

‘Greece—Patrick White’s Country’: Is Patrick White a Greek Author?

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When patterns are broken, new worlds emerge.

Tuli Kupferberg

In a 1973 interview shown on *Four Corners* the morning after the Nobel Prize announcement, Mike Charlton questions Patrick White on his formative time in England and wonders how he managed to make his novels so ‘Australian.’ White replies, ‘Because it is in my blood . . . my heart isn’t altogether here, I think my heart is in London but my blood is Australian.’ White had made other such public declarations of affiliation, claiming he did ‘better with the exotics’ in his autobiography *Flaws in the Glass* (1981) and naming ‘his elective Greece’ as ‘his other country’ (1989).¹ Drawn from diverse contexts, the multiplicity and contradiction of these utterances speak nonetheless to a self-invention: White’s declarations of belonging are complex rhetoric deployed by a masterful performer of multiple personae. When read in light of the complicating potential of the diverse paratextual accounts of White’s life and times, these statements draw our attention to what Brigid Rooney has argued is White’s ‘irascible yet famously public personae . . . [as] a script he performed, and that performed him, in public life’ (Rooney, ‘Public Recluse’ 4). This essay takes up Rooney’s account of White’s capacity for self-production and self-complication, considering the generative possibility of extending White’s declaration of Greek affiliation as a productive avenue for engaging with his literature. Drawing on an earlier and now largely dormant body of critical readings focused on identifying the Greek objects, entities and moments found across White’s oeuvre, this essay works to reveal the ghosted origin of these Hellenistic, Byzantine, Orthodox and Anatolian referents and allusions. The origins of these elements are identified through White’s ‘literary coming out’ in *Flaws in the Glass: A Self Portrait* and in Veronica Brady and Noel Rowe’s defence of a ‘biographic reading’ of White’s literature, Greekness is revealed as a literal and prominent concern in White’s life—embodied, of course in the presence of White’s partner of some 40 years, his ‘central mandala,’ George Emmanuel ‘Manoly’ Lascaris (White, *Flaws* 100). This essay considers in turn White’s interweaving of detail from his own life and that of Lascaris in the biographic and fictional crossover seen most profoundly in the *The Twyborn Affair*, a novel that ‘blurs the line of biography and fiction’ (McMahon 81). Drawing on this identification of the proleptic significance and queerness of these conjoined biographic topoi by Elizabeth McMahon, this essay reads the combination of Byzantine and Orthodox features working within the Twyborn character’s guise as the transgendered Eudoxia Vatatzes. I contend that this sees White drawing ‘Greekness’ into a schema of fictional performance of self. In turn, White’s lost fragment *The Hanging Garden* embedded with the ‘characteristic themes’ that appear throughout White’s oeuvre, gives us a sense of White’s continued preoccupation with Greekness. In taking on the narrative voice of Greek migrant Irene Sklavos, White brings to bear ‘all the symbolic jewels that dazzle and oppress,’ enacting a continuation of the moral and ethical critique of racist aligned coordinates of nationalism found in his public writing through the fictional voice of this displaced migrant child (De Kretser).

In an undelivered speech titled 'Greece—My Other Country,' White's capacity for self-invention is seen clearly when he evokes and arguably performs, a nationally coded rhetorical appeal to Greek kinship to serve his aim as anti-nuclear proliferation activist. Invited by the democratic Greek Government to speak as part of celebrations to mark the fall of the military junta, White travelled to Athens in November 1983. The speech he had prepared was never delivered, reportedly forgotten 'in the festive excitement' (White, *Patrick White Speaks* 132).² Written after White's post-1972 'coming out' as political activist, 'Greece—My Other Country' sees the author perform at his most impassioned, articulating a fear heightened by 'his visceral sense of apocalypse linked to World War II experiences' (Rooney, 'Public'). Finally published the year of White's death in the collection *Patrick White Speaks* (1990), the speech is both celebration and warning, with White evoking Greek history—from the near distant past of Byzantium to the more recent years of Turkish occupation—to warn against the threat of nuclear proliferation. White demonstrates his intimate knowledge of Greek culture to elicit a sense of affiliation and shared experience with the audience that never materialised. Enacting within his warning what Rooney has described as 'the almost formulaic combination of the irascible and the flamboyant, the desire to retreat and the desire for recognition' (4) White is at once endearing and castigating when he declares:

How could I resist returning at this point, when the close ties of love and friendship, the events of history, and those vertiginous landscapes of yours, tell me that Greece is my other country? Not that I haven't been disgusted by some of its material aspects, as those who have read my books will know. But these depressing details of the Greek experience only serve to bring Greece closer, make it more recognisably part of my own flawed self. (White, 'Greece')

Within the rhetoric of 'Greece—My Other Country,' White draws Greece into 'his flawed self,' figuring it as both familial and other to what we may assume to be, though undeclared, his country of residence. Conscious that ethnicising White is a gesture of infinite regress, I want to briefly extend this sense of White as a 'Greek author.' Dorothy Green's tribute marking White's death offers further detail. Green suggests:

White was tempted after the war to settle in Greece—his 'other country'; but his longing for the Australian landscape drew him back and exposed him to the anguish of those who accepted as citizens responsibility for their country's mistakes.

