

Is Prowse's Rectum a Grave?: *Jouissance, Reparative Transnationalism and Patrick White's *The Twyborn Affair**

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Even the title of Patrick White's penultimate novel, *The Twyborn Affair* (1979), carries a vague suggestion of the sexual about it. One such place where the suggestion of this text's carnality—the *affair* in question—might be said to converge is over the body of Don Prowse, the burly manager of the Lushington's property "Bogong" who features prominently in Part II of the novel. Prowse is clearly identifiable as an Australian literary archetype: a fantasmatic image of the bushman myth. But as an image of Australian nationalism he is also depicted in this text as an object of flagrant sexual desire. Focalised through the novel's protagonist Eddie, Prowse's exaggerated masculinity and his rugged, working-class charm—the very things that signify his Australianness—become the cathected objects of a desiring gay male reader. In making this argument, this essay seeks to elaborate on the claim made by Elizabeth McMahon in her queer reading of *Twyborn* that White's text 'align[s] an iconic national graphesis with a homographesis' (79). It must be said, however, that this eroticisation of Australia's nationalist literary heritage is not unproblematic: it runs the risk of glorifying the phallogocentricity of the Australian Tradition. Indeed, most critics of *Twyborn* have characterised the violent portrayal of sex in this novel as Prowse's rape of Eddie. However, this characterisation suffers precisely from what Eve Sedgwick has called a 'hermeneutics of suspicion,' in that it ignores the manifest pleasure to be had from Prowse's bodily representation. It also disavows the possibility of erotic investment in the male anus and stages an unnecessary confrontation between feminist and queer theoretical positions. Moreover, the accusation of rape adheres to a juridical logic which Robyn Wiegman has critiqued with her concept of 'paradigmatic reading,' and which Prowse's sexualisation thoroughly dismantles: the arousal generated by Prowse's masculinity, terminating in *jouissance*, disrupts the coherence of the reading subject, and consequently the fantasies of the nation state. In drawing on the radical potential that inheres in Leo Bersani's psychoanalytic theorisation of *jouissance* as a dismissal of identity, we are able to dismiss the potential charges of misogyny and homophobia that might otherwise cling to Prowse's muscular frame. And by reading Prowse pornographically, White's novel is transformed from a modernist relic into a self-conscious, 'mediatized' text that is capable of articulating a form of nationalism not only less paranoid, but also one that incorporates a healthy disrespect for national boundaries. The *jouissance* of White's text both shatters and repairs the psychic fantasy of nationalism, installing it more comfortably in a discourse of transnationalism.

It is clear that the character of Don Prowse taps into a distinctly nationalist Australian literary sensibility. As David Coad has suggested, Prowse is 'a Wild Colonial in the Snowy River tradition: aggressively masculine, virile, even bestial' (125). Prowse evokes the trope of the working class male that, as A.A. Phillips famously argued, is identifiable as a uniquely Australian literary figure. In Phillips's memorable phrase, Australian literature was the first to be written 'of the people, for the people and from the people' (53). But this 'Democratic Theme' is also heavily, even oppressively, gendered. In the words of Joseph Furphy, quoted approvingly by Phillips in his essay, Australian literature valorises 'the axe-man's muscle'

over ‘gentlemanly deportment’ and ‘half-a-dozen hard-muscled white savages, any one of whom could take his lordship by the ankles, and wipe the battlefield with his patrician visage’ (55–56). Prowse embodies Australia’s nationalist literary heritage through the same conjunction of class and gender. We can see this at the beginning of Part II of *Twyborn*, when he comes to collect the newly arrived Eddie from the train station. The scene is thus described:

A door was torn open and slammed shut before the driver came round and showed himself. He was of middle age, a reddish man in clothes which seemed to inconvenience him judging by the contortions to which he was subjecting his shoulders, while easing his crotch, and flinging evident cramps off a pair of well-developed calves. In spite of the rights he enjoyed as a native, he might have felt that the stranger stationed above him on the platform had him at a disadvantage. For he took up a stance, legs apart, hands on hips, as he stared upward. (175)

The very first interaction between these two characters is tellingly conducted on uneven ground: Eddie is ‘stationed’ above Prowse; indeed, as the son of a judge, he comes quite literally from a higher station in society. And this class difference between these two characters is framed and expressed in roundly gendered terms: Prowse’s ‘disadvantage’ provokes an aggressively masculine pose—with ‘legs apart, hands on hips’—while it is the manager’s brute, manly frame, conditioned by physical labour—with bulging calves, ‘musclebound shoulders’ (176)—that emerges from the banged-up ute. More tellingly still: Prowse’s status in this passage as a ‘native’ grounds his expression of class and gender in expressly Australian soil while displacing the patrician—albeit equally native-born Australian—Eddie, rendering him a ‘stranger’ in the Australian bush. Through the interaction of class and gender then, this introductory encounter between Prowse and Eddie clearly establishes the former’s status as the vivid embodiment of Australian literary nationalism.

