only a temporary refuge: much as Hurtle seeks release from the moral human contract which, in his view, fragments his artist's vision, his human relations have always provided the impetus for painting. A corollary therefore, of the contrived innocence gained by refuge in the dunny, would be perceptual sterility.

For example, when Hurtle reacts against Hero's emotional importunities he blames their relationship for compromising his artist's vision:

So far he had conceived in paint no more than fragments of a whole. If he were only free of women who wished to hold somebody else responsible for their self-destruction; more difficult still: if he could ignore the tremors of his own balls, then he might reach his resisted objective, ... all all of these [images] and more fused in one - not to be avoided - vision of GOD.

(V:369)

This urge towards an uncompromised universality is then expressed in Hurtle's new series of "Furniture" paintings, based on the memory of the kitchen table at Cox Street: "Mightn't the whole have been formally contained from the beginning in this square-legged, scrubbed-down, honest-to-God, but lacerated table?" (V:370)

Having parted from Hero, Duffield conducts a contained and celibate life, painting his furniture studies, and drinking milk, in a semblance of honest purity. But these new paintings are described as "exercises", into which Hurtle "forced himself, as in making love with Hero whenever she demanded it". (V:370) The sterility of this new mode of life and work becomes revealed to him, and only the carnivalesque, with its grotesquerie, its dissolution, and its dialectical and regenerative force, can release him from the discipline of a false and contrived commitment.

Hurtle's containment is initially undermined during a conversation with a shopgirl who objectifies him as an "elderly gentleman". His response to her unexpectedly subverts the entire rationale for the new paintings, and for his belief in "his own powers": "After living the fifty-five years you so correctly dropped to," he told her, "I've reached the conclusion the only truth is what one overhears.'" (V:394-5) This acknowledgement of vicariousness as the provenance of meaning encapsulates the book's moral theme, and it leads to Hurtle's disillusionment with his present work:

... the smallgoods girl, by performing a simple operation on his mind, had done away with the membrane separating truth from illusion..

(V:396)

In The Eye of the Storm Sir Basil Hunter writes:

"Constipation in the theatre doesn't pay, believe me. In some London basement perhaps, with half a dozen handwoven devotees in front; not when you take it on the road.'" (EOS: 346) This implicitly accords with the carnivalesque role of excreta and the visceral "lower bodily stratum" in the creative cycle of death and regeneration. In the present instance, Duffield's bowels correlate with his creative sterility: he is described as "costive", which signifies, as well as constipation, a quality of stubborn and impenetrable recalcitrance. Nevertheless, the pending carnivalesque renewal is indicated: removal of a (suitably visceral) divis-

ion - "the membrane separating truth from illusion" - suggests the kind of perceptually stimulating dissolution of categories that generally inspires and invigorates Hurtle.

Duffield's complaint leads him to the dunny where, although he remains constipated, "... when a smooth, velvety stool might have been the great rectifier ...", the chamber's grotesque function as a threshold to carnivalesque knowledge provides relief from the impenetrable "costive" impasse. (V:396)

The lavatory passage presents an interesting example of White's ironic versions of the carnivalesque. Although his reinvigoration occurs in a typical Bakhtinian locus for ambivalent carnival laughter, Hurtle's constipation denies the full symbolic process of excremental degradation and renewal. Instead the artist - an egregious renegade among his species, like the "skeleton at the Australian feast" - finds comfort in an unaccustomed gregariousness. Even so, the moment of human fellowship is tinged with bathos because, as usual, Hurtle's "mingling" is conducted vicariously:

Inside the vine-hooded dunny with its back to Chubb's Lane, heat became a positive virtue, an assistance to the stiff pelvis. While he sat straining in the heat which was half smell, he noticed the aphorism he had started to scribble on the white-wash - must have been twenty-five years ago - and never finished:

God the Vivisector
God the Artist
God

Permanently costive, he would never find the answer: it was anyway pointless, not to say childish.

As the sounds of life flowed along the lane behind him, breaking, and rejoining, his only desire was to mingle with them. He did, for an instant or two, and was rewarded with a gentle content, behind closed eye-lids, in his secret shrine: till the woman's voice began.

(V:396-7)

The passage of dialogue between Ida and Jean follows this, in which the artist receives a "vivisecting" from the nether-world of Chubb's Lane through the auditory membrane of his lavatory wall.

The episode illustrates his observation that "the only truth is what one overhears", but its significant aspect lies in the inversion of relations between the object and the perceiver in this case of eavesdropping. In this instance Ida and Jean do the perceiving and the artist passively follows their gaze: "'Look, Ida! Look at this fence!' He was wide-eyed for what they were going to see."

(V:397)

Spatially, Hurtle's position is akin to the vicarious narrator of the "Cackle of Confined Women" described by Bakhtin as "concealed behind a curtain". In the "Cackle" genre, carnivalesque gossip is licensed by the controlling - and focalising - authority of an eavesdropping narrative. Similarly, through his own medium, Duffield normally wields a power of sanction and licence over the carnivalesque grotesqueries that supply his subject matter. But in the

present case the eavesdropper is the object of the gossip and he has no authority over the discourse or the behaviour of the "low-other".

As I have suggested in Chapter Two, focalisation itself is inverted here; or it is at least made ambivalent. I suggest that the "membrane separating truth from illusion" is analogous to the boundary that separates the category of the grotesque from the category of the orthodox, of authority, and of authorship. With the dissolution of that "membrane", Hurtle's aesthetic vision has been deconstituted, and now with the inverted focalisation, his authority is degraded by the vulgar judgement on eccentricity and art: "'Yes, 'e's old all right - and crazy as a cut snake. That's what art does for yer.'" (V:397) Thus the carnivalesque transgression that occurs here entails not only the dissolution of a boundary by the grotesque, but also the eliding, as in syllepsis, of a differentiation between categories, which include categories of narrative focalisation, or of authority.

All this deconstitution is accompanied by the renewal, for Hurtle, of an open and childlike freedom from the suspicions of the ego: "He was so fascinated by what he was overhearing it scarcely referred to himself." (V:397) Of course this detachment could also indicate his customary "costive" imperviousness to the impact on him of other people's sentiments; the fact that he is still constipated and not fully aperient (as at St Yves de Trégor) would sup-

port this reservation. Nevertheless, Duffield is revitalised by the incident:

As soon as he was alone he pulled his pants up. Thanks to his constipation he wasn't delayed by wiping: one advantage in being an octogenarian nut.

He went upstairs and dressed a little ... He came down, and pulled the door shut on Number Seventeen. The impact might have started him off feeling younger if he hadn't noticed the veins in the back of his hand.

But it was in some compelled sense a festive occasion ...

(V:398)

Duffield later represents the events of that morning as "the throes of rebirth" (V:405) and is inspired to paint a child: "... he was fidgeting to create this child. Or more than one. Or many in the one. For after all there is only the one child: the one you still carry inside you." (V:405) But just as his "spiritual marriage" with Hero Pavloussi turned into adulterous depravity, the quest for a "spiritual child" ultimately leads him into paederasty, with its increment of guilt.

As I have hoped to show in this chapter, Hurtle Duffield is constantly steeped in carnivalesque ambivalence. It is his inheritance as a "changeling", it is thrust on him by circumstance and the importunities of other people, and it is the major influence on his work. Outside of his work Hurtle is a largely hapless figure in the management of life: "At least he had his work, however closely he was threatened by human vice, his sister Rhoda, the approach of

old age and the behaviour of those who only bought his paintings to flog." (V:470) In short, the greatest threat to Hurtle's integrity is the human contract with the discursive compromises it entails, and to which, against his will, he is constantly subjected.

If we apply the terms of carnival theory to Hurtle's haplessness, or powerlessness, the artist emerges as "King Carnival" who is given license, grudgingly, by the orthodox - the galleries, critics, admirers, the collectors, and speculators. More personally he is also given license by Boo Davenport who controls him through her vicarious interest in his corruption and guilt. She owns and understands him through his paintings, orchestrating his affair with Hero, and manipulating his conscience over Hero's suicide attempt and later, her death.

Olivia is an accomplice in Hurtle's life, and in his conscience. Her own response to this immersion in guilty ambivalence is literally to "go to Rome", as she informs Hurtle at his exhibition. In other words, at her last appearance in the novel she has sought her own closure by making herself impeccable - in the most complete sense of the word. She finally chooses to renounce the grotesque and the ambivalent, and to replace irony with faith. Hurtle himself remains "this pantaloons" (V:459), with a "parti-coloured soul" (V:339) He makes a painting of "The Old Fool Himself", trapped inside an "enormous bladder" (V:484) which

signifies hapless enclosure within the boundaries of the grotesque.

I would suggest, finally, that the paintings (like the dunny) provide a refuge that is too contrived, and which is even perhaps facile in comparison with the complex equivocal energies generated by Hurtle's discursive construction and his human relations. My reason is that the incisive dialogical tensions which are the strength of the book are dissolved in the paintings. As an artist, Hurtle is interesting because of his perceptory gifts; these however, are also the gifts of a writer, and indeed they are only active in the novel when described as moments of differentiating cognition which are not necessarily the thoughts of a painter.

The paintings themselves tend to appear very naive when White uses them as illustrations of the dialogical drama. In this role they become static and monological emblems which lack even the energy of the motifs that feed them. The tripod bidet, for instance, loses its active force in representation. Its various reworkings - as an abstract design, or with Rhoda as an octopus - convey nothing incisive to the reader, and their value for Hurtle, even, is glossed over. The paintings seem only to be actively meaningful when they appear as "conversation pieces" - when they provoke dialogue and tension, as in Boo's protests at the "Pythoiness at Tripod", and in Hero's shock at her "pornographic" portrait.

White's forté is the argumentative, provocative, and dialectical carnival of language. Indeed, in the episode of Hurtle's retrospective exhibition, he demonstrates this to the point of indulgence. Like the crowd at the show, he ignores the paintings and plunges with relish into his proper medium. The evening is presented as a carnivalesque cacophony of wit, malice, prurience, innuendo, and gossip. The art gallery act of passive looking becomes an active discursive exercise in voyeurism and in argument.

The topic of guilt, with which this chapter began, derives its energies from the fields of ambivalent identity construction, of disturbing illicit knowledge, and of morally equivocal human relations - which include vicarious appropriations of the stimulating "other". I suggest that Hurtle's refuge within the frame of painting is, for once, an unfortunate failure, because it is an escape from the dynamic energies of the carnivalesque into a non-linguistic, and crypto-spiritual realm of "oneness". This may be Hurtle's (and his author's) desideratum, but it is also a contrived escape from the equivocal discursive energies of writing and authorship. The artist as an old "pantaloon" recalls the precept that "there's no slander in an allowed fool". Similarly there is no dialectical force in emblematically described paintings.

I shall argue in the final chapter that the story of Eddie Twyborn is much more successful because he has no

refuge from the dialectics of category, of identity construction, of linguistic meaning, and of interpretation. There is no third realm outside of language such as the canvas offers to Hurtle; Eddie is his own work of art, and he collaborates with narrative practice in his own creation and destruction.

To conclude, I shall quote the curious apology submitted by the character "Patrick" at the end of Memoirs of Many in One. He is the extra-homodiegetic "frame" narrator of the novel who is presented also as a morally implicated protagonist in his role as Alex Gray's friend and editor. He is so patently a portrait of Patrick White himself (they even bear the same surname) that the apology must be interpreted as White's own view of authorship.

... 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.

If she had become my victim in those endless scriblings which I was faced at last with sorting out, I was hers through her authoritarian bigot of a daughter.

We were quits, oh yes, but never quit of each other.

(MMO:192)

Where Duffield finally tumbles out of discursive life into an inarticulacy of paint, canvas, colour, death, and cryptic spiritual symbolism, "Patrick's" conclusion remains true to the practice of authorship. It summarises the carnivalesque qualities of artistic practice that I have

demonstrated in this chapter, and it attributes to this practice the "ever-unfinished openness" of the sylleptic habits that invest Patrick White's writing with their equivocal energies.

Chapter Five: The Habits of "Eudoxia": Patrick White's
Allegory of Fiction

I: Death of an Author.

I have demonstrated Patrick White's concern with repute and gossip, and I have indicated the kinship of these forms of discourse with narrative practice. The broad hypothesis for this final chapter is that in The Twyborn Affair White examines the credence of repute as an interpretative discourse, and that in doing so he also tests the valency of conventional systems of meaning - including, once again, the convention of narrative authority. In this chapter The Twyborn Affair is considered as Patrick White's allegory of fiction and authorship. The allegory is seen to be constructed on the semiotics of Eddie Twyborn's multiple persona.

In Part One of The Twyborn Affair "Eudoxia Vatatzes" muses in her diary on disguise and identity:

... nothing of me is mine, not even the body I was given to inhabit, nor the disguises chosen for it - A. decides on these, seldom without my agreement. The real E. has not yet been discovered, and perhaps never will be.

(TA:79)

This represents identity as something indefinable and inconclusive. Even the body is interpreted as an arbitrarily chosen vessel for the elusive "real E.". The fact that this body's apparel is a "disguise" reinforces the sense of

arbitrariness in appearance, or in other words, in material identity.

If the physical appearance of Eudoxia or Eddie Twyborn or Eadith Tryst may be construed as a semiotic "signifier", and each of these identities respectively as the "signified" concept, then this character could be read as a human exemplar of the Saussurean doctrine of arbitrary relations between the "signifier" and the "signified". (The "real E." must of course be presumed as the "pre-signified" in this case. I shall reserve this proposition for later, observing White's apparent message that in fiction accurate signification is of secondary interest to the discursive means by which signification is practised.)

As the interpretation of appearance and the construction of identity are special concerns of repute and gossip, we may specify the discourse of repute as an instance of the Saussurean "system of conventions" that constitutes a language structure. Gossip and repute in Part One of the novel "confirm" the identity of Eudoxia - for the reader as much as for the characters - and the confirmation provides the kind of consensus which, according to Saussure's formula, is a definitive requirement for a linguistic structure.

This establishment by consensus of the semiotics of Eudoxia supports the apparent coherence and authority of the narrative in Part One. But of course this consensus is a misprision, shared by the reader, the Golsons, Miss Clithe-

roe, and the inhabitants of St Mayeul, which only exposes the fallibility of interpretation. What is more, the misprision proves that practices of signification are as arbitrary, and subject to personal discursive foibles (such as Joan Golson's velleity, snobbery, and lust), as they seem coherent.

"Eudoxia" is in fact a "fiction" that is created, as she herself observes in her diary, by her lover Angelos Vatatzes. (TA:65) If we develop the idiom that she uses here, and cast Angelos as Eudoxia's "author", we may suggest that the elaborate allegorical joke that White plays at the expense of semiotic construction embroils, at another level, his own craft. In other words, Part One of The Twyborn Affair may be seen as a jest at the practice of narrative fiction. The name "Eudoxia", meaning "Good Belief", or even "Pleasant Fiction", implicates Angelos ("Messenger") with his own author in the fabrication of this jest.

The fiction that is Eudoxia succeeds in convincing its intradiegetic "readers" - such as Joan Golson and Miss Clitheroe - largely because, for their own reasons (which we shall examine in due course), they need to believe in it. Further, they sustain their belief in the fiction by constructing Eudoxia's persona vicariously within their own intradiegetic narrative practice of repute and gossip.

That elusive quantity, "the real E.", is therefore subjected to its embodiments, personae, or "disguises" by

the "authorship" of Angelos Vatatzes as well as by the "readers" of his fiction. Eddie/Eudoxia/Eadith is of course aware that the semiotics of his persona are provisional and that these relate arbitrarily to his cryptic but presumed "real" identity. Nevertheless, he colludes with his authors - and with the reader/gossips - in sustaining his persona throughout Part One: such disguises, he writes, are constructed "seldom without my agreement". (TA:79) Only Angelos, apart from the "real E." himself (and Patrick White of course), is privy to the deception, while the public gaze interprets these personae as transparently signifying the substance of "E."

I shall show how, in fact, the intradiegetic "readers" are perfectly correct in their interpretations, and that it is not their inaccuracy, but rather the disturbingly protean habits of the "signifier", that cause them tension and distress.

Clothing features prominently in the novel, as the "disguises" assumed by Eddie and - less overtly - by other characters. It constitutes a symbology of the protean as well as of the apparently unequivocal and orthodox. The clothing that Eddie wears in each of his embodiments functions semiologically as the signifier of that particular persona. In each case the semiotic criterion for his outfit is that it must cohere and convince (as is popularly expected also of language), but in each case the popular principle

of unequivocal transparency is vitiated. The reason is that neither the signifier, for example the "carnation gown", nor the signified concept, for example "Eudoxia Vatatzes", identifies or determines the substance of Eddie Twyborn and, taken individually, the various outfits fail to indicate the cryptic "real E."

Axiomatically, Eddie's own carnivalesque destiny is dictated by the same semiotic principle of arbitrariness and indeterminacy, for "the real E." is, in fact, nothing more or less than this ambivalent chameleon character of several inconclusive masks and personae. The identity of "the real E." is a carnivalesque embodiment of protean signification. By arranging Eadith/Eddie's macabre death as a woman/man with painted face, White indicates that the quietus is not to be reached in a resolution of dichotomies, nor in conclusive revelation, but in a carnivalesque fulfillment of the ambivalence that challenges our instinct for discursive finality. The "real" Eddie Twyborn is yet another "King Carnival", who presides over the inversion of appearance and reality and over the necessary failure of authoritative and unequivocal interpretations.

Carnival, as I have observed in Chapter Three, neither resolves nor transcends itself - it is fulfilled by being curtailed. "King Carnival" is killed while still in his festive guise; he simply has no place in the realm of solemn, orthodox, and monological sincerity. Indeed, as we

have seen in Himmelfarb's experiences, the codes of this realm are designed to eliminate all that is perceived as inimical to popular and homogeneous orthodoxy. The particular threat that Eddie poses is his subversive and discomfiting ambivalence, which, as I hope to demonstrate, reaches beyond sexuality to disarrange the paradigmatic structures of monological signification.

Eddie Twyborn is "identified" in the novel as four different personae: Eudoxia Vatatzes, Lieutenant Twyborn, Eddie the jackeroo, and Eadith Tryst the brothelkeeper. Each of these personae is signified by a special outfit which is at once convincingly sincere and a form of "fancy dress". We shall consider Twyborn's sartorial "disguises" as ambivalent signifiers that conceal and reveal, and we shall see how their valency is constituted in the discourse of gossip and repute.

I shall start by reviewing the discursive means by which the fiction that is "Eudoxia" is constructed. As I have suggested, these entail forms of narrative practice which include voyeurism, gossip, and repute.

The book begins with a deliberate act of voyeurism in which Mrs Joan Golson goes to peep at the presently anonymous couple who inhabit "Crimson Cottage". She has become obsessed with Eudoxia since observing her the day before from her motor-car, and is now compelled to essay another

glimpse. This is how she recalls the first sighting, and introduces the reader to "Eudoxia":

"the elderly man, ... and ahead of him this charming young woman (daughter, ward, wife, mistress - whatever) ... the carnation tones of her dress dragging through, catching on, fusing with those same carnations which she reflected, while absorbing something of their silver from the lavender and southernwood surrounding her."

(TA:14)

This presents Eudoxia as a woman who is beguilingly anonymous, even as to her relationship with the old man her companion. She may consequently be construed by Mrs Golson's velleity (and by the sentimentally inclined reader) as "available".¹ In Joanie's visual memory the sex of the figure is unequivocally established by the dress she wears, which is a metonym for femininity, and which is also apparently "naturalised" in this significance by its intimate correlations with flowers and herbs.

With Eudoxia's perceived sex thus ascertained, the details of her personal beauty are easily assimilated to this misreading, and appear to confirm its veracity:

The long thin brown arms of this girl, the perfection of her jawline, the grace of her body as she turned smiling to encourage the dispensable (anyway for Joan Golson) man in black. ... this graceful creature strolling with unconscious flair through her unkempt garden.

(TA:14)

In addition, Joanie's lesbian perspective seems to settle the question of gender. Mrs Golson's sexual ambivalence there-

fore contributes vitally to the whole narrative of misconstrued perception, and her emotional investment in this fiction adds to its credibility.