If we take this superficially, the potential for reading White as almost being 'of a kind' with expatriate 'Australian-Greek' authors such as Beverly Farmer, Charmian Clift and George Johnson is enticing. Greece in this configuration takes on similar valences as London in readings of the significance of England in White's earlier life and work. In exaggerating this sense of Greek affiliation, my aim here is not to suggest that White was a Greek cultural nationalist, which would reproduce with slight modification a mere replication of older periphery/centre and expatriate models of reading White's cross-cultural connection. While White's affection for Greece may have extended to questions of Hellenistic independence and politics—'Greece—My Other Country' taking place in an implicit context of Greek cultural nationalism—he and Lascaris remained silent in the international debate. Rather, I take Dorothy Green's suggestion that White may have settled in Greece as offering further detail of the generative multiplicity of White's Greek affiliation, when read in light of White's other performances of Greekness.

Identifying Patrick White as ‘Greek’ has the potential to productively refigure him as a transnational and multicultural author. Conversely, this strategy also perpetuates the veiling of Manoly Lascaris. Under this regime, White’s diverse public and literary manifestations of Greekness—and any potential correlatives to Lascaris’s life—are flattened under the metonym of ‘White’ the author. Nikos Papastergiadis’s 1981 declaration—played out again in conversation with Christos Tsiolkas at the 2012 Antipodes Writers Festival—calls attention to this phenomenon, in drawing our attention to the depth and variety of references to Greeks and Greece throughout White’s oeuvre: ‘As soon as you’re successful and have got any Greek connection we’ll include you as a Greek; Patrick White is a Greek author.’ Though offered as a humorous provocation, highlighting the inherent difficulty of delineating the characteristics of Greek–Australian literature, Papastergiadis’s statement is also illustrative of how Lascaris, ‘the original of all White’s Greeks,’ remains hidden in accounts of White’s fictive ‘Greekness.’ By eliding the individuation of Greece in biography/fiction, life/work and self/other, the lines of signification that flow from Lascaris through White’s fiction are lost. In a different context, though suggestive of my point, Ivor Indyk in a recent article noted the dearth of multicultural voices in the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature. Remarking that an array of fine Greek–Australian writers were omitted, Indyk suggests that through, ‘White . . . a great mimic . . . you hear the post-war immigrant voice.’ Although White’s Greek references are diverse and drawn from the long durée of Greek history, they signify for Indyk White’s capacity for fictional self-production in taking on the voice of the migrant.

Obituaries and posthumous publications that marked the couple’s respective deaths further reveal White’s capacity for self-invention as entangled with his homosexuality. In White’s self-elision in public life of the couple’s Greek family and personal history, we gain a sense of what Brigid Rooney has described as the ‘the public political White [as] too easily doubled by the dubious, the insincere, and the inauthentic . . . his political activism is rendered ambiguous, even delegitimised, by association with theatricality, exhibitionism, and homosexuality’ (Rooney, ‘Public’ 6). Although he declares in ‘Prodigal Son’ that he returned to Australia for fear of becoming a tolerated ‘Levantine beachcomber,’ it is worth recalling that White had wanted to stay in Greece, and reportedly considered importing a stock of merino sheep, perhaps partly in sympathy for ailing post-war Greece, and as canny business. It was Lascaris who was more circumspect, and it was Lascaris’s fear of living in a homosexual partnership in a country not only ravaged by continuing war, but marked by his social and familial connections, and characterised in some respects by a broad religious conservatism, that saw the couple return to Australia.³ Refiguring Lascaris as the driving force behind the couple’s return to Australia, signifies the extent to which their domesticity dictated the terms of their shared life. Thus I would argue that White’s performance of Greekness is best understood from within his lived experience of Greece and the context of his partnership with Lascaris. Supporting the claim that White’s Greekness as grounded within the domesticity of his relationship, are records of White and Lascaris’ continued travel to Greece before, during and after Junta rule, ‘between novels, always spending time with Manoly’s family in White’s “other country”, Greece’ (Marr, ‘Gentle Foil’).