But if Prowse stands as a metaphor for a certain tradition of Australian writing, we must also note the oblique angle from which this tradition is observed: Prowse is consistently figured in the text through Eddie’s desiring gaze. Just after the scene of introduction described above, as Prowse drives Eddie back to the homestead, Eddie feels ‘a tingling attraction on his own side, generated, if he would admit, by those hands lying heavy on the wheel’ (177). From here on, the reader, through Eddie, is posited as a desiring subject of Prowse, who is in turn constructed as a desired object. Repeatedly, Prowse is reduced to the sum of his body parts in a manner that verges on the pornographic. He is variously described as: an ‘overtly masculine back’ (180); ‘a torso’ (185); ‘his manliness’ (188); ‘Prowse in his smelly overalls’ (201); ‘that scabby fist’ (202); ‘the sweaty brute’ (203); ‘nipples surrounded by whorls of rosy fuzz’ (235); ‘the armpits and biceps’ (238); ‘very erect’ (251); ‘his chest through the gap in his pyjama coat’ (257); ‘masculine strength and native brutality’ (259); ‘armpits’ (260); ‘armpits’ (again) (268); ‘red nipples’ (272); ‘impressively muscular in a singlet’ (279); ‘Prowse’s bulk’ (283); ‘chest and thighs’ (284); ‘like a ram or a stud bull’ (289); ‘the Brute Male’ (294); ‘this hairy body’ (296); and finally ‘thick lips’ (299). This exaggerated depiction of Prowse’s masculinity draws upon a very particular subset of aesthetic conventions that are typical of gay pornographic spectacle. As Richard Rambuss observes:

Gay male porn is dick and muscles; it’s hairy or shaved chests and butts. It’s jockstraps, briefs, and boxers. It’s a male fantasia of desirable and desiring men . . . The gym and the locker room, the barnyard and the construction site remain

classic situational turn-ons. So do law enforcement and military scenes . . .
Mainstream gay male porn runs on the desire for masculinity, on an erotic intensification of it. (202)

It is interesting to note here how gay porn, to a far greater extent than straight porn, is almost always happening in relation to an imagined public: the gym and the locker room, the barnyard, the construction site, the police station and the military barracks are all spaces that situate the gay sex of gay porn in relation to images of public spaces. Rich Cante and Angelo Restivo argue that in gay porn, ‘paradoxically, one’s awareness of oneself as a member of a “minority” is inextricably bound to one’s recognizing oneself as an element of the anonymous “mass”’ and ‘it is precisely this tension between anonymity and self-recognition that we discern in the spatial logics of all-male porn’ (153). Focalised through Eddie, the reader’s arousal by Prowse’s pornographic representation, although a private affair, is mediated by a furtive relation to a very public image of Australian nationalism. Prowse closely adheres to the ‘cowboy’ trope of gay porn, as the following topless portrait attests: ‘Prowse was at his most ostentatiously virile, in faded moleskins and heavy, conspicuously polished boots, a generous golden fell wreathed round the nipples of the male breasts. He stood looking down at the passive figure before him on the bed’ (211). But rather than the American cowboy, Prowse represents a distinctly Australian variation on this theme: as it turns out, Stetson hats and leather chaps translate quite easily into moleskins, R.M. Williams boots and an akubra. Prowse’s pornographic physicality thus functions so as to arouse a specifically gay male reader of Australian nationalism, who is in turn made aware of his status as member of both a minority community and an anonymous mass—otherwise known as the nation—to which a nationalist literary sensibility is passionately enjoined.

Gay porn is an apposite genre through which to inflect our reading of *Twyborn*, in that it dramatises a tension—a tension with which queer scholarship of White’s work has only just begun to grapple—between universalising and minoritising understandings of homosexuality, their relationship to White’s texts and to the Australian canon. Guy Davidson has characterised *Twyborn* as White’s ‘coming-out text,’ in that it puts the experience of gay male sexuality at the centre of one of his novels for the first time (4). Davidson’s essay shows how this new postmodern, camp sensibility in White’s work represents a shift away from the spiritual, transcendental and ostensibly universal concerns of his earlier, high modernist works (7). Davidson also observes that White worried about how such a literary coming out might affect his status as the preeminent Australian writer of his time (4). Similarly, in her reading of White’s text, McMahon argues that *Twyborn* rehearses a ‘dilemma of representation’ (84), that runs throughout White’s oeuvre, between a universalising, modernist aesthetic on the one hand which is engaged in a ‘humanist project’ to convey universal, human truths (85); and a preoccupation on the other hand with queer, minoritised sexualities which endanger this universalising project. This dilemma is intimately related to White’s engagement with Australian literary nationalism, with such an engagement strongly aligned with a universalising current. Echoing this tension in White’s oeuvre, McMahon writes:

The danger of foregrounding the particular operations of a queer ontology or aesthetic, then, is that they may preclude access to the broader category of the human, for to be homosexual is to be not fully human. For Australian readers, there is also an anxiety that if the writing is homosexual it cannot be general, therefore it cannot represent ‘us,’ the nation, the national literature. (85)

Most appropriately, McMahon goes on to use the word ‘slippage’ to describe the way in which critics of White’s work have elided the queer specifics of his work by concentrating on the perceived universal themes of his texts; this ‘slippage’ occurring ‘between the putatively universal subject of White’s fiction . . . and a universalising reading practice that is “sex blind”’ (86). But if White’s readers have, until very recently ignored the queer resonances in his texts, *Twynborn*’s gay porn aesthetic presents itself as a perfect occasion to rectify this. It amounts to a furious slippage back and forth between queer specificity and nationalist representation. One of the ways in which *Twynborn* seeks to overcome the dilemma of representation is in demonstrating the force of minority experience’s embrace of the universal through the spatial logic of gay pornographic spectacle. A pornographic reading of *Twynborn* negotiates the competing universalising/minoritising impulses in this text with what we might view as an agreeable forthrightness, a camp flamboyance even. Such enjambment testifies to a writing practice that is both specifically homographetic yet indelibly marked by the national and the universal.

The mere sexualisation of Australian nationalism by a desiring gay reader does not however inoculate this literary sensibility from critique. From a feminist standpoint, we must be sharply conscious of the potential danger that a pornographic reading of *Twynborn* runs of simplistically glorifying an already hegemonic masculinist paradigm. Signposting the putative thin ice upon which a reading such as this stands, Susan Lever finds, and not altogether unjustifiably, ‘a clear misogyny in the novels of Patrick White’ (95). While arguing that *Twynborn* is perhaps the least misogynistic of White’s novels, Lever nevertheless concludes that ‘White’s vision remains masculine’ and that ‘White cannot be called a feminist writer’ (104). Furthermore, Gillian Whitlock makes the point that the phallogentrism of Australian literary nationalism has been accompanied with a consistent ‘base note’ of homophobia (235). Such concerns are rendered very salient indeed when reading the first sexual encounter between Prowse and Eddie, in which Prowse is depicted ‘pushing his *opponent* around and about with chest and thighs, spinning him face down in the chaff,’ ‘tearing at all that had ever offended him in life,’ while ‘his *victim*’s face [is] buried always deeper, breathless, in the loose chaff,’ ‘for the *indignity* to which he was being *subjected*’ (284, emphases mine). This language of sexual confrontation, domination and submission that illustrates the moment when Prowse penetrates Eddie also alerts us to the dangers that a pornographic reading of Australian nationalism entails. As Bersani warns us, ‘the logic of homosexual desire includes the potential for a loving identification with the gay man’s enemies’ (Bersani, *Rectum* 14).

It is perhaps the ferocity of this depiction of sex in *Twynborn* that has moved critics to characterise it as a crime, as Prowse’s ‘rape’ of Eddie (Lever 99; McMahon 89; Schapiro 58). Perhaps more surprisingly, even David Marr describes Prowse as ‘the overseer at Bogong who raped the jackeroo’ Eddie (107). But this critical consensus suffers from undue reliance on a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ identified by Eve Sedgwick in her influential essay ‘Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading.’ For Sedgwick, ‘the methodological centrality of suspicion to current critical practice has involved the concomitant privileging of the concept of paranoia’ (125) and hence an over-emphasis in critical theory on ‘exposing and problematizing the hidden violences in the genealogy of the modern liberal subject’ (139). The characterisation by critics of Prowse and Eddie’s sexual relationship as rape is exemplary in this regard: positing a sexual dynamic of power and domination on one side of the leger (the top side, if you will) and violence and oppression on the other (the bottom side). Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with a paranoid critical standpoint, and Sedgwick is at pains to refine her argument by saying that paranoia represents ‘a way, among other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge. Paranoia knows some things well and others

poorly' (130). But one of the things that paranoia perceives very poorly indeed is pleasure. Sedgwick shows in her essay how pleasure is 'inadmissible' under a scheme of paranoid reading: paranoia operates exclusively on an economy of pain, aversion and suspicion as the means of exposing and quashing social oppressions.