Although White often treats this character as a parody of vulgar colonial commercialism, he also represents her as a devoutly sincere "author" and "reader", who genuinely suffers as a fallible victim of the carnivalesque indeterminacy of meaning. Joan Golson's role in Part One is to dramatise the "equivocal energies" of communication, and we might construe her thus as an unlikely but effective "oracle" figure. Eudoxia's diary description of Joanie's first peeping represents her as balefully comical, but portentous, with a monumentally looming presence:

... we heard a motor assaulting the hill, emerging from the pines, shaving the garden wall. And there is Mrs E. Boyd Golson staring out; one would say "glaring" if one didn't know her to be myopic and afraid of limiting her social successes by taking to spectacles.

(TA:31)

Another oracular aspect of Joan Golson is her role as a haunting fate figure; in each of the book's three sections she emerges from the past and from lives which Eddie has sought to erase. Looming as she does out of the boyhood life which he has fled, she seems to Eudoxia to hold the key to childhood fears and tensions. Later, after they have met, Eudoxia considers seeking her help to "escape" her

present fictitious life, and perhaps to resolve those tensions:

... I must escape, and not through suicide. Was this why I wrote the letter to Joanie Golson? To enlist her sympathy, her help? Can you escape into the past? Perhaps you can begin again that way. If you can escape at all.

(TA:80)

The unspoken answer, I suggest, is that history is a narrative of repute, a fiction, an "histoire", and this is precisely what Eddie's French life and disguised persona is designed to erase and to "rewrite", or at least to confound. Mrs Golson is embroiled in Eddie's past, and - through her lesbian escapade with his mother - she is embedded in the intimate text of Twyborn family reputation. Her appearance in St Mayeul is therefore a threat, because she brings with her, like a charioted figure of Rumour, the disturbing discourse of forensic gossip, and the history of Twyborn family flaws. There is, in fact, no escape for Eddie from the ramifications of gossip, repute, narrative, and interpretation.

The extradiegetic level of narrative plays a double game that both upholds and subverts this discourse of repute. It often hints subtly at "Eudoxia's" real sex, as if to offer release from the web of fabrication, while it also sustains the misprisions of Joanie's voyeuristic narrative. In the following extract, for instance, the narrative commentary colludes in the construction of "Eudoxia" by quietly affirming his "drag" as a metonym for femininity. But it

also reveals the fictionality of the construction, and in the absence of any importunate "authorship", Eudoxia is for once at peace with herself:

... "Eudoxia Vatatzes" was seated on a rock, bare feet enjoying the texture of stone (and childhood) long arms emerging from these faded, but still lovely, carnation sleeves, to embrace bony knees.
(TA:98)

Eudoxia's uncommon pleasure in reminiscence, and the conjunction of "childhood" with sensory - not verbal - "texture", create a temporary sense of innocence in which the threat of history and repute is suspended. Fiction itself, which is personified in Angelos's creation, and which is cognate with repute, is made momentarily transparent by the inverted commas. The phrase "bony knees" also distinctly counterpoises the fictive feminine register of "these ... lovely, carnation sleeves". It provides a clue to Eudoxia's real gender, which is, of course, subversive to the fiction that she is, and indeed is subversive to the narrative ramifications that construct Part One of the novel. On the other hand, the frank openness of the description supports the illusion of a generously transparent narrative honesty, and the reader tends to gloss over the glimpse through fiction's veil.

As if to reinforce such delicate construction with the most unequivocal of perceptions, the indubitably masculine E. Boyd (Curly) Golson remains convinced by "Eudoxia" since

his first glimpse of her: "The girl was a looker, in more ways than one', then Mr Golson decided to add, 'if you like 'em flat', and caressed his wife's behind with a hand." (TA: 42-43)

During the Golsons' visit to the Vatatzes a similar authenticating tactic occurs when Eudoxia is focused through Curly's eyes as an object of desire:

She was delightful of form, moving, swaying, in this bleached-out robe which only a 'bohemian' would be seen dead in, unlike Joanie (he would never criticise Joan's taste in dress: it was too right and too expensive) but this young erect sheaf, he could see her falling to the reaper's sickle, possibly his own - yes, his own.

(TA:105)

Curly's arrogant and proprietary lust seems to reflect the "ownership" or "governance" of Eudoxia by the narrative webs in which she is ensnared.

A more subtle deception is practised here too, in focusing the reader's attention on the incongruous shift of register, or discursive field, from the lyrical narrative voice in the first clause to Curly's crudities; the contrast between these registers tends to obscure the actual object of their perception. In other words White supports the illusion of "Eudoxia" through surface play that foregrounds the structure of the narrative itself and distracts attention from forensic interpretation.

Miss Clitheroe of the "English Tea-room and Library" is an information broker of impeccable "bona fides", who also

testifies, through her intradiegetic gossip narrative, to the authenticity of Eudoxia: "'That is Madame Vatazes', Miss Clitheroe replied without hesitation [to Joanie's inquiry]. ... 'A charming young woman.'" (TA:47)

Thus the persona of "Eudoxia" - signified by her clothing - is articulated and confirmed by repute and by the observations of other characters, as well as by the subtle ambiguities in the extra-diegetic narrative level. Miss Clitheroe's remarks seem especially authoritative because, unlike the Golsons, she expresses no ulterior interest in Eudoxia. The librarian is presented not only as a custodian of information but also as a steward of the orthodox codes and proprieties. Her observations therefore invest the signified concept "Eudoxia" with the authoritative valency with which the librarian's impeccable "bona fides" are credited.

Her credibility in the eyes of her expatriate clientele is sustained by her metalinguistic emphasis on the codified surface structure of information broking, to which, because of her social anxieties, Joan Golson is credulously receptive. For example, Miss Clitheroe's account of the Vatazes is described as a formal "recitative". Emphasis is given to her French pronunciation of "Crimson Cottage", and she airs her "bona fides", rather than any real intelligence about the couple, by displaying her familiarity with the local social register:

"They rent the place from Madame Llewellyn-Boieldieu - slightly Welsh through the Llewellyns of Cwm. Her husband, Monsieur Boieldieu, didn't recover from an accident." Here Miss Clitheroe glanced at the clock. "Are you acquainted with Madame Boieldieu?"

Mrs Golson was going at the knees. "I know nobody," she confessed feebly, and ordered a pot of strong tea.

(TA:47-48)

Joan Golson is inadequate before the demands, not of practicality, or of emotion, but of the ritualistic surface structure of the librarian's code. This structure is composed entirely of metalinguistic "signifiers", and the collective "signified" to which they point is the concept, not of the Vatatzes or the Boieldieus, but of competence at the code. Miss Clitheroe's knowledgable "recitative" presents her as an apparently reliable narrator. Her question to Joan implicitly means "Are you initiated in our code, or are you, as I suspect, an unreliable romancer, an impostor?"

Accordingly, Joanie's ordering of tea is a gesture to compensate for her inadequacy. White signals this by the conjunction of "feeble" Mrs Golson and "strong" tea. The following statement appears also to confirm the tea as a ritual "signifier" that skates on the surface of a cultural code: "... it was the idea of tea more than tea itself that she had needed as a fortifier ..." (TA:48). This pot of tea is a votive gesture of appeasement to the librarian oracle and her codified authority.

Joan Golson is one of the "authors" of the gossip narrative in Part One, as she does most of the peeping, inquiring, and processing of information. But although she exerts this carnivalesque motivating influence on the story, and continues to haunt Eddie/Eadith in Parts Two and Three, she is represented as weakly dependent on, and in awe of, propriety, protocol, and etiquette. As Eudoxia remarks in her diary, "The Joan Golsos of this world spend their lives brooding over accents.'" (TA:61)

Because Joanie is so anxiously susceptible to Miss Clitheroe's credentials, which "vouch for" Eudoxia, even the latter's reservations about the origins of "E." are, for Mrs Golson, no less than proof of "the lovely young creature's" authenticity: "She could be English. She is very well-spoken. But one can't always tell, can one? in a world like this.'" (TA:47)

Miss Clitheroe's reservation affirms "Englishness" as a codified standard of appraisal, and more significantly it deprecates conditions - "a world like this" - that undermine this standard and put discernment in doubt. Her utterance, in fact, formulates the dialectical structure of Bakhtin's carnival, in which the valency of the grotesque - that is, of the denizens of "a world like this" - depends on the postulation of an orthodoxy.

In The Vivisector this dialectic is exemplified by the relations between Christian and daemonic iconography on

Perialos, and between an artist and his patronage. In The Twyborn Affair, I suggest, White locates it much more fundamentally in the dynamics of his own discursive art. Miss Clitheroe (who appropriately dispenses fiction from her library), is considered a "reliable source"; authority and authorship are combined in her, and she governs the practice of reading - and of gossip narrative - among her clientele. Her own "impeccable" narrative governs the repute of the Vatatzes, and seems infallibly to confirm the semiotics of Eudoxia. Miss Clitheroe's misprision, therefore, is vital to the general fabrication, while simultaneously undermining the orthodox concept of narrative authority. It ironically contradicts Joanie's several tributes to her as an oracular "reliable source". (For example: "I have it from the English Tea-room that war is inevitable. ... So Miss Clitheroe says." (TA:58.) Similar utterances occur also on pages 69 and 128.)

The dialectical counterpoint to the variety of constitutive narratives in Part One therefore comprises doubt, ambivalence, and irony. ("But one can't always tell, can one? ..."). Its personification in authorship is the eccentric Angelos, who is responsible for the entire fiction. In the following segment from "E.'s" diary, he represents the truly Whitean ironic author, who jeers at his own creation. (He has just given Eudoxia her semiotic signifiers - the shawl and the carnation dress - for her birthday):

He said, "I was wrong to give you these things. You have dressed yourself up like a whore, sitting at the open window by morning light." We both laughed. His teeth are still brilliant. Mine will crumble before I'm even half his age.

(TA:23)

Angelos is like a Prospero whose powers - in this case, of "authorship" - are open to abuse by their own beneficiary. The "whore" is fiction personified, licentiously flaunting itself.

This pair of reprobates are the laughing authors of a carnivalesque fiction which tempts but confounds the predatory gossip narrators, voyeurs, and intradiegetic "readers" of repute. As an "author", an "authority", or an "authenticator" himself, Angelos manipulates and governs his "fiction", who depends on him for cohesion and coherence. Expressing this in her diary, Eudoxia represents their relationship as an allegory of fiction:

The freedom of one's thoughts ... My thoughts were never a joy - only my body made articulate by this persuasive Greek. Then I do appear consecutive, complete, and can enjoy my reflection in the glass, which he has created, what passes for the real one, with devices like the spangled fan and the pomegranate shawl.

(TA:27)

Bearing in mind this acknowledgement of its own artifice by the "Eudoxia text" itself, we shall now consider the deconstitutive elements that trouble the construction of a conclusive narrative discourse in a less than impeccable "world like this".

Much is said in Part One about being foreign, being colonial, and being English. Joan Golson is so anxious to be taken for English instead of the Australian colonial "other" that she is more comfortable in St Mayeul where the distinction between English and Antipodean is elided by the French. Miss Clitheroe's less than perfect world therefore provides Joanie with a haven from the discrimination between categories that embarrasses her in England:

... the non-committal smiles of the English when faced with what is regrettably colonial can become a strain. To land at Calais or Boulogne and find oneself simply and unacceptably foreign was by contrast a relief.

(TA:13)

The resort of St Mayeul is a place where Joanie "Sweat-Free" Golson can loosen the toils of established identity and of the tensions between "colony" and "Home". It is a kind of crucible in which categories are dissolved and certainty gives way to a stimulating or discomfoting confusion and ambivalence. Contrasts between orthodoxy and romance and between certainty and doubt are articulated, for instance, in this passage of Joan Golson's thoughts (she has just been trying to persuade Curly to stay on in St Mayeul despite the imminence of war):

Joan Golson thought she had probably lost. She would be carried back out of the iridescence into a congealing of life, from which only Eadie Twy-born ["E.'s" mother] had rescued her at brief moments. And she had neglected Eadie. That letter she had started and never got down to writing.

But what could one say when all was surmise, suspicion, doubt or dream? One would never be able to conclude, never live out the promises.

(TA:59)

Of course, Mrs Golson does not only have a "regrettable" nationality to dissemble - her sexual ambivalence haunts her even more profoundly than her Australianness. This makes her particularly sensitive to the discourse of repute. For example, she feels threatened by the librarian's discernment: "[Miss Clitheroe] looked at Mrs Golson, who feared that she was being lumped among the undesirables." (TA:47)

Even her husband, unwittingly and in jest, threatens her "regrettable" secret with exposure: "It's only a mystery what you find in St Mayeul. I'd begun to wonder whether you were having an affair.'" (TA:44) Curly expands this joke to include "old Eadie Twyborn" and the great transgression of the past - Joan's appearance at the Australia Hotel, with Eadie in a corked-on moustache and her husband's clothes.

Joanie is not guilt-ridden over that incident; indeed the memory of the event seems as stimulating for her as was the prank itself. Her concern, instead, is for the way that repute may interpret and represent her behaviour, for she seems anxious to preserve the private significance of her more inspiring moments. The harsh light shed on them by

repute, whether in crude jest or in disapproval, threatens the delicate fabric of her private imaginings.

Her own "regrettable" ambivalence is instrumental to a revelation that makes The Twyborn Affair a novel about the construction of meaning, and saves it from the rhetorical metaphysics to which White has to resort at the end of The Vivisector. The tenuous and desired "iridescence" signifies more than the glow of Joanie's passion: like the luminosity that draws Hurtle Duffield into heightened perception at St Yves de Trégor, it is White's habitual sign of an epiphanic atmosphere. But the carnivalesque dissolution of limines which occurs for Hurtle is redefined in Joanie's experience as a dissolving of linguistic certainty, of reliable semantic categories, of all conclusiveness. She discovers the semiotic indeterminacy of the word, and the discursive unreliability of the narrative text.

This suggests, for me, that in The Twyborn Affair White has progressed beyond the problem which he shares with Hurtle Duffield in The Vivisector. This is the problem of reconciling the material medium of paint (and the iconicity of paintings described in narrative) with an ironic, constantly revising, and indeterminate perception. In The Twyborn Affair White has instead formulated the genuine literary problem which is intimated, but remains more or less submerged, in his previous fiction. The emergence of White's "writing characters" - Alex Gray, Joan Golson, and

Eddie/Eudoxia - allows him more clearly to articulate the instability of meaning that he perceives and which it is difficult to describe convincingly in terms of the painted image or by other iconic symbologies.

Unlike Duffield, Eddie Twyborn is an artist without a medium. The nearest thing he has to a medium is his own embodiment. If Hurtle Duffield finds "refuge" within the "frame" of painting, Eddie's version is his own incarnations and the disguised attire and behaviour that he must assume to make these appear convincing to the people around him. Ironically for Eddie, his own disguises construct him discursively - they cause him, through the discourse of gossip and repute, to be inescapably "framed" by narrative.

Because society's medium for interpreting appearance is the language of repute, and because the conventions of repute accord "face value" to the physical aspect of a persona, the valency of this language is obviously undermined when the apparent persona is not a reliable sign of identity. This is the source of all the tensions (and the humour) in The Twyborn Affair, and it is why Joan Golson, as a would-be writer, a describer - cannot write, and "would never be able to conclude".

The "promises" which she would "never live out" in her failed letter to Eadie refer to the narrative contract, which has become confused for her in St Mayeul through two conflicting influences. First, she tends to rely on auth-

ority to substantiate her perceptions and behaviour; second, the "iridescence" around her passion for Eudoxia entails a dissolution of convention, and illuminates her susceptibility to carnivalesque ambivalence. The effects on her of these conflicting influences are "surmise, suspicion, doubt or dream" - all of which defy the epistolary confidence with which she had begun, "Dearest Eadie," and then "stopped as though daunted by that exceptionally stylish comma; and might get no farther." (TA:20)

Joanie "Sweat-Free" Golson is an exemplary foil for White's sense of humour (especially as she is not burdened by the prejudice that attaches to a Mrs Jolley, or a Miss Docker) because she is such a gullible and unlikely celebrant of the carnivalesque. Her passionate yearnings for "the other life and the poetry of rebellion" are genuine, (TA:129) but her credulity makes her a perfect vehicle for the bathetic human tensions that nourish "the black in White".

In The Twyborn Affair these tensions are identified and located in the play of semiotic signification. Because he has identified semiotic code as the source of meaning, or of absurdity, White relies much less in this novel on satire of personality, or on distinct moral positions, in order to articulate these tensions. They are experienced by almost everyone who encounters Eddie Twyborn, and none of these people is cast as a villain, or for that matter, as a rom-

antically conceived initiate. In The Twyborn Affair White replaces the grand themes of art, of madness, and of active evil, with the pathos of vulnerable emotions laid open by a carnival of unstable and illusory signification.

For instance, Mrs Golson's reverie earlier in Part One, after peeping at Eudoxia and Angelos for the second time, gives form to the illusion that she harbours. It also reflects, in its dream text, an absence of spoken language, which seems to be a crucial pointer to Joanie's needs as well as to her anxieties. She dreams of being received by the mysterious young woman, undressed by her, and put to bed in "a room of apparent importance and their evident goal":

Joan was acutely conscious of the embossed pattern of fruit and flowers on the copper warmer which was first slid between the sheets waiting to receive her. Language was what she could not sort out: perhaps it was the language of silence as the young woman turned her noble head towards her, the invited guest holding in her whiter, plumper fingers a stronger terracotta hand, but from which, in spite of its warmth, she experienced no response, little enough illumination from the white smile in a terracotta face.

(TA:22)

The "language of silence" in this dream could indicate an easing of Joan's anxieties about codified behaviour, etiquette, and the accent and pronunciation that betray her origin. But as something she "could not sort out", it also produces its own anxiety. She is discomfited by the silence because it does not provide the affirmation she seeks,

just as Eudoxia's hand fails to "respond" or to provide "illumination".

When Mrs Golson finally meets Eudoxia, the conditions of the reverie are reversed; it is Joan who helps "this radiant young woman" to the Golson's hotel suite. The lyrical simplicity of the dream is replaced with a blundering enthusiasm: "Mrs Golson was so devoted to her mission she would have got down on all fours and offered herself as a mule if asked." (TA:50) Most important, however, the "language of silence" is replaced by conversation in which she feels increasingly inadequate and discomposed.

Eudoxia's unorthodox remarks disturb Joan Golson. Her candour on the topic of truth and lies makes Joanie feel "she was being drawn out of her depth. She did not want to be upset. She was ready to be charmed again." (TA:51) On the subject of money "Madame Vatatzes was far too explicit for Mrs Golson." And the residue of Curly's cigar smoke produces a shock: "'In fact,' [Eudoxia] confessed, 'I like the smell of a man.'" (TA:52) Joan feels savagely inadequate at her own embarrassing response to this:

"Well, it depends - surely. I can enjoy the smell of tweed - and leather - and all that - but I can't say I like a man's smelly smells."

At once she blushed. She had never felt so tactless, stupid, vulgar.

(TA:52)

The worst comes when her vanity is provoked over her "Australianness"; Eudoxia's knowledge of the Golson origins

deflates what was meant to be an intimately shared and reciprocated confidence:

"You speak [English] so beautifully." Mrs Golson paused, and sighed. "We are Australians," she informed her recently acquired friend.

"So I gathered."

"Ohhh?" Mrs Golson mewed. "Most people tell me there isn't a trace ... No, tell me, do - how can you tell?"

"By those I've known." ... "By a certain tone," she murmured, and left it there.

(TA:53)

In this instance Eudoxia wields the discourse of repute against one of its practitioners. Sensible, however, of her unfair advantage, of Joanie's vulnerability, and of her own part in their interwoven history, she curtails her answer. Amusingly, Joan's recovery is also ascribed to repute, but with a favourably edited text which generates her riposte. This fails because Eudoxia dismisses the code of the conversation "set", just as Eddie Twyborn had once absconded from a tennis court and from the codes of courtship and marriage:

It went on clanging in Joanie Golson's ears, who, nevertheless, had been known for her game of tennis, and who now played a devious shot.

"Your husband, I take it, is French?"

Madame Vatatzes returned the ball out of Joanie's reach. "No," she said, "he is not French"; and sat contemplating her ankle.