Greece, White tells us is part of his own ‘flawed self’ evoking the title of his 1981 autobiography *Flaws in the Glass: A Self Portrait*—his famous literary ‘coming out’ where he first publicly defined his relationship with Lascaris. However unlike corresponding sections in *Flaws in the Glass* which focus on Greece, Manoly Lascaris is largely absent from these public performances—mentioned briefly as a ‘friend and partner’ in ‘The Prodigal Son’ and again in ‘Greece—My Other Country.’ We see then in Green’s and White’s pronouncements

a dual veiling of this obvious connection to Greece. The anachronistic correspondence of ‘flawed selves’ works chiasmatically in this context: at once signalling White’s Greek affiliation and veiling the presence of Lascaris’s contribution to White’s Greek self, while encapsulating White’s outmoded view of his sexuality as abnormal gender inversion.⁴ I am conscious that the dictates of literary and public interest, compounded by the then stigma and illegality around homosexuality, contributed to the occlusion of Lascaris in many now dated accounts. However, diverse texts—White’s autobiography *Flaws in the Glass*; David Marr’s biography *Patrick White: A Life*; and Vrasidas Karalis’s *Recollections of Manoly Lascaris*—speak to the prominence of the ‘Greek’ within White’s life as epitomised by Manoly Lascaris. This is underscored by the familiar Whitean epithets of ‘the central mandala’ (*Flaws* 100), ‘the gentle foil’ (Marr, ‘Gentle’), and the ‘archetype of White’s Greeks’ (*Flaws* 101).

Within these accounts we gain a vital sense of the complicating and generative potential of reading White’s Greekness as predicated on a conjoining of life and work. The relationship between White’s life and his fiction has been signalled in diverse ways, though most clearly articulated in the refutations by Noel Rowe and Veronica Brady of David Tacey’s famous review of David Marr’s *Patrick White: A Life*. In Rowe’s view, Tacey’s notably acrimonious response accused Marr’s biography of working to ‘demystify White’s work, to make it secular, understandable, recognisable, ordinary, gay, political, and of its time’ (Rowe 147). In the context of White’s Greekness, this is almost certainly the case. The biographic accounts provide a grounded historical and cultural map for reading some of White’s more anachronistic and unfamiliar Byzantine and Anatolian Greeks. In this sense, despite David Tacey’s opprobrium toward the biography for its ‘restriction’ of White’s fiction, the biographies and autobiography have the opposite effect, endlessly broadening the potential horizons of reading White’s texts (Brady, ‘To Be’). Taking up this broadening of horizons, we might consider how David Marr’s approach implies that the fiction, autobiography and biography are somehow, ‘discovered within a shared space of symbols and strategies’ (Rowe 150-1). Important for our consideration of White’s Greekness is the way in which the three interrelated textual accounts (the biography, the fiction, and autobiography), share a reading of the symbol of Greece, ‘which combines its iconographic possibilities with its tawdry realities’ (150–51). These realities, I argue, are indelibly inscribed and complicated in White’s autobiography, Marr’s biography, and Karalis’s ‘Platonic dialogues’ by the elements drawn from the life of Lascaris.

Much like White’s public performance of Greekness in ‘Greece—My Other Country’ we see White in *Flaws in the Glass* draw Greece into an ambivalent schema of performances—‘the mystic, the bitch, the benefactor, the Jeremiah, the drag queen, the sufferer, the outsider, the lover’ (Rowe). In arguing that the details of White and Lascaris’s life provide a cartography for navigating this proliferation of Greek performances, I am conscious that their full significance is only revealed in the shared and mutable space of biography and fiction. Though indelibly linked to White’s ‘Greek Archetype’ Manoly Lascaris, the art and artifice of these performances is White’s own (White, *Flaws* 62). In *Flaws in the Glass*, White recounts the White-Lascaris pilgrimage to the all-male monasteries of Meteora, Mount Athos. Dominating this account is White’s juxtaposed articulation of his fascination with the alien splendour of his surroundings, and his fears. Interpolated into White’s account of this experience are his imagined worries and presumptions about Lascaris’s emotions on his return to Greece. Lascaris is in a way the silent subject of White’s autobiographic ascent toward Meteora, he comes to inhabit a grounded position as guide, translator and companion, while elevated in the symbolic register of the work. White enacts a separate symbolism for Lascaris, conjoined with that of Greece, through eschatological and spiritual imagery. Manoly

is figured as ‘the central mandala . . . the solid mandala,’ an impermanent and encapsulating figure of the universe and a cartography for navigating its experience. This move is mirrored within Marr’s biography, where Marr introduces the symbol of Greece in a manner that centres on White’s relationship with Manoly Lascaris; in recalling White’s first meeting with Lascaris Marr writes:

Almost everything White wrote after that time bears traces of the history, ancient and modern, of the Lascaris family. Fragments of Byzantine genealogies, the sufferings of Smyrna, the squalor and magnificence of the Orthodox faith, the persistence of civilisations in exile—all became part of White’s experience. (Marr, *Patrick White* 218–19)

Rowe sees the ‘squalor and magnificence’ as White actively receiving this Greece, just as in the ‘dun-coloured’ traces of Patmos we can ‘catch the prodigal son bringing something of his Greece into his Australia and vice versa’ (Rowe). This is a conscious turn and a writerly strategy, and as Marr’s description illustrates, White’s Greece is ‘ghosted by those ambivalences’ embedded in his interrelated conception of his sexuality and creativity.⁵

These performances and experiences, though evident across the oeuvre, come to bear most profoundly in *The Twyborn Affair*, a text that is a ‘crystallisation of the preoccupations, as well as the characters and situations, of the previous novels and stories’ (Ramsay 91). Drawing on Elizabeth McMahon’s essay ‘The Lateness and Queerness of *The Twyborn Affair*: White’s Farewell to the Novel,’ I argue that White weaves Greekness into fictional performances of self in the characters of Eudoxia and Angelos Vatatzes. The Twyborn character’s first guise in the novel as the transgendered or transvestite Eudoxia Vatatzes is—unlike any of White’s previous protagonists outside the short stories collected in *The Burnt Ones*—marked as Greek. In the characterisation of the Vatatzes couple, White crafts a chimeric locus of those ambivalences he signalled in his depiction of Greece, through a ‘mode of allusion [that] blurs the lines of biography and fiction as White weaves in direct personal experience and information’ (81). McMahon notes that the novel’s protagonist Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadith Twyborn is ‘a composite within him/herself across the novel and of the oeuvre’ and this character offers proleptic significance across White’s work. The Twyborn character revisits many of the scenes and situations seen across White’s oeuvre and McMahon draws our attention to the ‘semi-familiar characters who are recast into familiar topoi, structures and settings from his earlier ten novels,’ who populate the text (91). Nicholas Birns among others, has taken a different reading, focusing on the ‘allusive significance of White’s Byzantinism’ as drawn from the annals of Byzantine history. Birns argues that White’s Byzantinism ‘at once acknowledges and mocks James Joyce’s Ulysses . . . as Ulysses alludes to the Greek epic *Odyssey*, so does Twyborn allude to the Greek epic *Akritas*’ (220). In a similar sense, Vrasidas Karalis’s scholarly work on White has argued that the threads of reference to Hellenism, Classical culture and Byzantium operate as part of ‘a historical tradition articulating a corpus of meanings, employed in this case by Patrick White in order to make his artistic universe coherent as both an intra-textual and extra-textual experience at a specific historical situation’ (1).

In light of this literary-biographic crossover, Angelos Vatatzes occupies a significant position within *The Twyborn Affair*, especially for a reading of White’s ‘Greekness.’ Vatatzes, a retired spice merchant and *émigré* from Lascaris’s native Smyrna, is Eudoxia’s Emperor/child/father/lover and a site of blurred biographic and fictional lines. Angelos presides over a small ramshackle cottage in Côte Morte, France, as infant-Emperor, insecure

at the arrival of Mr and Mrs Golson and the disruption they herald. As the Emperor/child/father/lover figure, he serves as a stylised, outré expression of Eudoxia/Eddie's escape from 'arbitrary and fragile "normality" of the Australian upper middle-class,' working in opposition to the Golsons' and Eudoxia's ambivalent desire to return to Australia (Coates 508). This Byzantine-Greek Francophile is dislocated in time and space, and within the novel he represents a combination of settings, preoccupations, and ancestral myths that resonate with Lascar's heritage: his formative years in cosmopolitan Alexandria, the Francophilia of his guardian aunts, and the fictional lives of White's other Greeks—notably those of *The Burnt Ones* (Marr, Patrick 214–18). Angelos serves as a mentor of sorts to Eudoxia, and works within the partnership schema, identified by Raizis, as a catalyst who enables the protagonists to increase their self-knowledge, overall understanding, and personal potential as a human beings (Raizis 155). Characters such as the Peloponnesian musician Moraitis and Smyrniot girl Katarina Pavlou in *The Aunt's Story*; Madame Hero Pavloussi, the Smyrniot wife of Greek shipowner Cosmas Pavloussi and lover to Hurtle Duffield in *The Vivesector*; Sister Maria de Santis, a Smyrniot Greek and nurse to Elizabeth Hunter in *The Eye of the Storm*; and the Greek aspects of Alex Xenophone Demirjian Gray all operate in this partnership scheme. These fictional Greeks also embody the particular Greece with which White is identifying, the multicultural cosmopolitan societies of Anatolia, Smyrna and Alexandria, inflected with Byzantine history. Here White's wilful identification with this particular scene of Greekness is seen as self-fabrication which works to 'cosmopolise' White's fictional Australia.