Only Curly's arrival could have affected Joanie worse.

(TA:53)

Joan is undone by the conversation because Eudoxia's candour, as well as her reserve, dissolve the social forms and contracts on which the hostess depends. It leads her to feel that "the shimmer had faded from the present occasion" and that she is stupidly gullible: "What she would have liked to know was how much she had been taken in - but ever. Would she remain the plump turkey, a knife eternally poised above its breast?" (TA:53)

While Mrs E. Boyd Golson is presented, not without authorial sympathy, as the most comical victim of Eddie Twyborn's disguises, and of semiotic and narrative unreliability, several other characters also suffer emotional confusion and moments of grotesque self-exposure when confronted with his ambivalence. Eddie is a catalyst for the doubts, fears, and inadequacies of these characters because his existence, as an embodiment of ambiguity, subverts not only definition, but the very system of signs by which meaning is conveyed and discourse is practiced.

Monsieur Pelletier, of the newspaper kiosk at Les Sailles, nurtures a "poetic" appreciation of conditions which recall Joan's unsettling "language of silence". The coastal landscape provides

... a spiritual refuge from his wife and family, from the intrigues of this village ... as well as from his own thoughts, doubts, fears, especially those incurred by references in the newspapers he had for sale, which he didn't so much read as flicker through, not wishing his mind to become entangled with their contents.

(TA:72)

He finds his "raison d'être" not in domestic life, or in the social discourses of the community, but in solitary regard, from his kiosk, of the ocean.

The receptive openness of his vision is suggested by the description of the sea air that regales him there on the morning after the storm: "... he began to breathe again, dragging on the air still churning out of the Atlantic, on past Gibraltar, to wane somewhere east of Marseille."

(TA:71) If he is also wont to question his own "raison d'être", this is not inconsistent, for Aristide Pelletier's inspiration excludes the determinate forms of signification. He is partial to the equivocal, the indefinite, the unsignified. When he watches Eudoxia approach the sea and disrobe, he rejects the impulse to borrow binoculars or a telescope because this would entail communication with their owners about the event, whereas he, "poetic at heart ... would have wished to keep his incident a wordless poem." (TA:73) The "language of silence" is his chosen medium.

Monsieur Pelletier is therefore qualified to appreciate the ambiguity of Eudoxia, just as Joan Golson ought to be through her sexual ambivalence. The narrative commentary suggests the shared attribute:

Monsieur Pelletier and Mrs Golson had not met at any point; they would not want to meet; they did not credit each other with existence.

It was only in the figure now clambering down over rocks, that the two might have agreed to converge.

(TA:72)

Experience of Eudoxia entails, for both, a loss of certainty - and of composure - which is accompanied here and in Joan's reverie by the absence of differentiating and defining language. The difference is that Aristide Pelletier is not constituted, as Joanie is, in the kind of social code of which Miss Clitheroe is custodian. As a local villager M. Pelletier is a denizen of the "world like this" that she deprecates. He does not define his world according to her differential and categorising episteme. Even the kinds of "undesirables" such as "les folles Anglaises", and "romantic Englishmen and pederast-poets" are naturalised in the vendor's perspective. (TA:73)

His "interest in the unidentifiable figure climbing down the rocks towards the sea" is presented as concomitant with his affinity for the coastal landscape. (TA:72) As the episode progresses, correlatives between his state of mind and his behaviour, the landscape, and Eudoxia's suicidal crisis are developed into an epiphany of "light and colour" in which language - whether of poetry or of the newspaper - is briefly transcended for Monsieur Pelletier. His experience of Eudoxia grants him a large measure of the "iridescence" which for Joanie is never more than a tentative illusion.

Like Eddie's appreciation of country pleasures in Part Two, this is one of the novel's affirmative moments. As it also provides a fully explored allotrope of Cecil Cutbush's sublunary onanism in The Vivisector, it could be read as a seminal set-piece from White's repertoire. (In fact, a good deal of masturbation and bed-wetting occurs in the autobiography as well as in the fiction, and these liquefactions invariably attend ambiguous moments of indefinable distress coupled with excitative perception.)²

Although Monsieur Pelletier's natural response to the distant figure is to determine its sex, it is the unresolved ambiguity which stimulates him. This, combined with the voyeur's nervousness, and the ambivalent intentions of the swimmer - whether a suicide or a bather - is a discomposing and an exciting stimulation. Signification collapses into ambivalence, and his response is to relate to it through the grotesque "lower bodily stratum", just as Cecil Cutbush opens his flies on a public bench after Duffield has confused the categories by which the grocer defines his life. The news vendor, however, has the advantage of a "poetic" sensibility, and is vouchsafed his epiphany of synchronised light, colour, orgasm, and relief when the swimmer turns back:

At the actual moment when Monsieur Pelletier came in his pants, the light struck through the congestion of oyster tones which had represented the sky until then, and the glistening oyster-forms of cloud slithered apart, so that the waves were

streaked with violet and the hyacinth of their normal plumage was restored. [He] ... again caught sight of ... the figure describing an arc as it turned, and returned towards the shore, away from the Sargasso of its intentions.

(TA:74)

Aristide Pelletier experiences the carnivalesque paradox of degradation and regeneration, and this correlates with the Venusian "rebirth" that Eudoxia's suicide attempt produces. Ambivalence is also entailed in the spiritual experience of each in his liquid epiphany: each is affirmed in his life, and the momentary absence of shame implies a transcending of tutelary or orthodox discourse; on the other hand, each is represented as "reborn" into a nexus of discursively governed, and therefore implicitly inadequate, love:

As the swimmer, as the light, as the colour returned, what could have remained a sordid ejaculation became a triumphant leap into the world of light and colour such as he craved from the landscape he knew, the poetry he had never written, but silently spoke, the love he had not experienced with Simone or Violette - or Mireille Fernande Zizi Jacques Louise Jeanne Jacques Jacques Jeanne - a love he knew by heart and instinct, but might never summon up the courage to express, unless perhaps at the point of death.

(TA:76)

The experience of Eudoxia Anadyomene is narrated in her diary:

Then the plunge. I am swimming. ... finally I burst out laughing. Like an amateur, I swallow a gutful of water. And light. All the refractions of light around me - violet into blue blue. ... I am the Amateur Suicide. I turn and snooze back

through healing water. I am not ashamed, as I shall be later. For the present, snoozing and spouting. Rising, as Angelos must be rising out of those other, grey waves, ... farting, regardless of whether I'm there or not. This is marriage, I would like to think, enduring marriage as authorised by our version of the Holy Ghost.

(TA:80)

She then writes: "But I must escape, and not through suicide. ... Was this why I wrote the letter to Joanie Golson? to enlist her sympathy, her help?" (TA:80) This indicates that even the "healing" experience has failed to deliver "the real E." from its fictional construction, or from the frame of narrative. If anything, the experience seems to aggravate a contrast between the naked, unsignified, and "free" person in the amorphism of water, and the clothed, identified, and "bound" persona on the land's unyielding forms.

To complete my observations on Part One of the novel, I shall examine the final unravelling of the narrative fabric that binds "Eudoxia" to fiction and Angelos.

The Golsons' visit to the Vatatzes forms the climax of Joanie's vicarious love affair. The evening's failure is adumbrated by her anxiety over clothes; she regrets, in the motor-car, a last-minute change of outfits: "She realised at once that she must look heavy, dull (perhaps she was) in her tan Melton." (TA:93) While her original peeping expeditions to "Crimson Cottage" put her in a "positive fantod" with illicit excitement, (TA:15) the authorised nature of this trip

seems to deflate the genuine romance that colours those adventures. Description of the drive suggests the lowering of a final curtain between the avid audience and her beloved, but elusive and pantomime, world of "iridescence":

As they swept through the grove of under-nourished pines, the stench from the salt-pans prevented Mrs Golson's hopes aspiring much beyond the hatching of sooty needles, through which were revealed those other glimpses of enamelled gold and halcyon.

(TA:94)

The visit returns Joanie to a "congealing of life". The causes of this deflation may be interpreted as disruptions to the "narrative" - or the romantic fiction - which she has constructed for herself. The major disruptions are so subtle that they are easily misconstrued as structurally supportive of Joan's narrative agenda. But on the contrary they steal the initiative and the "authorship" from her.

The first is Eudoxia's invitation to call; it translates the secret and tentative romance into social formality. The second is the participation of the husbands. Curly's presence locates the expedition firmly in the unequivocal register of male-dominated and "solid" authority (TA:90). Joan's response, for instance, to Eudoxia's invitation indicates a retreat into this orthodox discourse: "Oh," she gasped, "I'll have to ask Mr Golson - my husband - Curly ... " (TA:88) She is even reassured by his appear-

ance, dressed for the expedition, in the sartorial signifiers of his own discursive field:

... in spite of his tastelessness she was glad to see him, in his Harris Tweed, exuding the scent of bay rum, so far removed from what Madame Vataztes had referred to as "the smell of a man". Mrs Golson sat smiling up at him ..., almost worshipful had he noticed.

(TA:91-92)

A suitably blunt statement establishes his authority: "Curly was in the driver's seat." (TA:93) On her part, Joanie falls comfortably into the role of "a soft, silly woman" (TA:22):

She rather enjoyed being terrified in their own motor, her husband at the wheel. Lulled by her terrors, she sank back into an upholstered corner, clutching her bag with the amethyst brooch which she might, she hoped, find the courage to offer Madame Vataztes.

(TA:94)

The contrast between Joan's emotional indulgences here and the real urgency of her feelings on the first illicit visits shows her return to governance under the "master narrative" of unambivalent monological orthodoxy. As the evening progresses her own romantic text is disassembled by more blatant disruptions which confirm her earlier presentiment that she and "Madame Vataztes" are "of different worlds." (TA:85)

One of these disruptions (which is apparently paradoxical) is the intelligence that Eudoxia is Australian, and

not exotic in origin. It whets her gossip's appetite, but "E." tantalisingly denies further detail which, "now that [Joan] had this additional clue, might have enabled her to do her sums on past and present." (TA:104) This moment of tension exemplifies the conflict between two sets of "authorship" which pervades the novel - between the ambiguous semiotics of Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadith and the voyeuristic and predatory appetite of the gossip narrative that seeks "concrete evidence" and an unambiguous closure. (TA:166)

Angelos, the other "husband", contributes his own eccentric share to the disruption of Joanie's idyll. His outburst which interrupts the occasion ("I must leave you," he gasped at his guests.") drives Joan further into the refuge of the orthodox "master narrative":

Good reliable Curly had risen to support the old fellow if necessary (she had always congratulated herself when Curly, a warden at St James's, carried out the fainting ladies ...) Now, in their friends' salon, she could have patted his broad back.

(TA:108)

She even enjoys a moment of malicious revenge for the failure of her velleitous narrative construction to appropriate its object:

"I'm so sorry to have put you to all this inconvenience - and upset your husband by coming here." Much as it pained her to twist the knife, she experienced a sensation of exquisite pleasure from the pain she might have inflicted on the unattainable Madame Vatatzes.

(TA:109)

When Mrs Golson returns the next day to "Crimson Cottage", only to find the Vatatzes gone, the grotesque Viollette Réboa (who relates orificially to the world through the "ever-unfinished openness" of her varicose ulcer) takes her on a carnivalesque tour of the couple's private life. It is like a grotesque and degrading parody of Joanie's own romantic voyeurism. A rotting tomato, "melting into" a shelf, focuses the contrast:

Mrs Golson would have liked to persuade herself that Madame Vatatzes had been saving up this tomato for its seed. But the thought was bathetic in the guide's presence; the woman ... did not condone improbabilities.

(TA:115)

The "evidence" which is so valued by gossip narrative is plentifully revealed to Joanie, but its grotesque qualities are repulsive to her, and they also provoke an unbearable jealousy. The romantic carnival of her "iridescent" fiction falls victim to the grotesque carnival of the Vatatzes' reality: "Venez! Venez!" The guide was leading one no longer her confederate but her victim always deeper into the lives of the departed." (TA:115) In the bathroom lurks a mocking souvenir of Joanie's season of love - "an enema of enormous proportions" - and the chamber which, in her day-dream, had been the sanctified "ultimate goal" is now an intolerable threat to her feelings:

"Non! Non! Non!" Mrs Golson skirted past the bedroom, through the door of which she caught a

glimpse of shadowy, but turbulent sheets; she could not have born further evidence of the games, perhaps even the stains, of love.

(TA:115)

Joan Golson has always preferred to sustain her "iridescence" by preserving its vicarious and fictional status. Even when she first meets Eudoxia she seems more inclined to savour the signified concept, rather than the "presignified" or ontological reality, of her new acquaintance:

Mrs Golson would have loved it on her own. She thought she could identify the Meditation from Thais. She would have loved to settle down with an éclair, followed perhaps by a reckless Mont Blanc, and let the music lap round memories of a recently established, intricately constructed, relationship.

(TA:50)

She now flees, ironically, from both her own fiction and the conflicting "real" fiction that is Eudoxia. The following extract implies that hers is the bathetic failure of an "author" to countenance the "ever-unfinished openness" of her own text; she chooses instead to find a contrived closure in the asylum of the unambivalent "master-narrative":

All the way . . . , down the path smelling of tomcat, she was pursued by the woman's diabolical voice as she ran from the flickering images of Angelos and Eudoxia Vatatzes, themselves as diabolical as her own never extinct desires - as she fled towards Curly, honesty, Australia.

(TA:115)

The end of narrative for this intradiegetic "author" and "reader" is paralleled by "E.'s" own flight from the fiction of Eudoxia. The death of the "author" Angelos symbolically grants this release: "'He is dead,' she said, in what sounded not only a broken, but at the same time, an awakening voice." (TA:126) But in a balefully ironic twist of black humour, the dismantling of her fiction exposes her anew to the forensics of gossip and repute.

Angelos's last words, overheard by Madame Sasso, and related by her to Mrs Corbould, subvert his own creation: "'I have had from you, dear boy, the only happiness I've ever known.'" (TA:126) Mrs Corbould has already been "fascinated by the openwork in the yoke of the nightdress this rather angular, flat-chested young woman had been wearing" (TA:125) and "E.'s" exit from the text of Part One is also a flight from the unrelenting text of gossip.

White contrives by a subtle syllepsis to convey the arch pleasure of the vicarious reader/gossip as well as the dubious virtues of transparent signification; "openwork" triggers the wit and the ambivalence and provides the aperçu into a disintegrating semiotic system:

Before the two women could go to her, to initiate her into the formal grief it is usual for widows to indulge in, Madame Vatatzes escaped from them into the night, her gait as long, loping, ungainly, as provocative as Mrs Corbould had found the the openwork in a flat nightdress and the elderly Greek's last words.

(TA:127)

II: Death of a Fiction

I have concentrated on Part One of The Twyborn Affair because it is such a replete allegory of authorship. Parts Two and Three trace the destiny of the subject of repute and fiction, and I shall conclude by analysing Eddie Twyborn/Eadith Tryst's development under the governance of this discourse.

Sailing home to Australia after the First World War, Lieutenant Eddie Twyborn DSO (for this is "E.'s" new persona) seems determined to avoid any re-appropriation into the discursive framework of repute. He conscientiously avoids the gushing and predatory young women "Angie" and "Margs". Their threatening designs are established in this dialogue:

Margs looked round. "There's a smooth one, though - have you come across him? Eddie Twyborn."

"Oh yes. Lieutenant Twyborn."

"Was, I'm told. Decorated too."

Margs looked ready to gobble up, not only the smoothness, but the decoration.

Furtive in their confidences, they both looked round to see the object of them approaching.

He passed by.

(TA:135)

The coincidence of repute and narrative fiction appears again when at last Angie "dare[s] blurt at the one they needed as protagonist for their legend. "We all know you're

Lieutenant Twyborn, so why shouldn't I introduce myself?'
 ..." (TA:138)

In response to this importunity, he deliberately frustrates the contract of confidences sought by the young woman. He also rebukes the conventionalised idiom of repute, but White ironically represents his riposte as the clichéd behaviour of heroic modesty. This perceivable flaw could be attributed to Eddie's "despair" in the situation:

It was his turn to expose himself, as she had every right to expect, ...

But he could not oblige her.

So she went off into a recitative of gush, "It's so so so ... the DSO ... we're so so ... Well, real courage is not for every mortal to achieve."

By now quite desperate, he replied, "Courage is often despair running in the right direction." And stalked off.

(TA:138)

Whether or not Eddie's reply parodies the cinema screen hero, it does indicate the difference between his personal field of discourse, which is ruled by ambiguity, and the conventionalised register of the "master narrative" in which Angie and Margs have been schooled.³

Eddie's apperception of ambivalence alienates him from society. In his cabin he reads La Rochefoucauld, whose aphorisms are companion to his own ironic knowledge. Even though he "interrogates" them, he belongs in their realm of wry ambivalence and intricate literariness. The following extract illustrates the conflict between Eddie's orientation

in the field of intricate discursive artifice and the impo-
 tunate and disruptive exigencies of the diurnal world:

Nos vertus ne sont plus souvent que des vices déguisés ... ; when according to his own experience the reverse was true.

... he dozed off, and was soon spanned by the protective wings of this great eagle [Rochefoucauld], who should have been vicious, but wasn't. He could have cried out for the delight they were sharing if he hadn't become otherwise caught up in the stratagems of men, floundering in mud, failing to disentangle himself from the slime and blood of human bowels.

He awoke whimpering, twitching, yelping like a limp puppy.

(TA:136-137)

After rejecting his steward's suggestions for the impending fancy-dress ball, as well as the man's homosexual innuendoes, Eddie is represented as desolate and forlorn in his secret and unpromising state of ambiguity: "Turning a cheek against the hot pillow, Eudoxia Twyborn wept inwardly, for the past as well as a formless future." (TA:138)

This name "Eudoxia Twyborn" - which combines "the past" of Part One with the present of Part Two - indicates a new narrative "transparency". This is congruent with both the literal and the figurative "breaking down" of Eudoxia; the intimate representation of deep distress is now possible because the "omniscient" level of narrative is no longer required to support the tenacious intradiegetic fictionalising of "Eudoxia" that mediates "E.'s" representation in Part One.

The newly identified Eddie seems to desire transparency and a repudiation of the old fictive disguises. He dismisses the idea of the fancy-dress ball, and in this category he includes his past incarnations as Eudoxia Vatatzes and Lieutenant Twyborn:

"Tired of dressing up ..." Not only in the carnation robe, the pomegranate shawl, but the webbing, the mud leggings, and starting out through the carnival of gunfire and Verey lights.
(TA:137)

This "carnival" seems to be more than just a connotative description: it suggests that even his military service belongs to the category of ambivalent fiction and parodic "drag". (We have seen earlier, in Himmelfarb's passage through the apocalyptic cityscape of a bombing raid, how White construes the reality of "slime and blood" as a deadly "counter-carnival" - the "conventions of hell". Because this inversion of order is conducted by the governing "official culture", it enjoys a boundless license, and licentiousness confuses moral orientation.)

Despite his (and the narrative's) new inclination towards "transparency", however, the "real E." remains mostly opaque or concealed throughout Part Two. This "essential" identity is in fact even more rigorously suppressed here than it was in St Mayeul because, in his attempt to escape the fiction of repute, Eddie Twyborn has to suppress his own natural ambivalences. In his new "disguise" as a jackeroo

he will remain a fictitious construct, but one that is heavily and uncongenially "censored" in order to conform to the encoded values of the "master narrative".

Going ashore in Perth, Lieutenant Twyborn is conscious of his estrangement from this apparently homogeneous and monological "master narrative" to which he is returning:

Wharfies sweating round their hairy navels. I am the stranger of all time, for all such hairy bellies an object of contempt - a Pom, or worse, a suspected wonk. If only one had the courage to stick a finger in the outraged navel and await reactions. Nothing minces so daintily as an awakened male.

(TA:142)

Ashore in Fremantle, he says, "I'm a kind of mistake trying to correct itself." (TA:143) The following passage suggests that this "mistake" is a consequence of fictional misconstruction. Nevertheless, just as the "real E." seems to be a "concept" seeking a "signifier", so does Eddie feel bound to submit himself, however reluctantly, to the artifice of identity construction, or to the tyranny of a contingent fiction:

I am ... the eternal deserter in search of asylum. I did not leave Angelos, but might have done so. I did not desert from the army because it would have been too difficult. In such situations you're sucked in deeper, while remaining a deserter at heart.

(TA:143)

In Fremantle he buys "for five shillings a cardigan in grey string." (TA:143) This is the first of his Australian

"signifiers". Although it "might encourage a humility I've never been able to achieve", it is but another item of "fancy dress"; in fact this highly rhetorical "signifier" ironically contradicts the valued "humility". The same irony will embrace his humble choice of employment as a "jackeroo", and we shall see how this desired "asylum" will prove to be just as brittle an artifice as the previous personae have been.

Home at last in Sydney, the prodigal lunches with his mother Eadie. Conversation is forced and stilted: "'Darling, were you in the War?' 'Yes - as it happens - I was.' 'I'm so glad. We would have hoped you were.'" (TA:152-153) In contrast to this formal procedure, which is wryly defined by the narrative as "'tell[ing] about everything'", Eddie represents the family to himself as a gaudy vaudeville troupe, whose individual identities are signified by the sartorial semiotics that they have worn in the public theatre of repute. Even the official status of Judge Twyborn, signified here by metonymic items of court regalia, is translated into an ambivalence that matches the secret and scandalous valencies of his wife and child:

Would Eadie of the corked-on moustache flinch if he casually produced the spangled fan and pomegranate shawl, flung them into the conversation? Wait perhaps, till the Judge was wearing his high heels and black silk stockings.

(TA:153)

Despite Eddie's apparent desire to bury the past, the persistence of his costumed personae is unavoidable; he seems to rely on them to prevent his reversion to childhood relations with his parents. As well as protecting his tenuous sense of identity, these personae seem to provide emotional strength for the awkward reunion with his father:

The sound of his own feet covering a jarrah no-man's land between threadbare rugs should not have alarmed an ex-lieutenant (D.S.O.); nor should an ex-Empress (hetaira) of Nicaea, expert in matters of protocol and mayhem, have quailed before a situation involving a minor official even when the official was her father; ...

Lieutenant Twyborn went over the top, down the marble steps from which brocaded skirts swept dead leaves and caterpillars' droppings.

(TA:155-156)

This last sentence is perhaps the most complete definition so far of "the real E." who, as I have suggested in the beginning of this chapter, is in fact the carnivalesque and rhetorical sum - the "omnium gatherum" - of its component personae. The sentence follows the pattern of syllepsis in its eliding of the divisions between categories. Temporal and spatial categories are yoked together, as well as the "incarnations" of "E.". It might not be over-interpretive also to construe the phrase "over the top" in its slang register, as indicating the outrageous rhetoric in which White and Eddie regenerate identity and meaning when faced with the monologism of the Australian "master narrative".

"E." is next incarnated as a "jackeroo" on the Lushing-

tons' sheep station Bogong in the Monaro district of New South Wales. In Part Two, therefore, Eddie Twyborn (as the jackeroo is "transparently" identified) seems to be released from the particularly urban discourse of gossip, repute, and fiction into a non-discursive world of rural life. When he first decides on this life as an alternative to Law, he foresees this development as "Eddie Twyborn escaping from himself into a landscape." (TA:161) But White immediately indicates the fallacy in this scheme: he has Eddie enthuse on projected details, which include the clothing of a stockman. Once again this amounts to "fancy-dress", to a semiotic set, and Eddie unconsciously begins to compose himself a new fiction:

Oh yes, it was an idea he would more than consider; he could not wait to put it into action; he was already surrounded by the train smell, frosty air, his oilskin rolled, heavy boots grating on the gravel of a country siding. (Would those who came across him notice that the boots were recently bought and that his hands looked as ineffectual as they might prove to be?)

But the landscape would respond, the brown, scurfy ridges, fat valleys opening out of them to disclose a green upholstery, the ascetic forms of dead trees, messages decipherable at last on living trunks.

(TA:161)

Conditioned as he is to expect incredulity, it is natural for Eddie to worry about the coherence of his image, but his parenthesis also signals that, contrary to his expectations, this new enterprise will entail artifice, fictitious construction, and exposure to public "reading",

just as the life of "Eudoxia" did. The phrase "those who came across him" indicates his rather naive projection of country life; he seems to believe that the new persona of the jackeroo will be ontologically autonomous instead of being an integral thread in the semiotic and discursive texture of that life.

Although Eddie anticipates being able to "read" the "text" of the land, he contradicts himself by believing that the landscape stands outside of discourse. This means that his own idea of landscape is constructed in the pastoral mythopoeia which is a component of the colonial Australian "master narrative".

His first experience of the landscape at Bogong, however, is quelling. It is described as "coldly feverish"; its "denuded trees and shrubs showed up the stranger in his trespass". (TA:184) Far from finding a sympathetic colloquy with nature, Eddie feels exposed and grotesquely incompatible. When a car arrives at the homestead he hides as if to conceal a shameful transgression:

The trespasser ducked behind the skeleton trees as though caught out in the spangles and embroidered pomegranates of the European drag he liked to think he had abandoned.

(TA:184)

Eddie's new semiotic set, his farm clothing, does not yet seem to him adequately coherent, and vestiges of Eudox-

ia's "drag" persist in his memory as the prevalent but incongruous signifiers of his identity:

[He] gashed a glaringly new boot in tripping over a rock.

Would he ever succeed in making credible to others the new moleskins and elastic sides? At least people were more ready to accept material façade than glimpses of spiritual nakedness, cover this up with what you will, pomegranate shawl and spangled fan, or moleskins and elastic sides. Joan Golson had accepted a whole vacillating illusion, romantically clothed and in its wrong mind. But on entering the world of Don Prowse and the Lushingtons he suspected he would find the natives watching for lapses in behaviour.

(TA:183)

The great irony of Part Two is that as Eddie becomes increasingly convincing in his new life, learning the language and behaviour of the sheep station, so does "the world of Don Prowse and the Lushingtons" appear increasingly less coherent. Far from "escaping from himself" Eddie becomes a very distinct member of the farm community. As he gains the confidence of others, they expose to him their own flaws, and the "master narrative" itself proves to be largely fictitious.

We have seen some of White's grotesque "oracle" figures, in Rose Portion, Ida and Jean the gossips, Mrs Flack and Mrs Jolley, and Madame Réboa. Bogong's version is Peggy Tyrrell of the "fanged" teeth and a "football team of sons". White calls her, in fact, the "sybil" of Bogong. (TA:285, 290) Her garrulous faux pas seem presciently to comprehend

Eddie's ambivalence and to see this as a catalyst for revelations:

Mrs Tyrrell said, sighing, scratching an armpit under the black, bobbled shawl. "You gotter take what comes, I've always said. Man or woman. Prowse [the manager] wouldn't understand that. You would," she added.

"Why would I?"

"Because you're your mother's son," she said, peering at him and licking her lips.

"How do you know?"

"Well," she said, "I'm the mother of seventeen Tyrrells - a football team of boys - but the girls is what counts."

"I'm a boy," said Eddie Twyborn.

"We know you are," Mrs Tyrrell agreed, munching on her mauve gums. "The boys!" she munched. "Bet yer mum would've been glad of a girl."

(TA:182)

In another dialogue her intuitive sense of Eddie's androgyne ambivalence is even more overt, and, unexpectedly, the jackeroo feels comforted:

"I'll like 'avin' you around," she told him; you an' me 'ull get on like one thing". . . . "It's the girls I miss out 'ere. Never the boys. Not that you isn't a boy," she realised. "But different. A woman can speak her thoughts."

He should not have felt consoled, but was, to be thus accepted by Peggy Tyrrell. The flowering lamp he set between them on the oilcloth made a little island of conspiracy for the woman's blazing face and the pale ghost of what people took to be Eddie Twyborn.

(TA:185)

The Sybil of Bogong is not so much a gossiping oracle as a steward of the "master narrative's" integrity. Speaking to Eddie of Marcia Lushington, she says, "You can't say she's not a good sort, though some run her down They

say - well, I'm not gunner repeat. Those are the ones she don't wanter know.'" (TA:200) She presents the imminent nuptials of Dot Norton, the rabbitier's pregnant daughter, in the form of a folk tale - a coarse bucolic fabliau - with the wry humour and the vulgar details of that genre. But, when pressed by Eddie for the truth behind her narrative, she denies him this confidence, as though it would misrepresent and blemish the integrity of Bogong's own "text":

"They say ... as Dot's gunner marry Denny Allen. Mrs Lushington 'erself arranged it. ... Otherwise Dot'ull pup along the river bank, for all her father 'ull do about it - or 'erself catch the bagman 'oo comes sellun the separator parts - 'oo she says is the father - 'oo isn't, as everybody knows."

"How do they know?" Eddie insisted.

"They know," she said, "Because."

...
 "You ain't been 'ere long enough," she said.
 "But everybody knows."

(TA:238)

Eddie's response - "at last he felt that he belonged" (TA:239) - suggests that the consolations of country life have proved contrary to his original expectation. Instead of providing a haven from discursive textuality, Bogong has drawn him into its own fabric of carefully maintained fictions. This makes his own fictitious identity seem less conspicuous. As he learns about the secret incongruities that dilute the "master narrative" of Bogong, he becomes increasingly coherent himself. He becomes an incisive interpreter of the fictions and the secrets of Bogong. Incest

turns out to be the secret of Dot Norton's pregnancy, and barrenness is revealed to be the prevalent affliction - Marcia's three children, dead in infancy, are buried on the farm. One of them is implied to have been sired by Don Prowse the manager. Eddie himself could be the cause of her final ill-fated pregnancy.

Greg Lushington the grazier is revealed to be a "crypto-poet"; at tea one day he offends his wife by "confessing" to a new poem:

"What was it about?" Mrs Lushington asked, now that it was out in front of one who was, in most essentials, a stranger.

Thus cornered, Greg Lushington bleated, not unlike one of his own stud rams, "I expect it's about love - that's where everything seems to lead - in some form or other. Unfulfilled love."

(TA:232)

This bathos, which formulates the underlying vacuum in the lives of all who live at Bogong, is reinforced when the poet, composing, hones an elusive expression: "The word should have been "placebo" ". (TA:232) This word could imply that the "master narrative" that articulates life on the Monaro is an artificial construct, whose purpose is to forge consolation. Marcia's defence when Eddie "reproach[es] her for not having told him about the poems" supports this interpretation:

"Why should I have told?" She pouted. "If you tell too much in the beginning there's nothing left for later on. That's why so many marriages break up."

(TA:234)

Marcia implies that marriage is co-terminous with fiction, with good story-telling. For the Lushingtons, therefore, human life and relationship are recognised as a discursive contract. Don Prowse the manager, on the other hand, is much more vulnerable to emotional disarray because he does not recognise that "reality" is discursively articulated. Rather surprisingly, it emerges that he is highly literate; he has read Peacock and George Meredith. But he distinguishes categorically between fact and fiction:

"Well, you missed something if you never read Headlong Hall or The Ordeal of Richard Feverell. Though it's all gingerbread of course. I gave it up when I married and life became serious. Kath [his ex-wife] thought reading novels a waste of time - they weren't real.

(TA:201)

The crisis of Part Two comes when Don Prowse discovers that Eddie the jackeroo is not "real". It follows a passage in which Eddie again approximates the condition of "the real E." - in other words, a fulfillment of carnivalesque ambivalence.

Eddie and the farmhands have been "crutching" sheep ("`snippun the dags off a sheep's arse'", as one hand defines it) and the jackeroo has proved his competence: "... Prowse laid a hot, appraising hand on the novice's back. `Eddie 'ud make a professional shearer if he only knew it.'" (TA:280) Privately Eddie sees the maggotty infestation of

sheep as an analogue for his own richly concealed decadences:

[He was] drawn, it appeared, to the daggier [sheep]. It was an aspect of his own condition he had always known about, but it amused him to recognise it afresh while snipping at the dags of shit, laying bare the urine-sodden wrinkles with their spoil of seething maggots, round a sheep's arse.

(TA:279)

Drowsing on the way home from this convincingly bucolic labour and the "mateship" that locates it in the "master narrative", Eddie falls into reverie in which he recalls an occasion when he "had felt the urge to see his fortuitous mistress", Marcia Lushington. In the remembered incident, he starts out as an authentically male character; even his boots, as well as his idiom - once considered to be inadequate signifiers - are now an articulate part of an unambiguously masculine semiosis:

Never in his life had he felt so aggressive, so masculine, or so impelled by the desire to fuck this coarsely feminine woman. He deliberately thought of it as fucking , and spoke the word on his way up the hill ... As he walked he was looking down at his coarse, labourer's boots which he was in the habit of treating with rendered-down mutton fat. The boots matched his intention ...

(TA:281)

Eddie's "deliberate" choice of lexis indicates the discursive nature of this escapade: his affair with Marcia is an episode in the fiction of his masculine persona at

Bogong. Like his competence at sheep-crutching, the affair articulates his construction in the "master narrative".

Eddie is "frustrated" to find Marcia absent from the house. He is sylleptically prompted by "present impotence and an undertow of memory" to rummage, "seduced by the empty garments", among Marcia's clothes. Like the words that attract a poet, the clothes are described in terms of sensuous textural categories: "the soft and slithery, the harsh and grainy, the almost live-animal". (TA:282)

The passionate intensity of the jackeroo's lust becomes recoded as the passion of carnivalesque creativity - of recreating a "Eudoxia", a "good fiction". He gets himself up in Marcia's clothes, powder, and lipstick, and lies on her bed, "awaiting the ravishment of male thighs." (TA:282) Then Greg Lushington, "sightless behind his spectacles", looks in:

"I just wanted to tell you, Marce, that the word was wrong - in the poem, I mean. What I thought of as 'placebo', you remember? ought to have been 'purulence'".

Then he smiled, and immediately withdrew, not wanting to disturb his wife's rest.

(TA:282-283)

The revised word seems to imply that, far from being a consolation, the making of fiction is a corrupt practice, which, in its fabric, conceals its own "spoil of seething maggots".

That evening, in the stable shed, Don Prowse sodomizes Eddie in revenge for being not what he has seemed:

"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"

...
Prowse was tearing at all that had ever offended him in life, at the same time exposing all that he had never confessed ...

(TA:284)

Later Eddie stands up, "chaff trickling down skin wherever it did not stick inside rucked-up shirt and torn pants - the disguise which didn't disguise." (TA:285)

As a paragon of the monological Australian "master narrative", Don Prowse is triumphant in his exposure, not only of a deceiving fiction, but of a "regrettable" sexual ambivalence. On the other hand, his confidence in the code seems to be eroded by the apparent ease of the deceit and the perceived betrayal of "mateship". Not unlike Joanie Golson, Prowse is a victim of Eddie's equivocal fictitiousness; he too is thrust into the profound confusion of disorienting ambiguities. His unwonted homosexual behaviour is prime evidence for this confusion - days later, "penitent ... crying, expostulating", and very drunk, he enters Eddie's room and expresses his sense of disarray:

"... you got me worried, boy. I never did anything like it before. Don't know what came over me. I been thinkin' about it - what you must think ..."

(TA:295)

Eddie's attempt to "escape from himself" - or to escape from fiction - has led, ironically, to a brutal exposure of ambivalence which, this time, is unalloyed by the discursive artifices, whether coy, sentimental, romantic, or playful, that had articulated Eudoxia's relationship with Angelos Vatatzes. Don Prowse offers himself "as a sacrifice" to Eddie and afterwards the jackeroo, who is "shocked into what was less lust than a desire for male revenge", articulates the brutality with which fiction is exposed and "reality" is supposedly vindicated: "'Go on Don. That's what it's about, that's what you wanted.' ... 'Go on, Don - get!'" (TA:296-297)

The particular failure in Part Two of The Twyborn Affair, if not precisely a "fortunate" one, is at least salutary. The narratological jest of Part One is solemnly vindicated by the lesson that all human activity is owned by discourse. The Australian "master narrative" turns out to be a brittle tissue of fictions, and Eddie Twyborn learns that he can neither seek "asylum" nor "the real E." among the "pre-signifieds" of a landscape. Just as Bogong is discursively constructed by a sussurus of disappointments, intrigues, secrets, and consoling fictions, and just as love is appropriated to a contractual narratology, so is "E." inescapably a creature of fiction.

"E." re-emerges in Part Three as an outrageous fiction - as Mrs Eadith Trist the Bawd of Beckwith Street. This new

persona is initially narrated in the discourse of repute. She is focalised through the bedroom windows of the Ladies Maud Bellasis and Kitty Bins who live opposite the brothel. Their original opposition to "the deplorable trafficking" across the road turns to vicarious and voyeuristic enjoyment of a "pleasant fiction": "Perhaps they were too old to resist, or so old that they derived a voluptuous pleasure in associating themselves with imagined rituals of a sexual nature." (TA:306) Their cook Evadne, who is described as a "crypto-novelist", calls on the brothel and is able to flesh out this "pleasant fiction":

... thanks to Evadne, their imagination flowered more luxuriantly, in marble halls where odalisques reclined on satin cushions in gold and rose, and gentlemen with familiar faces, cousins and nephews, their favourite Gravenor, even their father the late duke, unbuttoned their formal black.
(TA:308-309)

This carnivalesque brothel is suitably located in the historically ambivalent milieu of London in the nineteen-twenties. White personifies the ambiguity of the era in the Bellasis sisters:

Like London itself, Maud and Kitty in their reduced circumstances were distinctly post-War, without realising to what extent they were also pre.

(TA:308)

The narrative speculates that Eddie/Eadith is qualified by personal ambivalences to know, like a mythological Fate

figure, that the present age is compromisingly suspended between two wars:

Perhaps Mrs Trist realised, looking as she did like a Norn, in her long sweeping colourless garments of the false dawn, as opposed to the hectic colours and lamplit jewels of earlier.
(TA:308)

Her preference for the false dawn of early morning - "the hour when dawn takes over from darkness" - suggests that the fiction that is Mrs Trist both depends on and articulates the historical era. (TA:309) The following passage reveals the constraints on "E.'s" quest for a "real" identity. It is implied that to "be oneself" is a condition that depends on contingent necessities; ironically, the contingency of a "false dawn" determines a "self" that is as illusory as this period of the day and of history:

... at the hour between the false dawn and the real, the moment when past and future converge, she was as much herself as a human being can afford to be: lips stripped, though not without a vestige of enamel in the deeper of the vertical clefts; in the shadows produced by a too pronounced jawbone traces of the mauve powder in which she veiled herself at other times.

(TA:310)

White represents the period as a season of licence, which often looks very like the outrageous world of Evelyn Waugh's satire. It is a "labyrinth of lost values" in which the young members of the upper classes indulge their hectic leisure, "playing at hide-and-seek in Harrods, falling drunk

in gutters, shooting one another in some amusing mews, developing abscesses from jabbing themselves too often through their stockings." (TA:311) *

In the case of the brothel, noble patronage grants a literal and material licence:

Mrs Trist remained fortunate in those who were protecting her, who cajoled the police, and introduced on a paying basis Cabinet Ministers, visiting Balkan royalty, even scions of the British monarchy encouraged to "get it out of their systems" before they were presented to the public as models of propriety.

(TA:319-320)

Under this licence the establishment of the brothel is represented as a creative act which, though morally dubious, enjoys the virtue of seductive appeal:

Leave alone [Mrs Trist's] moral account, there was this material mansion which had taken possession of her, and which her taste was converting ... into a sequence of tantalising glimpses, perspectives opening through beckoning mirrors to seduce a society determined on its own downfall. If it had not been so determined, the puritan in her might have made her feel more guilty.

... So she accepted her own corruption along with everything else and started casting the play she had been engaged to direct by a management above or below Gravenor and his exalted friends.

(TA:321)

The statement that her "material mansion ... had taken possession of her" indicates that "E.'s" personal fiction is appropriated to the discourse of a macabre and baroque carnivalesque. The "determination" of society to participate,

and the "exalted" connections of the carnival's "management" suggests that this celebration of fiction, for which "E." appears so eminently qualified, is conducted within another "master narrative". It is in fact another version of the "counter-carnival" which I have defined earlier as carnival that is conducted by an orthodox discourse.