The climactic revelation of Eudoxia's male sex, presaged throughout the first third of the novel, marks the finale of the long arc of Section One, altering certain interpretations of the characterisation of Vatzes throughout the first third of the novel. The 'Emperor of Byzantium' (35), and 'dotty 68-year-old child' (63), though absent from later sections, continues to inform Eudoxia's self-image as hetaira, Empress, and the common Whitean figure of 'whore and nun' (White, *Twyborn*).⁶ A.P. Riemer has noted that Eudoxia is a Byzantine imperial name with a pedigree, notably that of consort to Emperor Arcadius, famous for 'a luxurious and flamboyant way of life [that] brought down on her the wrath of St John Chrysostom.' This Byzantine allusion is continued in Vatzes, a demanding sensualist, 'protected by malice, madness, the Byzantine armour inherited from his ancestors' (White, *Twyborn* 35), he shares a preoccupation with a believed lost or stolen Byzantine throne with Lascar (Karalis). Riemer and Birns have both noted the obvious metonym, drawn from the annals of Byzantine imperial history, which articulates a link between 13th century Emperor John Vatzes III, his nephew Theodore I Lascar—son of Manuel 'Manolis' Lascar, first emperor of Nicaea—with Angelos Vatzes and in turn, White's Manoly Lascar (Vasiliev 508). Like that of Manoly Lascar, the veracity of Angelos Vatzes's imperial claim is questionable; Karalis highlights the fact that many wealthy merchant families bought and traded imperial names and titles during the waning years of Byzantium (Hope, 'The Face'; Karalis 'The Byzantine Mind'). Allusions to the tenth-century Byzantine epic poem *Digenes Akritas* identified by Birns further this sense of Byzantine self-complication. *Digenes Akritas* literally means twice-born—Two Blood Border Lord or Twain-born Borderer—a militaristic frontier epic and, 'one of the most ambitious productions of Medieval Greek literature.' Centred on the racial hybridity of Basil, whose epithet *Digenes Akritas* refers to his mixed Greek and Syrian parentage, Birns delineates a possible correlate between this racial hybridity and the gendered and sexual liminality of Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadie *Twyborn*. Eudoxia, like *Akritas*, is 'splayed between the antagonisms of his day' and is able to navigate the warring tensions of hybrid ethnic-national identity or gendered performativity and is also marked by it as other (Birns 220).

We see this play out within *Flaws*, where White figures himself as the not quite-expatriate Australian in London, and Lascaris as the derogated ‘Greek from here’ in Alexandria, or as the migrant ‘black prince’ in Castlehill (*Flaws* 100, 138). Within this account, White segues to a description of Lascaris’s migration and White’s feeling of fear and ‘responsibility for the island continent to which I had brought the one I most respected and loved’ (136). White explains how Lascaris felt this same tension when the couple spent time in Greece; this casts them as ‘anomalous expatriates’ outside the belonging offered by either cultural-national identity. This self-complicated narrative of anomalous expatriates draws our attention to the interrelation of this specific sense of cultural affiliation to the migrant and expatriate experience of Lascaris. In a 1992 interview Lascaris describes his native Alexandria as ‘entirely cosmopolitan’ with a large European population ‘with every nationality you could think about’ represented in smaller numbers. He states he ‘was aware of growing up on the wrong side’ being part of a rich family where ‘one took for granted that so many had to be poor and had to stay there’ (Lascaris). Like White, Lascaris expressed an early understanding of social and ethnic difference; in relation to servants in their family employ, ‘one was conscious of being a parasite living on the backs of those poor wretches.’ Connected to this is an articulation of a developing sense of dislocation related to burgeoning sexual identity, as well as experiences of physical dislocation and migration. While revealing in *Flaws in the Glass* that much of *Riders in the Chariot* was written while ill in bed at Dogwoods, Castle Hill, White relates a particular anecdote from this time to the xenophobia of characters Mrs Flack and Mrs Jolley (*Flaws* 112). In this sequence of *Flaws*, White reveals his belief in the interrelation of his sexuality, his artistic perception, and an affinity with the outsider figured here as the immigrant: ‘As a homosexual I have always known what it is to be an outsider. It has given me added insight into the plight of the immigrant—the hate and contempt with which he is often perceived’ (*Flaws* 147). Within this account the particularities of Lascaris’s life are erased when he is viewed as of a kind with another newly arrived migrant, an Italian signora. Lascaris, at first seen as ‘some sort of black prince,’ a foreign and uncertain figure for the Anglo-celtic residents of Castle Hill, is figured by White as benefiting from a gradual change in the locals’ perception. He is ultimately accepted along with the signora; as related by Mrs Poulter, ‘she’s a lovely lady, she’s not black at all’ (139).