Before we examine this discursive dispensation into which Mrs Trist is induced, her personal contributions to the carnivalesque celebration of fiction need to be considered. The semiotic set of "E.'s" present persona is patently "over the top". Her outfits are highly rhetorical: "Mauve was her colour when in full panoply. While following a timeless fashion, she dressed with extravagant thought." (TA:310) Her make-up is described as "poetic as opposed to fashionable or naturalistic." (TA:310) Description of a beauty patch - perhaps the most rhetorical of all the "signifiers" in the vanity case - explicitly defines Eadith Trist as a "pleasant fiction":

... on high occasions she went so far as to stick a grain de beauté on her left cheekbone, a punctuation mark in the novelette she enjoyed living as much as the one Evadne Schumacher, the cook-novelist at the house across the street, was obsessed to write. Perhaps it was Evadne who had conceived the additional conceit of the violet cachou Eadith took to chewing when got up in her purple drag.....

(TA:310)

In a passage which illustrates the theoretical linkage made in Chapter Three between fiction, voyeurism, and a de-

cadent version of the carnivalesque, Eadith Trist appears as a voyeuristic omniscient "author". It also indicates, however, this author's consciousness of her own guilt, which is a potential disruptor of the fiction:

A craftsman had fitted a concealed eye to each cell of this elaborate comb of which she was the animating principle. She would not have disclosed to anybody the existence of what was in a sense a humiliating toy, least of all to Gravenor, whom she must continue to admire, but who, as voyeur, would have been reduced in her estimation. She could not have explained how a common peep-hole becomes an omniscient eye, how it illuminated for her the secret hopes and frustrations struggling to escape through the brutality, the thrust and recoil, the acts of self-immolation, the vicious spinsterly refinements which shape the depravity of men, her own included.

(TA:329)

(Eadith Trist is a queen bee in her "elaborate comb".)

Mrs Trist's authorial gaze through the peephole - the aperçu - into the cells of the comb is directed at herself as much as at her clients: the peephole, which is the most patent of all ocular devices for illicit perception, as well as for narrative focalisation, is also a mirror that reflects her own "depravity". While this passage presents her as the originating author, "the animating principle", of her great carnivalesque fiction, it also indicates the flaw - a deconstituting principle - which will lead to the unravelling of this fabric. The flaw is the conscience of the author articulated by her own sense of guilt.

A few pages after this the true depravity of voyeuristic "reading" is demonstrated in the death of Lydia, the devout Catholic prostitute, at the hands of her confessor. Lydia's confessor, acting as the reader/voyeur of her erotic "text", transgresses the "narrative contract" of her confession by murdering her. In doing this he "erases" her, as if she were indeed a text. This is an instance where the vicarious thrill of reading, and of perceiving illicit knowledge, leads to an extreme "appropriation" - the consumption and destruction of the "text" itself.

"I'll be late" [Lydia] said, "if I don't get a move on." Every morning she went to early mass, and evenings to confession. Some of Lydia's clients, her boss suspected, had left their cassocks behind them.

... Staring at herself in the glass she had never looked so lustrous ... Her confessor could only have found Lydia's sins forgivable.

... Lydia didn't return from mass. Days later her body was found in a North London canal. Her confessor was arrested for her murder.

(TA:330-331)

This "erasure" is also an extreme version of absolution, which is brutally ironic after Lydia's confession to Mrs Trist: "I'm thinking of giving the game away.' ... 'I'd really like to fall asleep and wake in Heaven.'" (TA:330) This absolution by grotesque death and by the erasure of fiction could be seen to predicate Eddie/Eadith's grotesque dismembering at the end of the novel, and the consequent stilling, for the Twyborns, of Rumour.

Another instance of potential disruption to "the elaborate [fictional] comb of which [Eadith Trist] was the animating principle" appears in the tension between the metaphorical and the literal, when Bridie "the Irish whore" discusses the conditions of employment:

... Bridie had a rather more esoteric clientele; she specialised in whips and chains. ("If I draw the line, madam," she said at the first interview, "it's when it comes to the shit-eaters.")

The bawd would have liked to think the expression a metaphor, but from her experience of life she knew that shit means shit.

(TA:331)

Unlike Hurtle Duffield's Nance, Eadith Trist is tempted to fictionalise degradation - to endow it with the "aesthetic principle" of "grotesque realism". It would help to maintain the integrity of the fiction that "E." has constructed if the "expression" were to be metaphorical. Like Nance, however, Eadith Trist has learnt that "shit means shit", and this knowledge erodes the boundary between reality and fiction. The following segment indicates, however, that a contingent dispensation in which license seems to be guaranteed, supports Mrs Trist in preserving the semblance of her fiction:

Mrs Trist recoiled momentarily for [sic] her own power to pander to the worst in human nature. In the beginning ... she had had her doubts about what she was doing, but as time itself seemed to pander, and from scattered inklings, to be preparing some kind of cataclysm, she allowed her power to overpower.

(TA:332)

Again, this suggests that a dominant "master narrative" is the authority for "E.'s" own "authorship".⁵ The "Bellasis siblings", Lord Roderick Gravenor and Lady Ursula (Baby) Untermeyer, are representatives of this "master narrative"; their friends include Diana Siderous and Cecily Snape (of the "entire negro band"). This social set is bent on amusement to counter the ennui of their lives. Diana Siderous stands in one afternoon for Bridie, who is drunk. After a session of strenuously perverse erotics she "translat[es] this gross physical outrage into an anecdote to amaze a dinner party of intimate friends." (TA:340) The equivocal morality of the social set reflects the fragile and recondite amusements of this ambiguous interbellum which are hinted at when Madame Siderous wishes Mrs Trist to meet Ursula Untermeyer:

"You'll be the first madam she's met - and rare objects are her obsession. She'll add you to the Julius Untermeyer Collection."

This was the way it went at the time, along with the hide-and-seeK at Harrods and amusing hats (Ursula had been known to crown her own brittle carapace with a lacquered crab shell mounted on a doily in paper lace.)

(TA:341)

The difference between the equivocal discursiveness on the Monaro and the equivocations of the Bellasis' social set is that the latter seem completely to replace morality and emotion with the quest for hectic amusement. If emotional survival was the object of Bogong's fictions, among Ursula's

set the object is distraction from a reality which promises to be "cataclysmic".

After her patron Rod Gravenor has brought his sister to visit her at the brothel, Eadith Trist, mulling over the occasion, comprehends the nature of the siblings' vicarious curiosity. She formulates their relation to her in the precise terms in which Stallybrass and White perceive the relation between the Edwardian middle class child and the "nanny" who introduces illicit knowledge into the nursery:

The Duke's children as she saw them again, cheeks bulging, lips glossy, eyes glazed, were re-living life in the nursery while masticating the buttery toast in the whore-house in Beckwith Street.

Longing in and out of season for the cosiness of the nursery fire, with Nanny and a fender to protect them from its perils, in their still childish middle-age they hankered after other, more perverse dangers which Nanny Trist was able to provide. Or so Eadith sensed in trying to explain why Ursula and Rod were attracted to her. They were excited by their own perverse behaviour, yet if her noble charges were to detect in Nanny a flaw they had not bargained for, she suspected they would not hesitate to reduce the whole baroque façade of her deception to a rubble of colonial wattle-and-daub; no compunction would save Nanny from the sack.

(TA:355)

This indicates the raison for Eadith's noble patronage and it also reiterates the precariousness of her fictitious construction: if the text which the Bellasis (even including their aunts Maud and Kitty) have helped in "authoring" should prove flawed, they would repudiate it, just as Don Prowse tries to repudiate Eddie for queering the discourse

of "mateship". The mutual love between Eadith Trist and Rod Gravenor focuses "E.'s" dilemma. The love is only sustained by the fiction of Eadith, but the fiction, in order to survive, cannot countenance consummation of the love.

Ursula's country house, "Wardrobes", is appropriately named for the theatrical unreality of the "false dawn" between the wars. It also reflects the semiosis of clothing which articulates "E.'s" embodiments. White presents the weekend house party at "Wardrobes" - attended by Eadith Trist - as a corrupt carnival of gossip, innuendo, self-advertisement, and malice. This is presided over by "Baby" Untermeyer's "high social key", and by her vicarious urge to "collect" people, which seems to be her social propelling force.

On the drive down from London Gravenor says to Eadith Trist: "You'll find "Wardrobes" more like a whorehouse than Baby would ever let herself see.'" (TA:370) For Eadith, the shift out of her own cohesive honeycomb into the theatricality of "Wardrobes" will trigger the disintegration of her own fictionality. Gravenor's next utterance seems presciently to anticipate this:

Then he added, "I don't guarantee it'll make you feel more at home, Eadie. But we'll have each other, shan't we?"

Whether spoken in irony or not, it warned her. "I can't remember you ever calling me 'Eadie'. Why, suddenly, now?"

"To make you feel at home." He spoke with perfect gravity, but still she suspected irony.

(TA:370)

"Home" and "Eadie" - the name of Eddie Twyborn's mother - prepare the way for "Mrs Trist's" disintegration which begins at the house party. Strolling in the "lovely effete damp-laden garden", which seems to formulate Bellasis pathology, but also asserts its own independent and natural identity (the evening mist is beyond the control of artifice), Eadith Trist muses on her failures: ⁶

The mist, the monochrome, warnings in her bronchial tubes, reminded her of failures. Failed love in particular. Her every attempt at love had been a failure. Perhaps she was fated never to enter the lives of others, except vicariously. To enter, or to be entered: that surely was the question in most lives.

(TA:374)

This confession of a novelist reclaims the question of authorship from the cynically amoral discourse of the brothel, and locates it in the field of "E.'s" emotionally genuine but vain aspirations.

The rising of a cold night mist seems to be a correlative for "E.'s" recovery from outrageous fiction, and it could also provide the sympathetic veil under which she may recover the multiplicity of her "real" identity. The process begins that night:

She couldn't have been more restless in her sleep. Eddie Twyborn was pestering his sibling. She resisted, but was taken over, replaced. She was relieved finally to have the freedom of this other body, cropped hair bristling on a strong nape ...

(TA:375)

"E." becomes Eddie Twyborn, and dreams an orgasmic dream in which "escape" and "extinction" are correlated, as are "wounding" and the consummation of love:

As Eddie Twyborn tossed and turned in the white gulf of Baby Untermeyer's four-poster, the mists from the beech wood must have risen higher to be pouring in waves through the open window. ... In escaping through the first-floor window of what was no longer a hiding place he suspected that escape can also mean extinction. Well he was committed to both, as the D.S.O. can be awarded to despair running in the right direction. ... The Judge was waiting for him below.

...
He said if we lie down here they won't get us they'll fire over our heads Eddie.

Gravenor was forcing him down almost lying on him to protect him from the inevitable.

Not poor Edward Eadie's husband.

Tears were falling for the past the present for all hallowed hell on earth

...
You aren't hit are you Eddie?

Wounded in spite of the shield this freckled other body provided.

...
He looked down at his fingers and saw that the blood wasn't red but white.

(TA:376-377)

As "E." is always the subject of fictional construction, to "escape" this bond would mean the "extinction" of himself as a "text". His failure to escape here is "fortunate" in that it leads to his being "wounded" instead by the agency of interpretative repute (the "gunfire" from which Gravenor tries to shield him). The transformation of blood into seminal fluid signifies that the wounding by repute (that is, exposure) has released Eddie Twyborn from dissembling and self-repression, and allowed him to consum-

mate his relationship with Gravenor. It is therefore a highly wishful dream, in which a forced exposure makes possible the fulfillment which he cannot otherwise will himself to attempt.

Waking into "a perversely sunny Wiltshire morning", Eadith Trist observes that "War, death and sex were the missing elements in this protected room." (TA:377) The distance of Ursula's set from such dire contingencies is illustrated in the following segment:

After lunch, and resumption of their hats, most of the guests returned to the garden, ... to snooze, or continue their destruction of literature, art, and political careers, the dissection of adult-eries they suspected or knew their friends to be conducting, and speculation on Hitler's next possible move in developing the Grave Threat to England.

(TA:381)

Eadith Trist "escapes" from these petty equivocations to her room where she finds strength in her own genuine ambivalence:

She stood bathing her face in front of the bathroom glass.
He burped back at her, out of the past or the future.
She felt the better for it, however.

(TA:381)

This "unpacking" of "E.'s" ambivalence becomes increasingly natural and unguarded; it is stimulated by the simplest contingency, such as a gravy spill at dinner. Her rubbing at the stain is represented as an attempt to erase dis-

comforting memories: "All the stains in her life were concentrated in this greasy emblem". Then the ruby smudge of lipstick on a napkin seems to imply that such erasure is a murderous course:

She reduced [the gravy spot] at last enough to satisfy her conscience. More startling was the bloody mark left on the napkin by nervous lips; he hid it with such vehemence he might have been sitting with Prowse amongst the mutton fat in Peggy Tyrrell's kitchen.

(TA:383)

The suggestion is that, whether in the persistence of memory, or in the labour of suppression and censorship of this histoire, the true multiplicity of "E." is due to emerge. Out of doors, in the absence of her "readership", Mrs Trist is represented as "free to disintegrate in the overall pointilliste haze of woods and fields, in particular the marigolden water meadows." (TA:384)

The final disruption, at "Wardrobes", of the fiction of Eadith Trist comes from agents of the Australian "master narrative". These are Reg and Nora Quirk (who perform "the Australian coo-ee" - the call of the currawong - for the amused English who sylleptically quiver "with daring, brandy, and malice"). (TA:388) Eadith confirms their authenticity: "[She] saw that the Quirks were recent vintage Golson." (TA:386) In his gauche and name-dropping discourse, Reg - unaware of "E.'s" identity - remarks that Mrs Eadie Twyborn

is in London, and that Judge Edward Twyborn is recently dead:

Mr Quirk stood swirling the dregs of beer at the bottom of his glass with appropriate solemnity. "The Judge recently passed on," he had to inform her.

Flushed by social triumphs and the success of their little performance, death could have been the Quirks' least concern. ... the clatter and splintering of human laughter at its most inhuman, a night bird calling more poignantly than the self-possessed currawongs of earlier, cannot have entered their consciousness. So why was this woman acting queer?

For the invisible bird, throbbing and spilling like blood or sperm, had brought Eddie Twyborn to the surface. ... he started skittering across the lawn, the brutally illuminated terrace, into the house, in his ridiculous drag, the wisps of damp-infested cocks' feathers, trailing skirt, stockings soaked with dew.

(TA:391)

In the context of this unambiguous and shocking disclosure, Eddie Twyborn's habit of fiction is reduced to a "ridiculous drag". Back in London she questions this habit: "She began to wonder whether her life were a collage of fantasies: her profitable whore-house, her love for Grave-nor, the romantic dresses, the elaborate jewels." (TA:392) An answer to this doubt is that all her unlikely range of experience so far is undeniably "real":

On the other hand she could still practically feel the calluses got by crowbars and shears, experience the voluptuous ease of entry through the gateway of Marcia Lushington's thighs, the agonies of Don Prowse's thrust, hillocks of chaff crumbling around a salt-stricken mouth, pure contact with the Judge under the honeycomb bedspread of a circuit hotel.

And now Eadie, that squalid old drunk, Joanie Golson's ex-lover. The ex-lovers, the ex-husbands, the ex-lives were all weighing on Eadith Trist.

(TA:392)

These "real" memories are recoded in the second paragraph in terms of repute. It is this discourse of repute, and not the purely physical memories, that disturbs Eadith Trist. The role of her parents in the construction of her fictional histoire is particularly indefinable and troubling:

The Judge and Eadie: Eadie and the Judge. Nothing more difficult than to fit the parents into the warping puzzle without committing manslaughter and condemning yourself for the monster you are and aren't.

(TA:403)

In London she finds her mother praying at successive churches but loses an opportunity to address her. The quest to find Eadie becomes the quest of a "penitent" for "her saint" (TA:404), for "the moment of longed-for, but dreaded expiation." (TA:405) I suggest that the guilt which "E." seeks to expiate stems from the equivocal discourse of repute which has fictionalised both him and Eadie, making them inaccessible to each other, and alienating the Judge from his wife and child.

When Eadith Trist finally meets and speaks to her mother, on a bench on the Thames Embankment, the essential establishment of identity is done in writing:

The women continued sitting side by side, till Eadie found the strength to rummage in her bag, and when she had found the pencil she was looking for, to scribble on the prayer-book's fly-leaf.

Eadith was offered this tremulous scribble, and read, "Are you my son Eddie?"

... If Eadith could have unbent. But if she had, she might have broken. At least she couldn't have trusted her lips.

Instead, she seized the pencil and slashed the fly-leaf of the prayer-book with a savagery she did not feel.

Eadie Twyborn read when the book was handed back, "No, but I am your daughter Eadith."

The two women continued sitting together in the gathering shadow.

Presently Eadie said, "I am so glad. I've always wanted a daughter."

(TA:422-3)

The discourses of naming, of family relationship, and of emotional reunion are mediated by the good offices of the Book of Common Prayer. Religion is supposed to be a stabiliser of truth: its language articulates wholeness, and it seeks to resolve dialectic. Its metalanguage for wholeness is Logos, which is the transcendental version of monology. The inference is that the fiction of a Twyborn daughter is substantiated here through the authority of religion: the fiction is blessed, sanctified, and made "real". An appropriate consequence is that "Their harmony was by now a perfect one ..." (TA:423)

This "perfect harmony" constitutes an apotheosis of fiction. The categories of reality and fiction seem completely to be dissolved in the final ten pages of the novel. The Sybil of Bogong has been vindicated in her intuition

("`Bet yer mum would've been glad of a girl'"). The gentle and rather hapless officer of the Australian "master narrative" - Judge Edward Twyborn - is dead, and the two "widows" are free to construct a relationship hitherto denied them. (This is, doubtless, a development of an "Oedipal" kind; I shall remain consistent, however, in not using the metalanguage of psychoanalysis in this thesis.)

In a more felicitous version of the banal "telling about everything" that had characterised family discourse on Eddie's return from Europe, this new relationship is represented as forged in dialogue. For example, "[Eadith] promised ... to take her mother back to the hotel, and to visit her for conversations." (TA:423), and in due course, "They had many delightful conversations ..." (TA:424)

This is a very rare narrative remark for Patrick White, whose conversationalists invariably indulge in "idle chatter and the destruction of their friends", and for whom friendship (as defined by Mary Hare) may be "two knives". This remark signals the "widows'" shift from the tension and conflict of dialectics to a harmonious realm of fantasy in which their inherent ambivalences are sanctioned by the licence of fiction. There is no disruption by the claims of the "master narrative", unlike Eadie's first words to her returned son in Part Two. ("`Oh!' she cried. `What you've done to us, Eddie! Whyyy?'" (TA:147)) By contrast even the

most outrageous aspect of "E.'s" life is "naturalised" in this fictional agreement between the two "women":

Eadie asked her daughter how she had been spending her life, and Eadith told her how she had drifted into becoming a bawd and running a brothel as a profitable business.

"Years ago," Eadie said, "I might have been interested in visiting your house. Yes," she gave a short dry laugh, "I'd have enjoyed investigating a brothel. Now I'm too old."

(TA:424)

In this conversation the improbables of wild fiction are harmoniously assimilated into the flat quotidian register of domestic family relations:

"You're not going, are you, Eadith?"

"Yes, Mother, I must make sure my whores are fed"; as though Ada [the manager] wouldn't see to that.

Mother and daughter nuzzled at each other's cheeks; they might have been foraging for some elusive truffle.

Eadith left after promising to return next day at her usual time.

(TA:425)

The present harmony is generated by this mutual acceptance of "pleasant fiction" - of "Eudoxia". Paradoxically, Eadie's belief in her "daughter" threatens to disrupt the fiction, because she wishes to consolidate her new relationship by taking "E." home with her to Sydney. "Mrs Trist" is distinctly a creature of London's season of misrule - of interbellum hilarity and of wartime licence, and she asserts the impossibility of her return to Australia:

"If I do go home, Eadith, is there any reason why you shouldn't come with me?"

The searchlights had woven their subtle cage.
"I mightn't be allowed," Eadith replied.

(TA:423)

The "searchlight" metaphor implies that the probing discourse of repute, as well as the carnivalesque riot of war (which is the "cataclysmic" fulfillment of the "master narrative" under which Mrs Trist has been constructed) sanction the prohibition on "E.'s" return home. The next segment expresses "E.'s" awareness of this "paradox of fortunate fiction" - to adapt Carolyn Bliss's phrase - in which she is immured:

Yes, it was the most seductive proposition: the two sitting in the steamy garden, surrounded by ragged grass, hibiscus trumpets, the bubbling and plopping of bulbuls, a drizzling of taps. But as from all such golden dreams, the awakening would surely devastate.

(TA:425)

White ends the history of "E." by exploring the equivocal energies of this paradox. Mrs Eadith Trist decides to resolve her history by doffing the habit of fiction and by going "on a short but painful visit to his mother's womb." (TA:428) This, of course, would indicate a "rebirth" of Eddie Twyborn the son, with the implication of normalised relations between mother and child. She (now signified by the pronoun "he") hands over the authorial role of "animating principle" to the manager, Ada, who is appropriately clad in a fictitious "habit". In his farewell speech s/he

wittily articulates the paradoxical state of a fiction that is also a practical reality. This could also reflect on the grim absurdity of the prevailing wartime dispensation, which, as in Himmelfarb's experience, is steeped in the ironies of "counter-carnival":

He told her, "I've decided to make the break tonight. I'm glad you're taking over, Ada, because you're a serious person, and practical seriousness is what a whore-house demands." They both enjoyed his joke, or she pretended to. "My frivolous self will now go in search of some occupation in keeping with the times."

This brown-habited imitation of the dedicated nun stood shuffling a bit on the basement flags.
(TA:427)

Ada now wears the "habit of fiction", and "E." is once again presented as a man, as "Eddie Twyborn", and wears a man's outfit to signify this persona. The great irony that invests the paradox of fortunate fiction, however, is anticipated by shortcomings in "E.'s" new semiotic set:

Eddie himself felt uneasy, ... in the cheap suit he had bought in a hurry, the shirt a size too small, and shoes which not only pinched his toes, but squeaked at every step he took. There was too much hasty improvisation about the current version of Eddie Twyborn ...

(TA:427)

The phrase "the current version" recalls the lesson of Part Two - that all "versions" of existence are subject to discursive construction, and that, in Twyborn's case, this means he can never be anything but a fiction, even if, like Hurtle Duffield's youthful painting, it is a "botched

thing". In another aspect of the paradox, Eddie's attempt to become his mother's son renders him more outrageously rhetorical than ever before. As a grotesquely androgynous figure he personifies the rhetorical "double supply" of syllepsis:

As he crossed this seemingly deserted city ... [he] saw himself reflected in plate-glass: the distorted shoulders of the shoddy suit, the pointed shoes, the cropped hair. He was disgusted to see he had forgotten to take off Eadith's make-up. The great magenta mouth was still flowering in a chalk face shaded with violet, the eyes overflowing mascara banks, those of a distressed woman, professional whore, or hopeful amateur lover.

(TA:428)

This is "the real E." reflected, in the moments before its death, as a gimcrack carnivalesque construction that parodies the categories - male and female - which are yoked in its sylleptic structure. The metonymic particles in terms of which this rhetorical "omnium gatherum" is described indicate the present disintegrating of the fiction that is Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadith. This time there is no revelation through "openwork" or through "failure to disguise": the meaning or the identity of "E." is nothing else than this macabre man/woman incoherently arrayed in its fragmented and contradictory semiosis.

The following extract suggests a "making strange" of the cosmic order itself, in which the burning East End appears to Eddie as an inverted sunset. This carnivalesque

defamiliarising or disorientation accompanies the collapse of discursive cohesion and coherence:

He had almost reached Eadie's hotel when he noticed the east blazing with a perverse sunset, if not fiery razzle-dazzle, heard the chuffing of his own heart, a clangour of racing engines, the thump and crump of history becoming unstable, crumbling.

(TA:428)

The crumbling of "history" could imply the collapse of the "master narrative" which has been largely responsible for constructing "Eadith Trist". I have previously suggested a kinship between her character and the discursive spirit of the time. In another sense, which applies more generally to repute, fiction, and histoire, and more specifically to the history of "E.", it could predicate a carnivalesque collapse of coherent signification. Whereas "E." has always sought to be convincing as a fiction, and this virtue has in fact been required by every order of vicarious "reader", s/he now appears openly as a heteroglossia that defies the differentiation of categories by which orthodox definition is conducted.

"History", as "time", is also represented as a metaphoric structure, as "this great unstable temporal house". It is reminiscent of the "comb" of which Eadith Trist was the "animating principle". Now the authorial agency of "E." is wrenched from its creation, and the fiction disintegrates:

In a moment it seemed to Eddie as though his own share in time were snatched away, as though every house he had ever lived in were torn open, ... a few broken bars of a Chabrier waltz scattered from the burst piano, was it the Judge Pantocrator looking through a gap in the star-painted ceiling, the beige thighs hooked in a swinging chandelier could only be those of that clumsy acrobat Marcia, all contained in the ruins of this great unstable temporal house, all but Eddie and Eadith, unless echoes of their voices threading pandemonium.

(TA:429)

Eddie is then mortally injured in a bomb blast. He is literally fragmented, dismembered, so that he dies a grotesque death. As a fiction he is forever unfinished, he does not find resolution, but has closure forced on him by the Pan-Demonic dispensation, the "conventions of hell", the counter-carnival, or the governing "master narrative":

Down one of the ... streets came a young soldier in battle dress and tin hat. He reached the corner in time to fall head on, ... with this character from a carnival or a looney bin.

...

The next moment they were heaved up almost above the parapet.

Eddie Twyborn should have shouted, "Time to go over..." but his voice failed him.

...

It seemed to him that the figure head-on was melting into the worn stone, ... the tin hat no more than a cabaret prop.

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, ...

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.

(TA:429-430)

Eddie fails to reach "his mother's womb", but the macabre carnivalesque aspects of his death suggest that this entails a metaphysically proairetic regeneration - a paradoxical "rebirth" on the "crimson current". His mother, in the meanwhile, is appropriately "expectant", and is in a state of mind to accept ambivalence and paradox; she is, in fact, the ideal "reader" of her child's fictitious condition:

Mrs Twyborn had been waiting in her hotel room for the daughter she was expecting. There had been an unusually fine sunset, if to the east rather than to the west it accorded with these times of illogic and apocalypse, so she had not bothered to question it.

(TA:430)

The major irony of this "paradox of fortunate fiction" in which Eadie and Eddie are embroiled is that the death of the fiction - the death of "the real E." - allows Mrs Twyborn to maintain her "pleasant belief" in her "daughter". This cannot now be disrupted by the importunate arrival of her son seeking to "visit his mother's womb". Indeed, the coherence that Eadie finds in the contingent "pandemonium" is attributed to Eadith's prescience; fiction prevails for Eadie, and guarantees her peace of mind:

Outside, the clangour of chariots racing towards brassy sunsets.

She sat on. It had happened as Eadith had predicted. But she could not care. At least she did not feel afraid. Age had drained her of fear, along with her vices, doubts, torments.

(TA:430)

White inserts an extraordinary detail in the image of a woman hopping away down the hotel corridor, "screaming, as though she belonged to the present, some young person no doubt who had not suffered enough." (TA:430) It might not be over-ingenious to interpret this figure as a personification of violent dialectic, of the "vices, doubts, torments" that haunt the practices of constructing and interpreting fiction, and which have bedevilled the lives of Eddie Twyborn and his "readers". The explanation of this phenomenon, given by a maid, is even more singular: it seems to present the figure as a personification of syllepsis, the figure of speech which epitomises cutting irony, synecdochic fragmentation, and a licentious carnivalesque artifice:

"... She got a fright when the bombs fell. She jumped up and zipped herself into one leg of her siren suit. Now there isn't time to unzip."

The old woman had dismissed bombs and their consequences; she sat contemplating the image of the hopping woman.

(TA:431)

The "hopping woman" is, of course, suffering a literal form of "double supply". Through her personification of outrageous rhetoric she could signify the consequences which a licentious "master narrative" has brought upon itself; "Now there isn't time to unzip" seems to impute an historical context to the implied dilatoriness.

More relevant to Eadie's present serenity, the "hopping woman" could also symbolise the exit from the novel of its

ironic Whitean voice. Such an "abdication" could be seen as an authorial act of charity which allows Eadie to sustain her own "pleasant fiction" to the end. In an eliding (which follows the general pattern of syllepsis) of the narrative boundaries that conventionally differentiate between times and places, Eadie is granted her own power of authorship. The "abstraction" of the burning city gives way to the "reality" of Eadie's garden in Sydney, where she confidently awaits "Eddie Eadith her interchangeable failure." (TA:431)

I have suggested in this section that the thematic valency of "failure" could be interchangeable with the theoretical implications of carnivalesque fiction. In the phrase quoted above, "fiction" does seem to provide an alternative word for "failure". The "fortunate" aspect of her child, whichever word is chosen, is expressed in the next two sentences:

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.

(TA:431-432)

Eadie Twyborn has been granted her own pleasant fiction - her "Eudoxia", which she had literally "lost" in the disappearances of her fictitiously constructed son. Through the precipitate rout of "the high social key" - of syllepsis in its siren suit - and through her indifference to the

demonic "master narrative" of history, she gains a rare discursive "harmony", which is untroubled by the importunities of outrageous authorship, gossip, or repute. The concluding paragraph of The Twyborn Affair frames this allegory of fiction with a gently comic benediction. The little figure of a "jester" - an "allowed fool" - might imply that no offence is meant by the authors, by Patrick White, by Joan Golson, Angelos Vatzatzes, Eudoxia/Eddie/ Eadith, and "old Eadie Twyborn" herself:

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.

(TA:432)

Coda: Three Uneasy Pieces

Patrick White's suite of Three Uneasy Pieces has no table of contents. Where that list usually appears is a photograph of White and Manoly Lascaris standing at their kitchen table, on which three potatoes are posed. Below the photograph are the words "THREE POTATOES and Two Guest Stars". These five photographic subjects are, it seems, the contents of the book. If we follow the theatrical cues - including this presentation of a stagy "poster" - we might consider the book as a kind of performance, as a "one-hander" which is "delivered" by Patrick White.

The performance turns out to be to be a retrospective exposition of authorship. The first piece, "The Screaming Potato", presents the topic of troubled authorial conscience. It ends with the same question that torments Hurtle Duffield in The Vivisector:

"Oh Lord, dispel our dreams, of murders we did not commit - or did we?."

(TUP:12)

White's recurrent motif for authorial power - the knife - dominates this piece. Its victim, of course, is the potato, and "vegies" in general.

The piece opens with a brief paradiagnosis:

It has been said she peels an economical potato. Seven children she had to bring up after he defected. I have seen her holding a skinned potato perhaps admiring her artistry or wondering whether to gouge the eyes. Perhaps she should

leave them. A certain amount of flesh would disappear with the gouging.

This was a long time ago. We have all done a bit of gouging since then, in the name of morality and justice.

(TUP:11)

The narrative cue, "It has been said", is a rhetorical appeal to the authority of repute. It invokes the collective "authorship" of hearsay. The testatio - or evidence of personal experience - "I have seen her", rhetorically substantiates this. But the curious anonymity of the narrative's subject conflicts with the rhetoric of narrative certainty. The whole work is characterised by similar narrative ambiguities. Most evident is the constant sliding between an extradiegetic narrative stance and the involvement of the narrator within the story. Kaleidoscopic reverie and dream sequences also alternate with experience recorded in the narrative present. These are virtuoso dramatisations of the act of writing.

In "The Screaming Potato" White presents the fundamental problem of authorship as the difficulty of achieving "sincerity". Here he seems to prescribe humility and contrition as necessary conditions for sincerity, but indicates that they are vitiated by exigent compromise:

Prayer and vegies ought to help towards atonement. But don't. There is the chopping to be done. Memories rise to the surface as we hear the whimper of a frivolous lettuce, the hoarse-voiced protest of slivered parsnip, screaming of the naked potato in its pot of tumbled water. So how

can an altruist demonstrate his sincerity?
(TUP:12)

This could be read as an allegory for writing. "Chopping" is the action of an incisive authorship, and "memories" provide the stuff of narrative, of histoire.

For White, the dichotomy that comes before all the creative ambiguities and the discursive conflicts is the opposition of silence to language. Its metaphysical equivalent is the dichotomy of unity and fragmentation. Alf Dubbo, for instance, or Mary Hare, are exponents of a mystical all-comprehending silence, and Laura Trevelyan's discourse of "air" articulates this hermetic unity. White's famous formula for eloquent silence describes Dubbo's rendering of Christ in his "Deposition" canvas: "Much was omitted, which, in its absence, conveyed." (RC:456) The "high social key" is the dialectical opposite of this eloquence; the "gnashing", "basking", "chattering" set of gossips are the obvious exponents of mundane loquacity.

The visionary characters, however, also display their flaws. Although Norbert Hare apprehends the mystical chariot of Ezekiel, he is crippled by his dilettante focus on "the fragment" instead of on "the whole". Hurtle Duffield, unlike Norbert Hare, is able to perceive "the Whole" in the old kitchen table of his youth, but he is "constipated" as an artist, and comes to apprehend the "membrane separating truth from illusion" which disqualifies his vision of unity.

In "The Screaming Potato" White presents an ideal and visionary alternative to his incisive and vivisectioning authorship - or to "chopping":

Could we perhaps exist on air till the day we are returned to earth, the bed in which potatoes faintly stir as they prepare sightless eyes for birth?

(TUP:12)

Here is Laura Trevelyan's ideal "text" - the sustaining susurrus of "air". But Laura depends on her lozenges, and Patrick White is dependent on broncho-dilators. In Flaws in the Glass White describes his writing as the opposite of silent eloquence, and identifies it not with "air" but with the "airlessness" on which Laura chokes in her uncle's garden:

I had imagined that if I could acquire the technique [of painting] I might give visual expression to what I have inside me, and that the physical act of painting would exhilarate me far more than grinding away at grey, bronchial prose. This could be the delusion of a writer who has always resented having to write.

(FG:150)

The second piece, "Dancing with Both feet on the Ground", is a buoyant and carnivalesque performance, which appears to celebrate the act of fiction. The actor/narrator appears as cicerone in a voyeuristic tour of the human flaws that populate the "great Schloss of a hotel" where the scene is set. (TUP:16) David Marr demonstrates the autobiographical content of this piece. The hotel derives from the

Palace Hotel near Montreux in Switzerland where the Whites joined the actress Ethel Kelly's Christmas party in 1926. The hilariously ambiguous "Contessa del Castelmario, alias Gladys (Baby) Horsfall of Gundy, New South Wales" is modelled on Ethel Kelly, according to Marr, and the teenaged girl with Josephine Baker "spit curls" derives from the daughter of another Australian family, the McDonalds. (TUP:17) (Marr 1991:76-77)

Marr includes a photograph of the assembled Australians - "the Whites, the McDonalds, the Gordons, and all their children" - which seems perfectly to illustrate the festive but illusory carnivalesque of the fictitious Schloss. (ibid: 76; plate 20) Wearing fancy-dress for the New Year's Eve ball, the Australians are temporarily reprieved from their orthodox identities as grazier and professional families. Under this carnivalesque licence the young Patrick appears in drag, sporting lipstick and a string of pearls, and cryptically peering from under a cloche hat.

The narrator of "Dancing" is equally outrageous. In the hotel section he is this precocious young voyeur, who peers in at windows, trails down passages, reads the sounds of plumbing and bowels; sees through closed doors:

From outside the great Schloss of a hotel, up to its eyes and ears in snow, I am looking in. It is freezing, but I am not cold.

...
The heaters are cracking their joints. A heater has burst in No.53, or the old dosser in knickerbockers could not hold out any longer.

...
 Behind their door the German couple are doing the
 right thing.

(TUP:16,17,20)

This narrator also enters the action of the story.
 What is most unusual about this ploy is that he does not
 only narrate from within the events, but he consciously
 presents himself as a homodiegetic authorial presence; not
 only "watching", but "directing", as Miss Hare says of Mrs
 Flack and Mrs Jolley in Riders in the Chariot. His preco-
 city is fulfilled in authorship:

The general rout is trickling slithering pouring
 in. Slim young women in frothing georgette,
 squeaking taffeta, ice-blue green rose, all the
 colours of the crevasse, at heel the chivalrous
 male their vanity expects. They don't notice I am
 leading them. I am too anaemic, emaciated, out-
 wardly adolescent. They don't know I can perform
 every step they fancy. I have performed them in
 the shelter of a womb. Crumbling bones will never
 prevent me carrying out my duties.

(TUP:20)

Playfully he tests and celebrates his powers of fict-
 ional composition and authorial control:

One sylph is not aware her corsage has undergone a
 change from orchids into profiteroles, or her
 squire that his fly is sticky from a handful of
 caramelised potatoes.

...
 To impress myself with my own power I hold up a
 hand.

"Oh no ... is it ... really?"

At his worst, or perhaps always, the matter is
 perverse.

...
 Denied the freedom of the dance, wooden figures
 trudge across the floor, get back the feel of

their hinges, adjust disbelieving papier maché masks.

One sax lets out an uncontrolled fart.

(TUP:20-21)

Most interesting of all is the narrator's relation to the Contessa del Castelmarino. Bored with a scandalous widowhood, she is taking instruction for conversion to Roman Catholicism. Daily she drives out with a priest in a hired sleigh, and "sometimes I accompany them":

The Oz women watch the departure from the hotel steps, sucking in scandal with the keen air. Should they drag me back to safety? Gladys frowns to find her session will be spoiled by my company and, seemingly, that I don't need instruction.

(TUP:18)

When this semi-autobiographical Patrick White presence joins the Contessa's table and asks her to dance, it is a meeting of two ambiguities, and of two outsiders:

Another loner, I ask whether I may sit at her table.

"Sweet of you," but she smiles sour.

"Off yer tucker?" I aim at making her feel she is back at Gundy, none of the Castelmarino carry-on.

She throws back her head and laughs. "Aren't you a scream!" But Baby Horsfall is the one that's screaming ...

...
I order Königsberger Klops which they make special for the Hun clientele. I gobble it up quick ... because I see the ice-maidens and their escorts are getting away from me, ...

Oh-di-oh-doh

I must follow, or rather, I must lead.

"Care to dance?" I ask Baby ...

"Well," says the fake, ... "what an idea! Aren't you wicked! But I don't mind if I do."

(TUP:22)

This second "Uneasy Piece" is narratologically "framed" by the elderly Patrick White shifting arthritically through dance steps in his kitchen; literally "dancing with both feet on the ground". He seems to present the figure of the dance as a metaphor for the conduct of life: ¹

I was never young. Just as I am not old. The Charleston, the tango are more my style. For God's sake, I'll not be chained to the beginning or the end of time. I like to think I am breaking new ground advancing into a future with rooted feet and what some would call senility.

(TUP:15)

In the next segment an extraordinary piece of sylleptic and synaesthetic fantasy seems to gather past and present, and reality and fiction, into a figural celebration of intuition and of the carnivalesque. This escape from reason and from monology is achieved by a variation of the Indian rope trick: ²

The un-reason of the past and even more the now. Was it last night or tonight I tore off my clothes smelling of armpit and Ravel and was let down into the street by a rope?

Those who dance will always dance, will share the privileges of air fire water, figures of the tireless dance disguised, ashes strewn on the stagnant surface of the lake a variation on the same theme.

(TUP:16)

Since Patrick White has died during the writing of this thesis, the reference to funerary ashes gains a sonorous, if not macabre, resonance. Since the posthumous appearance of Marr's biography, we know that it describes White's plan for

his own interment. "White had chosen a scruffy stretch of water near the bench on which he used to rest in a clump of melaleucas. Could it not be one of the beautiful lakes, Lascaris had asked? It had to be this: heavy with lilies, with a scurf of plastic and broken glass along the bank."
(Marr 1991:644)

The dance with the Contessa finally returns this sequence of fantastic authorial performance to the narrative present of Patrick White's kitchen, and we realise that he and she are in fact the same person. The author and the character are one, united in outrageous fiction:

"What mad fun!" Gladys Horsfall claps her hands, slaps her widowed thighs. As we dance together and apart, we stamp, kick up our Paris heels.

...
All dance as Shakespeare expressed it in his stage directions.