Returning to *The Twyborn Affair*, we see a dramatisation of the transformative power of migratory displacement. The death of Vatatzes instigates Eudoxia’s post-war journey to Australia and transformation into Eddie Twyborn. Eddie’s arrival in Fremantle is marked by his meeting with a fish-and-chip shop owner, a Greek character of an altogether different kind. Con Aspergis, or ‘Con the prop’—a triple entendre of proprietor, White’s self-conscious deployment of the character as stage mechanism, and Eddie’s fear of recognition and passability: ‘Will Con the prop recognise the con?’ (144)—is reminiscent of the stereotyped representation of Greeks seen during the 1970s and 1980s in Australian popular culture. The gendered ambiguity and associated anxiety of the Twyborn character reflects the political and religious division of identity between Christian Greek and Muslim Arab that Digenes Akritas experiences. This consideration of duality and hybridity of race and sexuality, through characterisation in *The Twyborn Affair*, extends further to the duality of representation of Byzantium as concept and country. Birns contends that White’s deployment of fictive allusions and historical references to Byzantium throughout a work seen as ‘deliberately “minor” and “surplus”’ is a way for White to ‘defend himself against the inevitable accusations against *Twyborn* as being a “minor” novel, not possessed of the cultural weight of such master works as *Ulysses*’ and a distancing from works such as *Voss*, ‘lauded by

nationalistically minded critics as allegory for Australian ambition' (222). Birns contends that White's 'Byzantine manoeuvres' signal an affinity and resonance with this marginality:

A situational kinship with Byzantine culture: both are marginal latecomers, indisputably great in their own way, but, when compared to their more storied predecessors, bound to be deemed rather weird by those who have instituted and perpetuated the cultural-historical norms by which we still tend to be governed (222–23).

Con Aspergis serves as a point of transition and transformation for Eddie wherein he is able to play out vestiges of his/her cosmopolitan Greek self, 'some kind of Greek sacrifice crossed with an Australian fate' (144). The only significant dialogue in the sequence in Fremantle, structured as script including bracketed directions, plays out a scene in Con's shop where Eddie responds in Greek, stating that he learnt the language, 'In another life. In Byzantium' (145). This again marks Eddie as a belated outsider, as Con appears to be the wrong kind of Greek, too colonised or perhaps too working class; Eddie finds the exchange too much to bear, leaving without his order of 'Good fress fiss.' Con's presence is somewhat anomalous though perhaps serves to reintroduce 'the Greek' in a more familiar, more Australian manner. Con is the last Greek character identified in the text, though Greekness recurs throughout the novel in Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadith's inner monologue, continually self-referring as 'hetaira, Empress, nun,' a combination of the sexual, the Byzantine and the ecclesiastic that later culminates in Eddie's interaction with his father Judge Twyborn, and in the scene of his death.



Figure 1. Mosaic of Christ Pantocrator (All-Ruling) in the south dome of the endonarthex, Christ in Chora Church, Constantinople. Photograph by Guillaume Piolle

An important symbol of the Orthodox faith, the Christ Pantocrator, the 'Lord Almighty' also transliterated as 'Ruler of All' or less literally, 'Sustainer of the World' (from *pan*—all; *kratos*—strength), appears in the imagery of the final moments of the life of Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadie. The image of Christ and Eddie's father Judge Twyborn metaleptically combine, recalling earlier scenes where Eddie remembers an ambiguously described evening

in a shared bed with his father; ‘Judge-Pantocrator looking through a gap in the star-painted ceiling’ (429). This representation of Christ, markedly different from representations of the eroticised Christ or the Bleeding Heart of other denominations, illustrates the degree to which White performs and embodies aspects of Lascaris’s Orthodox faith in his fiction. Sources from the life support this idea: Shirley Hazzard in a letter of condolence to Manoly refers to White as ‘Patrick Pantocrator,’ hinting at a wider audience for White’s ‘Greekness’ and his having discussed these Greek and Orthodox concepts and perhaps their importance to him with others.⁷ Within the text the recurrence of Orthodox imagery and iconography—such as the Pantocrator figure, the iconographic hooded eye, and the Panayia—draws our attention to the significance of faith for White’s ‘Greekness.’ In *Flaws*, White framed this as ‘my inklings of God’s presence are interwoven with my love of the one human being who never fails me.’ David Marr writes with reference to faith and religion in White:

[T]he earthiness of God also had a source in the traditions of Orthodoxy and it’s very important to remember that in all the examination of Patrick’s faith, an understanding of his partner Manoly Lascaris’ faith . . . a faith that he saw as timelessly old and Patrick absorbed that idea as well is very important. (Marr and Clarke, 5 mins)



Figure 2. William Yang *My Generation*. Altars in White and Lascaris’s Martin Road home.

In his self-portrait, *Flaws in the Glass*, White disclosed how ‘his other country’ had given him ‘that small Greek of immense moral strength’ who had brought equilibrium into a nature ‘violent and possessive, jealous, vain and unforgiving’ (100). While White did not adopt Lascaris’s devout Orthodox faith he saw it as ‘a star to his “wandering back,”’ enabling his creative powers to flow freely. In another sense, Karalis has suggested that the Orthodox praxis of saintly reverence organised the temporality of the White–Lascaris household.⁸ Important elements of the faith recur throughout White’s work, such as the visual language of Orthodox iconography, specifically the hooded eyes seen for example in Sister Maria de Santis in *The Eye of the Storm*. Icons adorned not only the physical space of Martin Road, they also featured in photography associated with White’s work, particularly William Yang’s image ‘The Folly of Patrick White’ associated with *Memories of Many in One*.



Figure 3. William Yang, 'The folly of Patrick White,' St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, 1985.

The recent publication of a fragment of White's unpublished novel titled *The Hanging Garden* reveals further detail of White's Greekness which has the potential to significantly alter our understanding of the role of Greekness in the earlier fiction. David Marr's endnote to the published fragment gives some insight to the planned structure: it was to be in three parts, 'a structure White had used as early as *The Aunt's Story* . . . [it] dispenses with chapter breaks so that each section . . . has the long arc of a novella' (Marr, 'Endnote' 220). White not only replicated the structure of his early works in the writing of *The Hanging Garden*; other objects, entities and moments recognisable from White's earlier fiction recur in the novel: the eponymous Hanging Garden is a familiar setting from White's biography, the theme of abandonment by mother of child prominent in the biography and significant to both *The Eye of the Storm* and *The Twyborn Affair*; the visceral and psychic imagery of the London Blitz, and the significance of Greekness and Greek characters are drawn together in this work.

The novella fragment charts the transformation of identity and understanding resulting from the dual displacements of cultural and geographic dislocation and burgeoning sexuality in the story of two European children evacuated for their safety to Australia during World War II. John Sutherland sees a departure in White's narrative style, suggesting coyly that '*The Hanging Garden* is a Proustian novel,' and that writing his memoir, 'drew White back into recollections of his own childhood, to . . . the adolescent mind' (Sutherland). British-born Gilbert Horsfall, whose perspective we first follow, has been sent from London to escape the bombing. Eirene Sklavos, later revealed to be the central character of the fragment, and whose Greek Communist father has died in prison, is brought to Sydney by her Australian mother who returns to the theatre of war and dies. The two children find themselves boarding with Mrs Bulpit, a British-born widow. J.M. Coetzee's consideration of the novel framed around concerns of alienation, articulates the sense that, for Eirene, 'Greece and Australia constitute opposing poles':

Having just begun to get a feel for Greek politics and her parents' position in Greek society (her father seems to have been a romantic leftist from an 'old,' antimonarchist family), she must now navigate the very different Australian system, where she will be looked down on as a 'reffo' (refugee) and suspected, because of her dark skin, of being a 'black.' At school, her precocious

acquaintance with Racine and Goethe will count against her (anti-egalitarian, un-Australian).