Till Baby slips, it's those spiky heels. She lands on her bum.

"Shit, Paddy!" she blubbers. "For Chrissake, I've buggered me coccyx!"

Fetch a stretcher for the Contessa del Castelmario.

"I must suffer no pain ... money is no object."

Fetch the confessor, extreme unction, the lot.

(TUP:23)

Back in Patrick White's kitchen, in the "framing" situation, the author has fallen down: "I find myself on the kitchen floor, on a wet night, or in the sun-dust of a summer morning. The radio regurgitates. Is it now or then? ... I must raise myself on the precipice edges of stove and

bench. Life doesn't end on the kitchen floor while there is the will to dance." (TUP:23-24)

The third "uneasy piece", "The Age of a Wart", is a story of betrayal, guilt, and the failure of authorship to "watch" and "direct". This turns out to be one of Bliss's "fortunate failures", because it entails the humbling of the author in penitent remorse, while he seeks his lost "subject". It ends in a kind of atonement which signifies the bridging of narrative distance, or the purging of authorship in a union with its subject.

The young narrator has a schoolmate called Bluey Platt, from whom he catches a wart. The narrator - again a Patrick White figure - belongs to a wealthy and socially pretentious family. Blue lives with his widowed mother, a nursing sister, in a poor flat on the "Wrong Side" of Sydney harbour. He finds Blue vaguely repulsive, but is sent to have tea with him ("they told me I must go, it would do me good, such a nasty spoilt boy, to have tea at Mrs Platt's ..." (TUP: 27)) Blue asserts the bond of friendship in a curious ritual of wart-brotherhood:

... he lurches against me, it seems on purpose,
holds a fist against one of my knuckles, and
mumbles, "Twins!" as he grinds his wart into mine.
... I hear myself hissing.

(TUP:28)

The fascinated gaze of the authorial perspective upon the "other" emerges at the flat. Blue's father was a viol-

inist, and a baker by trade. "...a master baker - a real artist". To the boy from the orthodox middle-class background, this is an engagingly exotic world - "in their company it doesn't seem funny that a baker should be called an artist." (TUP:32) The Platts' tea is transformed into an experience of seductive sublimity; White signals this with his customary idiom for moments of epiphany:

The meal has become a feast in a world of light and water. We are going to have baked beans direct from the tin, which Effie handles with a padded glove, the apples which had been in the bag, and, surely not as a reminder of warts, a plate of rock-cakes. Nothing so magical had ever appeared on our table at home.

(TUP:32)

Another "magical" find is the two black cut-out illustrations on the wall of Blue's room: "one of a violin, the other a knight in armour. Under the figure, printed on the wall itself, in big red letters, the word TANCREDI." (TUP:29) These beguilingly cryptic tokens introduce the Whitean persona to the ineffable dimension of creative art, of fiction, and of imagination. "Tancred" emerges as Blue's real name, and the boy himself reveals a creative perception. The narrator, bemused, begins to learn the seductive authorial pleasure of secret insight, and the bewilderment of multivalency, though he remains an incredulous, but curious audience to the Platts' revelations:

Tancred!

You could have knocked me down. I reckon nobody at school ... knows Blue Platt is Tancred underneath. The kids would have been shocked for Bluey's sake ... Blue wears his real name without a blink and takes me out to the balcony.

"This is it," he says, "the View!" throwing out his hand like a conjuror.

It is one of those days. Looking across the water at the city and the good suburbs, the Harbour is all glitter.

... Now that he has done his duty by the View, I have to get a squint at Bluey on his own ground. Tancred says nothing further, but his white skin with gingery tones is breathing, his eyes are such a colour as I have only ever seen in sky or water. I would not have admitted I was proud, but I was, of this new-found friend.

(TUP:30-31)

Soon after this the narrator betrays the wart-brotherhood by removing the excrescence with a caustic-stick, Tancred disappears, having apparently left school, and the narrator is sent to a school in England. His life thereafter is a search for Tancred. Tantalising reports come to him, as well as cryptic messages from Tancred, who has been seen in London helping victims of the Blitz, supporting his mates in a Japanese P.O.W. camp, and nursing the victims at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Tancred is an "initiate" who eludes appropriation by narrative; his life is given to human service; he seems to embody Himmelfarb's description of the "hidden zaddikhim - holy men who go secretly about the world, healing, interpreting, doing their good deeds." (RC: 155)

The Whitean persona meanwhile gets on with his authorship: "[I] returned to ... the writing of a novel which

pretended to search for truth, reality, in carefully chosen words and the studied sentences of literature." (TUP:41)

And again: "I cover the world gorging myself on unrationed food, filling sheets of foolscap with irrelevant thoughts which lay claim to significance." (TUP:43)

The narrator, in advanced years, discovers old Mrs Platt in a nursing home, and she tells him that Tancred is "out West. Somewhere in the desert." (TUP:55) This is remarkably like Laura's description of the dead and transcendent Voss, who "is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be.'" (Voss:448) Similarly, Tancred is implied to be a principle, an object of faith, which is shared by Mrs Platt and the narrator: "... she doesn't mean to crab me. She knows my intentions are serious. We are true believers. We believe in Tancred." (TUP:55)

The Whitean persona (whom Tancred addresses in his messages as "Face-ache") ends up in old age, in hospital, with a suspected melanoma. He expresses his yearning for Tancred to a nurse:

Tancred is the part of me I've always aspired to. My unlikely twin, who got away. We each had a wart as big as a rock-cake. They died. The age of a wart is a couple of years, you know. But mine has come back. Look ... look ... larger than ever ... than life. It's been lying dormant."
(TUP:57)

He learns that he is not going to die, and finally Tancred appears at his bedside. Whether this is a real meeting, or a hallucination, remains ambiguous. It is beside the point, for this reunion signifies the unification of the fragmented author. Even more, it is a kind of transcendence of the "perpetual dialectic" described by Bliss.

The narrator's "fortunate failure" to fictionalise Tancred, or to appropriate him as the subject of his authorship, is rewarded by a union, not of author and protagonist, but of equals, of "twins". The final lines of "Three Uneasy Pieces" are like Prospero's speech of abdication. As the magician is enabled to put aside his magic powers, so is Patrick White able to doff his authorial puissance. The triumphant first-person plural expresses this "Twyborn moment of grace" in which sylleptic double supply, and narrative collusion, are replaced by the communion of love:

(FG:257)

He has come. He is holding my hands in his. I
 who was once the reason for the world's existence
 am no longer this sterile end-all. As the world
 darkens, the evil in me is dying. I understand.
 Along with the prisoners, sufferers, survivors.
 It is no longer I it is we.

It is we who hold the secret of existence
we who control the world

WE

(TUP:59)

Appendix: Syllepsis and Zeugma

According to The Oxford English Dictionary syllepsis may entail either a grammatical or a lexical "double supply": "... a figure by which a word, or a particular form or inflexion of a word, is made to refer to two or more other words in the same sentence, while properly applying to or agreeing with only one of them ... or applying to them in different senses (eg. literal and metaphorical)." This definition is repeated almost verbatim in The Oxford Companion to English Literature. The Longman Companion to English Literature, however, contracts this to the second option of the OED definition: "A figure of speech by which a word is used in a literal and a metaphorical sense at the same time, eg. 'You have broken my heart and my best china vase'."

The following example, quoted in the OED entry, involves a grammatical distortion of concord: "He runs for pleasure, I for fear." In this, as in the previous example, the fusion of the two clauses entails ellipsis. Another quotation in the OED suggests a functional similarity between syllepsis and ellipsis: "Fill up all the ellipses and syllepses of Tacitus, Sallust, Livy, etc., and the elegance and force of their sententious brevity are extinguished." Ellipsis is again suggested as a possible characteristic of syllepsis in the OED entry for the adjective "sylleptic": "It [a certain

gesture] is ... obscure because it is sylleptic, ie. it expresses but the most general facts of the situation."

Lewis and Short's A Latin Dictionary presents syllepsis as follows: "a grammatical figure, by which one word is referred to another in the sentence to which it does not grammatically belong." Their example, "hic arma, hic currus fuit", ("here was his panoply, and here his triumph") is a rather weak illustration of this for "arma" only occurs in the plural form. Nevertheless, it represents the poetic convention, derived from Greek practice, by which Latin neuter plural nouns regularly take singular verbs, and which would encourage this kind of sylleptic construction. Obviously, in a non-inflected language like English, instances of deliberate syllepsis that entail the manipulation of concord would be comparatively rare.

Liddell and Scott, in their Greek-English Lexicon, translate "syllepsis" as "a taking together, conjunction", and they describe its use in rhetoric as "a figure by which a predicate belonging to one subject is attributed to several." Neither of these accounts mentions a variation in lexical sense.

In his book Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry, Brian Vickers simply defines syllepsis as "using one word while suggesting two senses of it." (Vickers 1970:148) Here he depends on Quintilian's classification, in which syllepsis is a "figure of speech" (distinguished from "figures of

thought") and is placed in the category of "word-play", along with paronomasia and antanaclasis. (ibid:86-87) Vickers' examples from English poetry present syllepsis as the simplest form of pun. In his quotation from Sidney's "Astrophil and Stella", the sylleptic play occurs in the word "rich" - a pun on the surname of Stella's husband. (ibid: 148) Another example from the same poem offers the pun "eye"/"aye":

Unkind, I love you not: O me, that eye ["aye"]
Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie.
(11.47-8) (Vickers 1970:148)

Vickers quotes this line from Shakespeare's Sonnet 138, "Therefore I lie with her, and she with me ..." which entails, as well as the pun, a double supply of the verb to two clauses. (ibid:149) But it is interesting that he chooses, in this book, not to dwell on the structural, or syntactical features of syllepsis. His emphasis on the lexical semantics in the figure indicates a liberal approach to rhetoric; he is more concerned with describing the poetic effects of ambivalence than with taxonomical definition.

In his later book, In Defence of Rhetoric, Vickers' definition of syllepsis refers purely to its ambiguous effect: "Where a word is used once only but where by the context and tone two different meanings are suggested." (Vickers 1988:498) Commenting on Bloom's play on the word "keys" and the name Keyes in Ulysses, he writes, "Rhetoric-

ians distinguished various types of pun: this is an example of syllepsis, where two meanings of the same word are invoked without repeating it." (ibid:400) (The other two kinds of pun - paronomasia and antanaclasis - involve echoing or repeating the word. (ibid:400)) Elsewhere in this book he refers to syllepsis as "a form of pun which alludes to a second meaning without repeating the word." (ibid:383) He illustrates this with the following dialogue from Othello, in which the Moor's suspicion is provoked by innuendo, "sharpened by the ambiguity (or syllepsis) that Iago exploits" in the verb "to lie." (ibid:337)

OTHELLO: What hath he said?
 IAGO: Faith, that he did --- I know not what he did.
 OTHHELLO: What? What?
 IAGO: Lie ---
 OTHHELLO: With her?
 IAGO: With her? On her; what you will.
 OTHHELLO: Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her, when they belie her. Lie with her!
 'Zounds, that's fulsome!
 (Othello IV.1.) (Vickers 1988:337)

Two aspects of this example help to justify the application of the term syllepsis to patterns in Patrick White's writing which are broader than the formally defined figure. First, Vickers has no scruples about using the term for ambiguities that spread beyond the confines of the sentence. Second, he shows that the ambivalence produced by the pun on "to lie" is encouraged by Iago's use of aposiopesis - defined as "breaking off a sentence with the sense incomplete." (Vickers 1988:492) Vickers looks to Quintilian for a de-

scription of this figure that indicates a tactical function, "as a means of transition to another topic." (ibid:318) In Patrick White's hands, aposiopesis is more a property of narrative poetics than of rhetoric, but it does contribute to ambiguities and tactical uncertainties in narrative and dialogue, which are part of White's "sylleptic pattern". (Bliss 1986:193)

Lee Ann Sonnino, in A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric, offers definitions of syllepsis from Puttenham and Scaliger. The latter, who lists the figure under eclipsis, says: "By a number of singulars this figure signifies a multitude, under one genus it comprehends others ... that, two things are signified by the one word." (Scaliger III,1 xxvi) (Sonnino 1968:50) The elliptical nature of syllepsis is again implied, as well as the effect of double meaning.

Puttenham's definition combines the elements of syntax and double meaning: "... if [a word is wanted] in sundry clauses and of several congruities or sense, and the supply be made to serve them all ... conceiving and as it were comprehending unto one, a supply of two natures." (Puttenham: 165) This is Puttenham's exposition of syllepsis (I have modernised the spelling):

"Here my sweet sons and daughters all my bliss,
Yonder mine own dear husband buried is."

Where ye see one verb singular supplyeth the
plural and singular, and thus

"Judge ye lovers, if it be strange or no:
My Ladie laughs for joy, and I for woe."

Where ye see a third person supply himself and
a first person. And thus,

"Madame ye never showed your self untrue,
Nor my deserts would ever suffer you."

Viz. to show. Where ye see the mood Indicative
supply himself and an infinitive. And the like in
these other.

"I never yet failed you in constancy,
Nor never do intend until I die."

Viz. [to fail] Thus much for the congruity,
now for the sense.

(Puttenham:165)

Puttenham then gives an example of ambiguous "sense" in the
supplier term of a syllepsis.

Some other interesting aspects are raised by Sonnino's
taxonomy - her "Descriptive Index of Tropes and Schemes" -
in which she lists figures under various general character-
istics. Syllepsis and zeugma, (she uses their Latin names
conceptio and adjunctio) are recorded under "Figures of
omission, including refusal to speak", and "Figures that
vary the normal syntax". (Sonnino 1968:259,264) Syllepsis
is excluded from the category that Vickers might have used:
"Figures which include a play on words". Here Sonnino lists
"Antanaclasis: The pun". (ibid:260) She also omits adjunc-
tio and conceptio from the category of "Tropes".

Sonnino's own formulation, which appears in her "Des-
criptive Index", defines syllepsis as "when one verb sup-
plies several clauses in several different senses", but jud-

ging from the syntactical categories under which she lists the figure, she clearly diverges from Quintilian's category of "word-play". (ibid:259) Sonnino's specification of the verb as the supplier term in the figure also contrasts significantly with the more open definitions in Vickers and in the OED, both of whom refer more inclusively to "a word".

When syllepsis is compared with zeugma, several anomalies seem to occur in the definitions, which suggest a fairly flexible application of the terms in analysis.

M.H. Abrams, in A Glossary of Literary Terms, lists zeugma as a rhetorical figure, but he does not mention syllepsis. In fact Abrams's description of zeugma (which he qualifies as "the most common present usage") is almost identical to those of Puttenham and the OED for syllepsis:

Zeugma in Greek means "yoking" ... it is applied to expressions in which a single word stands in the same grammatical relation to two or more other words, but with some alteration in its meaning from one instance to the next.

(Abrams 1981:162)

Of Abrams's four quoted examples, the following (from The Rape of the Lock) evokes the Whitean tactic which Wayne Booth has formulated as "conjectural description":¹ "Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade". This indicates the appearance in double supply of other connectives than "and". While "or" has the same paratactic co-ordinating function of "and" and "but", it may also introduce conditional result

clauses, and - typically in White - clauses of conjectural alternative.

Sonnino's definition of zeugma (or adjunctio) is simply "when a number of clauses are completed by one verb." (Sonnino 1968:259) As in her treatment of syllepsis, she specifies the verb as the supplier term. The distinction for Sonnino is that zeugma does not necessarily entail a variety of senses of the supplier term. Her summary of sixteenth-century usage conforms with descriptions by Cicero, Quintilian, Puttenham, and Peacham, all of whom she quotes. (ibid: 22) Her example from Peacham is worth noting, in which the supplied terms may be viewed as appositional in the nominative case: "... the foundation of freedom, the fountain of equity, the safeguard of wealth, and custody of life, is preserved by law". (ibid:22) (She qualifies this as "hypozeugma".)

Vickers defines zeugma identically as "using the same verb to serve two or more objects" (Vickers 1970:149), and "where one verb serves two or more clauses." (Vickers 1988: 498) His example, however, (which appears in both books) typically presents the play on words which he ascribes to syllepsis:

"Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss
(Shakespeare: Sonnet 128)

If "give them thy fingers" may be construed as "make them a rude sign", then this example - by Vickers' own definition - is a syllepsis. In the scurrilous interpretation, which Shakespeare no doubt anticipated, "give", rather than "kiss", is the supplier term. The idiomatic and non-literal meaning of "give" (to "show") provides the sylleptic ambiguity. We may note, however, that the ambivalence ("let them kiss your fingers"/"make them a rude sign with your fingers") renders the second line as a chiasmic zeugma, which is probably what Vickers has in mind. The two supplier terms, "give" and "kiss" stand at the extremities, and the supplied terms, "thy fingers" and "thy lips" straddle the caesura.

Liddel and Scott translate and define zeugma as "in grammar, a figure of speech, wherein two subjects are used jointly with the same predicate, which strictly belongs only to one." In Lewis and Short it is "a grammatical figure, according to which two nouns or two infinitives are united to a verb which is applicable to only one of them."

Christopher Gillie's account of zeugma in The Longman Companion describes "a figure of speech similar to syllepsis but having one word used with two others to only one of which it is grammatically or logically applicable." (He does not prescribe this last condition for syllepsis.) For Gillie, as for Vickers and Sonnino, zeugma refers to the purely grammatical double supply, and syllepsis to cases of

semantic ambiguities. However, his example of zeugma would, according to his view, also contain a sylleptic metaphoris-ation: "See Pan with flocks, with fruits Pomona crowned". The sylleptic ambiguity presents a metaphorical "crowning" of Pan.

The entry for zeugma in The Oxford Companion simply echoes, in abbreviated form, the definition of syllepsis. Zeugma is "a figure of speech by which a single word is made to refer to two or more words in a sentence, especially when applying in sense to only one of them." This obscures the distinctions that Sonnino and Vickers make between the figures.

The same contradiction is maintained by the OED where zeugma is "a figure by which a single word is made to refer to two more words in the sentence, especially when properly applying in sense to only one of them, or applying to them in different senses." (This recalls Puttenham's account of syllepsis.) It is clearly a modern "received" definition, for the entry continues, "But formerly more widely, including, for example, the use of the same predicate, without repetition, with two or more subjects [what Puttenham calls prozeugma]; also sometimes applied to cases of irregular construction, in which the single word agrees grammatically with only one of the other words to which it refers (more properly called syllepsis)."

Finally, it is interesting to observe that Puttenham seems to be the originator of the phrase "double supply". It is his typically graphic term for syllepsis. It would seem to indicate the polysemy of the supplier word that distinguishes this figure from zeugma. (Puttenham:165-6) (He describes zeugma as "the single supply". (ibid:163-4))

To recapitulate briefly, all of these accounts - some classical, some from the Renaissance, and some from modern received definitions - share the basic recognition of a duality in sense or in syntactical arrangement.

Some definitions imply or explicitly claim a metaphorising function in syllepsis or in zeugma. Others just observe a variation in sense, which does not necessarily entail a deviation from literal meaning. Most specify the predicate as the supplier term; others concede that function to any part of speech. Some differentiate between a proper and an improper grammatical or logical relation between the supplier and the supplied terms. Only two definitions specifically locate syllepsis within the single sentence. All, however, including Vickers' account, suggest that zeugma is so confined, and is thus the name for the typically epigrammatic sylleptic structures which are characteristic of Augustan wit.

My own working formula for this thesis is that most zeugmas tend to entail a sylleptic ambiguity, but that the deployment of syllepsis does not necessarily require a zeug-

matic structure. Bliss's recognition of a "sylleptic pattern" in Patrick White's writing reflects her similar approach. (Bliss 1986:189) White's "sylleptic pattern" is traced by "subjunctive, conditional, and generally conjectural constructions". (ibid:187) Bliss observes the kinship of the sentence fragment (aposiopesis) and ambiguities in narrative stance, with sylleptic ambivalence: "In each case the possibilities for interpretative pluralism deny the reader closure." (ibid:192) This last remark suggests a fundamental paradox in White's style: when White uses the zeugmatic formula for his sylleptic expression, the ambivalent lack of closure is counterpointed by the highly crafted and formulaic shape of the zeugma. My interest is in analysing this paradox; my purpose is to demonstrate Carolyn Bliss's observation that syllepsis "epitomises" Patrick White's "perpetual dialectic". (Bliss 1986:188)

Notes to Preface.

1. Herring, T. and G.A.Wilkes, "A Conversation with Patrick White." Southerly, 33 (1973) p.139

2. I have followed Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's usage of terms for narrative "level" and "voice" as they appear in her "Typology of narrators", eg., "extra-diegetic", "intra-diegetic", and "homo-diegetic" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:94-103) When the distinction between such levels has not been the object, I have simply used "diegesis" to signify narrative commentary as distinct from dialogue or from the conduct of characters.

Notes to Chapter One

1. Austin Roxburgh contemplates Ellen 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."

(FL:54)

2. "Scrimshaw" is the precise craft of decorative incision on pieces of ivory. Transferred to the narrative arts of gossip and literature, the name irresistibly recalls Jane Austen's description of her own fiction - "the little bit (two inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a brush". I have encountered no evidence of White's attitude to Austen, but the coincidence might be adduced in the argument for gossip as a mode of fiction.

3. Lawson remarks on White's sylleptic habits, but he tends to regard the figure philosophically, rather than textually, as a "dichotomy" which seeks to "transcend" itself. This approach leads him into confusion:

White's characteristic forms of humour are also fundamentally dichotomous. His use of syllepsis is widespread and usually involves a yoking of a mental, emotional, or spiritual quality with a physical one ... "Mrs Moriarty molten with self-pity and sweat," [sic] "He groaned with compassion and a tight crutch." His fascination with puns is a further example of interest in the dual nature of reality. But it must be acknowledged that none of these, in fact, asserts dichotomy: they are all ways of expressing a desire to bring together, to

combine the opposites, to transcend the distinctions.

(Lawson 1979:291)

In my view, which is closer to the "fortunate failure" school of thought, "dialectic" is a much more useful term than "dichotomy". It signifies the dynamics between dichotomous terms, rather than the duality itself. Judging from Lawson's example, the use of "dichotomy" leads too readily to the seductive but useless concept of "transcendence", or to the idea of "resolution", which White repeatedly exposes as a fallacy.

4. I use the term "implied author" according to Rimmon-Kenan's definition as "a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text". It is not a narrative agent, such as a "speaker" or a "voice", but a consistent "set of implicit norms" which govern the reliability or unreliability of the narrator. (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 86-88)

5. The recurrent emphasis on "air", and especially its diegetic attribute, coincides with biographical fact. White suffered all his life from asthma. In Flaws in the Glass he describes his respiratory problems while writing Voss:

Much of Voss was written in bed. ... It was not all asthma. ... But never for long. I would be standing on the brown-and-pink Wilton carpet, hanging on to the foot of the silky-oak bedstead acquired with the house, my lungs retching after almost non-existent air.

...
Bronchitis, Menuhin playing Bartok's Violin Concerto, and a virulent review of The Tree of Man, helped me to resolve the death of Voss. I had not felt up to it before. Suddenly I was injected with enough adrenalin to hack off the head.

(FG:140-1)

6. Bliss observes that the "coo-ee" scene is "a textbook example of what Australians call the 'cultural cringe'". Eadith Trist, as an "agonised" observer (Bliss's adjective) would share her author's deprecation of this equivocal relationship between "Home" and "Dominion". (Bliss 1986:226)

7. Incidentally, a more conventionally idiomatic version of this syllepsis is spoken by Captain Purdew in A Fringe of Leaves:

... "with wind in the jury-sail and Providence behind us, we can't but make landfall this evening."

Then White's appetite for bathetic deflation, and for scurrilous word-play, leads to the inevitable pun on "wind":

"It'll take more'n wind, all right," one fellow grumbled. "Wind 'as left us for other parts, like as it's gone from my empty belly."

Captain Purdew frowned. "There's a lady present," he reminded.

(FL:178)

Turner's bathetic flatulence at Voss's embarkation (see Chapter Three), and numerous other fartings in White's fiction, indicate the author's fondness for this version of "wind". In this broader context of authorial habit, it is difficult not to sense the ghost of a smile in the placing of a "cool southerly breeze" behind Mrs de Courcy.

8. White seems habitually to apply variations of the phrase "high social key" to genteel but equivocal dialogue. For instance this phrase describes Miss Scrimshaw's indulgence in gossip (FL:1), and it describes Ursula Untermeyer during her perverse sensation-seeking visit to Mrs Trist's brothel. (TA:343)

Notes to Chapter Two

1. In a short account by Ray Willbanks of an interview with Patrick White, gossip is mentioned three times - to describe the conversation, as a theme of discursive art, and as an invidious narrative practice. This is how he describes the interview:

... two hours of conversation, gossipy, bitchy, full of laughter and complaints and pronouncements, a roller coaster ride ...

He records White's interest in a film - based on a novel by the author's friend Thea Astley - called A Descant for Gossips. And then he recalls White saying "in one of his moments of bitterness":

"You'll probably go out and tell X [famous writer] just what I said about her. Everybody tells everything."

(Willbanks 1980)

2. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, in her manual of narratology, lists gossip as a kind of narrative. There is, however, no further reference to gossip as a form of narrative fiction. (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:1)

3. "Python", in Greek mythology, was the serpent killed by Pythian Apollo. It rotted at Delphi, which is also called Pytho. The temple of Apollo at Delphi is the Python; its priestess, who uttered the responses of the oracle, is the

Pythia, and one who consults the oracle of Pythian Apollo is a pythaistes. Pythonikos means inspired, pneuma pythonos is a spirit of divination, and pythones are ventriloquists. Pythiaxein means to be inspired by Apollo, to prophesy, and pythesthai is to inquire of the oracle. Pythesthai also means to rot, or to make rotten.

The "tripod" which White associates with his "pythonesses" Rhoda Courtney and Mrs Flack derives from the seat of the Pythian priestess. In Rhoda's case he appears to construe it as a support for the "oracles" - which he apparently confuses with the "auspices" of the Roman custom.

4. My borrowing of these terms from structural linguistics is purely analogical. I intend them to suggest the idea of an apparently homogeneous order - the "implied authorship" - and a heterogeneous and "disorderly" discourse - the ambiguities of the narrative. The analogy does not extend beyond the concepts of langue as a paradigmatic "competence", and parole as a syntagmatic performance.

5. Howard Jacobson, "Tough treatments for symptoms of schlock", Sunday Independent, 14 July 1991. Review of Patrick White: A Life, by David Marr.

6. We may also notice White's propensity for describing sacrificial knives, as in the case of Mr Bonner's petty betrayal of Voss, where he "was relieved to have made his sacrifice with an almost imperceptible movement of the knife." (Voss:61)

This construction upon the knife motif is naturally congruent with oracular divination, and suggests more dimensions of the gossip theme. Propitiation of a baleful discourse, of a sinister and voracious kind of "authorship", is a possibility. The sharp "cutting" tongue of malicious narrative would serve to this purpose.

7. The following passage is an exposition on the theme of gossip and xenophobia. It indicates the extent to which Himmelfarb, the third party subject of gossip, is excluded by the gossip "authorship" of Sarsaparilla:

The voice of the Rosetrees proclaimed that a stranger was in their midst. If it hesitated to deride, it was for those peculiarly personal, not to say mystical reasons, and because derision was a luxury the Rosetrees were only so very recently qualified to enjoy. The voice of Sarsaparilla, developing the same theme, laboured under no such inhibitions, but took for granted its right to pass judgement on the human soul, and in indulge in a fretfulness of condemnation.

(RC:211)

"The voice of Sarsaparilla" signifies what I shall call a "master narrative". That is, the apparently unambivalent and monological discourse of social orthodoxy. Unlike the "discourse of air" - the intuitive communion between Whitean "initiates" - this collective voice wields material power. Its "authority" is indicated by the relatively subordinate position of the Rosetrees, whose "voice" is flawed and made ambivalent by their dissemblance of their identity.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. This is how Bakhtin describes the formation of his Renaissance "heteroglossia":

A millenium of folk humour broke into Renaissance literature. This thousand-year-old laughter not only fertilised literature but was itself fertilised by humanist knowledge and advanced literary techniques. In Rabelais we see the speech and mask of the medieval clown, folk and carnival gaiety, the defiance of the democratic cleric, the talk and gestures of the mountebank - all combined with humanist scholarship, with the physician's science and practice, and with political experience.

(Bakhtin 1968:72)

2. Bakhtin asserts that the popular laughter of carnival embraces a world that is free of temporal or spatial limits. The images of the grotesque body are universal, and they populate an abundant earth:

The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance. [They refer to] the collective ancestral body of all the people. Abundance and the all-people's element also determine the gay and festive character of all images of bodily life; they do not reflect the drabness of everyday existence.

(Bakhtin 1968:19)

3. Bakhtin describes how "naturalism" begins, in Cervantes' Don Quixote, to "reduce" the material bodily principle:

... bodies and objects begin to acquire a private, individual nature; they are rendered petty and homely and become immovable parts of private life, the goal of egotistic lust and possession. ... Their link with life and with the cosmos is broken, they are narrowed down to naturalistic erotic impulses.

(Bakhtin 1968:23)

4. Here is a comparison between descriptions of the phallus from Gargantua and Pantagruel and from Fanny Hill:

O dumpy cod, stumpy cod, famous in birth,
hamous in girth; O cod, rich in lactory secretions

and heavy as lead; O cod, rose-red; O cod, above all things fair, cod covered with hair; O cod, caulked and dawked, veined and ingrained: Hear me, I beseech you!

O tuck, O cod, O stucco cod; O cod grotesque (what incunabula you scrawl in grottos!); cod humoresque, cod arabesque (with styles, devices, mottoes!).

(Book 3, Chapter 26) (Bakhtin 1968:417)

Its prodigious size made me shrink again; yet I could not, without pleasure, behold, and even ventur'd to feel, such a length, such a breadth of animated ivory! ... whose exquisite whiteness was not a little set off by a sprout of black curling hair round the root, through the jetty sprigs of which the fair skin shew'd as in a fine evening you may have remark'd the clear light ether through the branchwork of distant trees overtopping the summit of a hill ...

(Fanny Hill:85) (Charney 1981:81)

5. Bakhtin observes the universal valency of the "unfortunate kiss". He explains that "the rump is the 'back of the face', the 'face turned inside out'", and that "one of the most common forms, expressed in word or gesture", of this inversion, is the "baise-cul". (Bakhtin 1968:375)

6. Bakhtin lists "three distinct forms" of folk carnival culture: "ritual spectacles", "comic verbal compositions", and "various genres of billingsgate", that is, "curses, oaths, popular blazons." (Bakhtin 1968:5)

7. In contrast to this gossiping practice, Bakhtin claims of the "people's festive laughter" that it is "also directed at those who laugh":

This is one of the essential differences of the people's festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times. The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction. The people's ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it.

(Bakhtin 1968:12)

8. The extreme stylistic contrast, perhaps, to the equivocal carnivalesque of sylleptic wit, is what Bakhtin describes as "coq-à-l'âne" or "from rooster to ass". "This is a [carnivalesque] genre of intentionally absurd verbal combinations, a form of completely liberated speech that ignores all norms, even those of elementary logic." (Bakhtin 1968:422) Patrick White's extraordinary telephone conversation with "D", in Flaws in the Glass approaches this description. (He also seems to impute a grotesque oracular quality to the telephone, which is his "elixir"):

[Manoly] cannot believe in my elixir any more than what he sees as my circus religion, his own faith deriving from the Pantocrator and the sap of plants.

(FG:241-0)

The conversation with "D" is not truly alogical, but it does indicate a buoyant and joyous verbal "liberation". It is also scurrilous, and is seasoned with puns and double entendres. Here are samples of this "coq-à-l'âne":

... are you a ray of sunshine today?
 ... couldn't expect me to scintillate - not as things are ...
 ...
 ... There! D'you here that noise? It only ever happens when I'm talking to you. We're being bugged.
 ... What if we are? Let's give them something real juicy ...
 ... But it hurts my ear ...
 ... Buggery hurts.
 ...

D. roars. We always enjoy a good roar together.

... I've gotter go - gotter look at my chicken.
 ... You were going to tell me what to do with New Zealand whitebait.
 ... Look, I'll write it out - Mummy's own whitebait dollops. But I gotter go ...
 ... Bye then.
 ... Bye ...
 ... But you gotter admit it's the Age of the Crab.
 ... Any old age was that. They say they're worst when you get 'em in the armpits.

I give D. hell, but D. enjoys it, as do most of those others admitted to hell - or so I dare

believe. I also believe tunes played on the tin whistle have their own importance.

...
Thank you, D. for joining me on tin whistle; a duet is more consoling than solo.

(FG:239-242)

(Incidentally David Marr identifies "D" as the artist Desmond Digby. (Marr 1991:608))

9. I do not mean to imply that Bakhtin ignores the fact that carnival is licensed by a governing authority. In the following extract he acknowledges this condition. However, he tends to emphasise the dialogical nature of relations between "establishment" and "marketplace" during carnival as a generally "liberating" experience, and he suppresses the fact of the return to governance:

... one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.

... People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. ... The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind.

(Bakhtin 1968:10)

Notes to Chapter Four

1. This syllepsis fully reflects Brian Vickers' definition of the figure as a variety of pun. (See appendix for definitions by Vickers and others.) "Tossed" is the supplier term, which is expanded into metaphor by "sea". But as well as its double supply to "Welsh voices" and "some unreasonable unhappiness", it could be seen as ambiguous in itself. White so often has his characters masturbate when confused (Eddie Twyborn, M. Pelletier, Cecil Cutbush, for instance) that the obscene slang meaning of "toss" is surely intended here. In this sense, "sea" also carries a double entendre.

After all this ambivalence, and its taint of guilt, the boy seems to take refuge in unexceptionable conduct. The "fried whitebait in little potato baskets" appears to be a stock motif for characters' composure after disconcerting experience. This is the dish addressed by the young Hurtle and Rhoda just after seeing the anti-vivisectionists' stuffed dog, and it is the meal at which Joan Golson sits with her husband after receiving a letter from "Eudoxia". The dish itself presents ambiguity: Mrs Golson is "distressed" never to know whether the "potato basket" is for eating or merely for holding the fish. (TA:70) Thus the refuge, or the consolation, of this motific dish is made equivocal.

The two young "vivisectors", on the other hand, feed on the equivocation: "they started eating the potato baskets, though perhaps you weren't supposed to. (V:136)

2. White seems to spare Hero Pavloussi his customary narrative irony. Instead she is submitted to the circumstantial ironies that attend her numerous disappointments. These result from her "monological" rigidity. It is her quasi-tragic flaw, and it prevents her redemption as an "initiate", even though her "simplicity of spirit" (which commends her to Hurtle) should ostensibly qualify her as one.

Hero has no capacity for ambivalence. Instead she is manipulated and abused by the ambivalent - such as Hurtle and Olivia - and finally cast off, I suggest, as an exasperation. I suggest further that she is incompatible with Whitean narrative itself - this is why she is always presented objectively, and why she is never a narrative focaliser. The dispensation that ordains her tragedy is White's discursive order of fictive ambivalence, which Olivia and Hurtle represent, and whose guilt is theirs:

"But you know Hero was my mistress."

"I gave her to you - for that purpose - not to kill!"

... "How many murders, Boo, are ever proved?"

"Exactly. Very seldom the ones we know anything about ..."

... "But Hero died of cancer, didn't she?" He had found the strength to shout that.

It was surprising none of the elaborate figures in Mrs Mortimer's illuminated living-room broke.

(V:418)

3. On the topic of "bum-swabs" in Rabelais, Bakhtin remarks that the swab is "one of the widespread images of scatological literature" and it is "widely used in epigrams on writers and their works. (Bakhtin 1968:114) (We recall Pope's Curl acting as a "swab": "Oft, as he fished [fair Cloacina's] nether realms for wit".)

Bakhtin observes that the choice of swabs used by the young Gargantua in the First Book (Chapter 13) is "not merely capricious; it has its own logic, though an unusual one." (Bakhtin 1968:372) In the case of Olivia's letter, the carnivalesque, or grotesque, logic would entail the debasement of communication and the degrading of Olivia's social discourse. Her studied ambivalence, which is formulated by her syllepsis, is strategically debased by Hurtle's natural ambivalence. The aperient and grotesque "lower bodily stratum" debases Olivia's calculating "narrative" manipulations in what is but a thinly disguised carnivalesque ritual.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. Not least, "E." is apparently "available" to narrative itself; the act of voyeurism establishes this. Eudoxia's paradoxical elusiveness, however, contradicts this perception, and she herself complains of narrative rapine:

... just when I'd begun to order my life, perhaps even make it into something believable, this emissary comes to smash it to pieces. Nothing so brutal as a soft, silly woman.

Everything, I now see, has been leading up to this act of aggression.

(TA:22)

2. See the extract from FG, quoted in Chapter Four, in which the young Patrick, discomposed by the singing of Welsh miners, "tosses" on his hotel bed and "a sea of anxiety". It is difficult to resist sensing a kinship between the personal and the sylleptic habits.

3. That both Angie and Margs are "owned", as is Joan Golson, by the "master narrative", is signified by their passage to Australia from an adventurous war that was "not without its rewarding moments." (TA:135) The reward is promiscuity which is "licensed" by the exigencies of war:

"Did you sleep with him?"

"You have to, haven't you? when there's a war on."

"Exactly! That's what I felt about Doug."

(TA:135)

Though they are presently "licensed" by ship-board hilarities, they now return to orthodox governance - which includes, for Angie, marriage to a grazier.

4. This description of a lady "who consider[s] it fun to be on 'darling' terms with a procuress" could be the synopsis of an Evelyn Waugh plot:

One of the outwardly flawless English flowers, Cecily [Snape] had been forced to leave the country for a while after an affair with an entire negro band ending in the death of a drummer and exposure of a drug ring.

(TA:337)

The apparent narratological relish in this account - indicated by the lack of punctuation - is congruent with the

general celebration of fiction in Part Three. "E.", being a genuine fiction, sees Cecily's vaunted repute as "amoral swank". That Cecily has deliberately sought to be fictionalised in repute emerges later when she confesses that it wasn't the whole band, but just "the one who died, and the one who did him in." (TA:338)

5. This is reminiscent of White's description of himself "pandering" to his pilots as a South African Air Force intelligence officer in Egypt. "... I was changed by circumstance into a hen fluffing out wings to accommodate a half-fledged, frequently troubled brood." (FG:89) Like Eadith's role, this is the commanding, and ambivalent, position of a controlling "author": "The most difficult part of the performance came when I had to round up my pilots for the journey back [from leave in Alexandria]. From being a pander I became a conscience." (FG:91)

6. The name "Bellasis" seems to suggest a pathologising of beauty. The suffix "-asis", as in "psoriasis", brings to mind the lexis of disease and corruption.

Notes to Coda

1. Arthur Brown's mandala dance, in The Solid Mandala, is a non-verbal figuration of his life. The curious transitive use of the verb "to dance" seems to imply that this dance is not a mimesis or a representation; instead, for Arthur, it actually is what it conveys. For example: "He danced the moon, anaesthetized by bottled cestrum. He danced the disc of the orange sun above icebergs ..." and, "... he danced the passion of all their lives ..." (SM:266-267)

2. Ron Shepherd finds a kinship between White's early short story "The Twitching Colonel", and the Indian genre of metaphysical comedy. Devices such as the Rope Trick apparently occur in this genre as means of vitiating a material reality which is perceived as illusion. Ron Shepherd, "An Indian Story", in Shepherd, R. and K.Singh, Patrick White: A Critical Symposium. Adelaide, 1978.

Notes to Appendix

1. Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction. Chicago, 1961 p.184

Bliss observes that White's "conjectural description" has the same effect as his syllepsis, synaesthesia, fragmented syntax, and ambiguous focalisation - they are "deliberate evasions", which

... signal the resignation of the prerogatives which normally accrue to the omniscient narrator, placing White for these moments where the reader is: outside of character and action ...

... they enlist the reader as a partner in the apprehension of meaning. He both seeks and contributes to the novel's emerging significance.

(Bliss 1986:189)

In terms of my theory of gossip narrative, this suggests a "disingenuous" strategy for establishing a confidential "collusion" with the reader, or perhaps more accurately, the "narratee".

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