In Eirene's first moments in Australia, the political and the spiritual combine as a patina of well-known Greek religio-political representations is cast over the concerns of the two children. Greek terms for commonplace words, such as *saloni* for lounge room, render the familiar as unfamiliar. This signifies Eirene's dislocation from her newfound Australian home, and through her gradual adoption of Australianisms, her disconnection from her heritage. Mary, as the Panayia figure—'the Saint [with] her black robe, her dark face,' the all-powerful mother goddess belonging to the syncretic popular religion of rural Greece, in which archaic pagan elements survive embedded in Orthodox Christianity—becomes the national embodiment of Greece itself; 'Papa says, "ah mba" he accepts the Panayia only when she becomes Greece and they torture her' (White, *Hanging* 35). Interweaving these common and understandable terms with more culturally specific concepts such as that of the *pneuma*, White creates a sense of cultural untranslatability and even frustration. Eirene remembers the *pneuma* being spoken of on the island in the Cyclades by her religious and mystical aunt, Cleonaki who 'has the eyes of great Italian actresses and Saints' (35). 'Pneuma,' she tells Gilbert, cannot be explained in English yet she herself struggles to understand what it means. Coetzee gives particular insight into the potential meaning of *pneuma* at work in the text, arguing that 'White clearly intends *pneuma* to be more than a mere marker of Eirene's Greek origins':

Pneuma is in fact one of the more mysterious forces in both ancient Greek and early Christian religion. Pneuma, issuing from deep in the earth, is what the oracle at Delphi inhales to give her the power of prophecy. In the New Testament *pneuma* is the wind that is also the breath of God.

Coetzee sees that, 'it is possible that through Gilbert (standing in for himself) and Eirene (standing in for Lascaris)' White hoped, in *The Hanging Garden*, 'to explore more deeply feelings of despairing rage at a beloved country that has fallen into the hands of a brash, greedy, nouveau-riche class.'

White's *Flaws in the Glass* contains a lengthy record of White and Lascaris's travels together in Greece and this account reveals that for a period, he was 'in the grip of a passionate love affair, not so much with Greece as the idea of it' (*Flaws* 179). White's idea of Greece as read within White's oeuvre—the Greek characters as 'partner,' the historical Byzantine references, and the locations and events specific to the life of Manoly Lascaris—becomes a mirror through which he considers his relationship with Lascaris and his own Australian identity: 'Greece is one long despairing rage in those who understand her, worse for Manoly because she is his, as Australia is worse for me because of my responsibility' (187). In this sense, Patrick White's literary-biographic Greekness is inseparable from his endless self-construction. When read within the fiction it becomes inflected with connotations of otherness, of homosexuality, of migration and displacement interwoven with inspiration drawn from his life and that of his partner. The Greek objects, entities and moments manifest across the fiction are prominent symbols that act as conduits between fictional and biographic selves. The depth and variety of reference to Greeks and Greece is further complicated most ostentatiously in the *The Twyborn Affair*, a text that 'blurs the line of biography and fiction' (McMahon). This complexity is of course acknowledged by White's readers and critics, though as I have shown, drawing out the specifically Greek dimensions of these lives provides a new gloss. This Greekness serves as a signifier for dislocation across borders of

time and country, and represents the ‘squalor and magnificence’ of the Orthodox Church as corresponding to the evolution of White’s personal faith (Clarke). For White, ‘Manoly is the Greek archetype’ in his work, and White’s ‘other country,’ Greece, was best-known to him through his life-long partnership with Mr Manoly Lascaris (Flaws 101).

NOTES

¹ White claimed in *Flaws in the Glass*: ‘I do better with the exotics . . . Esme the black grandmother has realised that I too, am black.’ (255) While stating in his speech, ‘Greece—My Other Country,’ ‘How could I resist returning at this point, when the close ties of love and friendship, the events of history, and those vertiginous landscapes of yours, tell me that Greece is my other country?’

² Though published as a collection of White’s speeches under the author’s name, Paul Brennan and Christine Flynn provide editor’s notes throughout.

³ I refer here to the five year Greek Civil war directly proceeding WWII, and later the unrest surrounding the Junta. Lascaris’s ambivalence in regard to his sexuality and his family is described in detail throughout Marr’s *A Life*. Deborah Adelaide, ‘No One Comes to See Me Anymore’; David Marr ‘A Gentle Foil’; James Waites ‘The Widow White’; provide further articulations of this.

⁴ Guy Davidson explores this relation of gender inversion, sexuality and creativity in detail in ‘Displaying the Monster: Patrick White, Sexuality, Celebrity.’ *Australian Literary Studies*, 25.1 (2010): 1–18. Print

⁵ Guy Davidson’s ‘Displaying the Monster’ provides an account of White’s claims of his interrelated sexuality and creativity.

⁶ Not only seen in Eddie’s transformation from Eudoxia—figured as hetaira (consort) in opposition to Sainted Anna—to Eaddie Trist, Madame of high class brothel, but also in the character of ‘Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray’ who is also figured with reference to the Whore/Nun dichotomy.

⁷ I thank Brigitta Olubas for this quotation, drawn from private correspondence between Shirley Hazzard and Manoly Lascaris.

⁸ I thank Vrasidas Karalis for his generous input here.

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