Given the pleasure that has been shown to reside in the text's construction of Prowse's being, a pleasure that is routed through Eddie's desiring gaze, it seems unduly presumptuous to reflexively assume that Eddie would not consent to a roll in the hay with Prowse, even in a posture of submission. Indeed at several junctures in the text Eddie contemplates coming onto Prowse himself: 'he was tempted to do it' (259). The sex scene in the stables is painted as deeply ambiguous, and we can leave open the question of interpreting the following lines of post-coital *tristesse*: 'Eddie Twyborn was breathing chaff, sobbing back, not for the indignity to which he was being subjected, but finally for his acceptance of it' (284). It is perhaps more than understandable if some critics should call this rape; yet sex is here painted as something that is degrading and yet accepted; Eddie's body is a 'slender offering' (284) which, having been offered up to Prowse lies curled next to him, their bodies 'coupled' and 'breathing in some kind of harmony' (285). But in inflexibly characterising the sexual dynamic between Prowse and Eddie as that between rapist and victim, a hermeneutics of suspicion forecloses on the possibility that any all-male erotic pleasure might be had here. And it is ironic, to say the least, that paranoia—a system of knowing which places its unalloyed faith in exposure of *hidden* operations of power as *the* means of political change—should fail to account for the flagrantly visible homoerotic pleasure that inheres in Prowse's bodily representation, and which might still be said to inhere in this sex scene. As is typical of paranoid critical reading practices, analysis of this text has heretofore seen high crimes occurring at the site of possible pleasure.

The characterisation of Prowse's penetration of Eddie as rape is problematic because it requires a symbolic manoeuvre whereby Eddie is made to signify not as a gay man but as a woman. In his conceptualisation of paranoia, Bersani characterises as central a process of 'doubling,' whereby 'the paranoid sees the visible as a simulated double of the real . . . deceitfully repeat[ing] the real' (Bersani, *Redemption* 189). If we are to take both Prowse and the legacy of Australian nationalism in this text as agents of masculine oppression through the former's status as a rapist, this requires a rereading of Eddie Twyborn as woman—through his sexual penetration by Prowse—and the concomitant disavowal of any pleasure derived therefrom. This feminist interpretation suffers from a paranoid hermeneutics in reading the possibility of Eddie's own anal eroticism, and in effect his homosexuality, as a *façade*. Granted, this conceptual manoeuvre is figured in the text itself, when, after Prowse has zipped-up and left the stables, Eddie is referred to as a 'victim' 'wholly exhausted by the switch to this other role' (285): what might be meant by this reference to an 'other role' is left open by the text; it might refer to Eddie's momentary transformation into a symbolic woman, or it might not. At any rate, this invocation of an 'other role' does posit a logic of binary identities of self and other, male and female, top and bottom. Jonathan Kemp, in his book *The Penetrated Male*, argues that 'a binary understanding of gender subjectivity predicated on sexual positioning,' wherein 'the penetrated partner—regardless of gender—becomes understood as somehow female/feminized' (10), is problematic because it brings about a situation where 'erotic investment in the male anus is hegemonically disavowed by branding its owners as *symbolic women*' and thus 'a kind of castration is performed' (5). The rape argument becomes ungovernably toxic when we consider the fluid positionings that comprise Prowse and Eddie's sexual relationship, for we must remember that there are two sex scenes between these characters depicted in this novel. At the end of Part II the tables turn and Eddie

penetrates Prowse, then dumps him, saying ‘Oh, go on, Don! Don’t be a cunt—for God’s sake go!’ (299). If we are to take Prowse’s penetration of Eddie as a rape, then there is certainly a case to be made for the inverse. But the rape argument thus degenerates into a sort of textual China syndrome, uncontrollably corrupting a protagonist whose centrality to the narrative requires the maintenance of at least some readerly sympathy, both for the pathos of the story’s tragic ending to congeal, and for the reader’s interest to endure. But more to the point, the rape argument is fighting the wrong war, because it misrecognises the nature of masculine domination. As Bersani notes, ‘phallogentrism is exactly that: not primarily the denial of power to women (although it has obviously led to that, everywhere and at all times), but above all the denial of *value* of powerlessness in both men and women’ (Bersani, *Rectum* 24). It is upon this distinction that the conditions of possibility for male anal eroticism depend: in order to ‘reclaim the male body as a penetrable body’ (Kemp 1) we must articulate ‘a different—a non-phallic—genealogy of the male subject’ (Kemp 8–9). We might then understand the ‘other role’ to which Eddie is consigned by his sexual encounter with Prowse as an articulation not of womanhood, but of a castrated, penetrated, yet desiring, male subjectivity.

The accusation of rape in this text should also be resisted on the grounds that such an interpretation is an example of what Robyn Wiegman has termed ‘paradigmatic reading,’ or ‘the rendering of social life through the instrumental reasoning of juridical form’ (32). Wiegman instructively positions paradigmatic reading alongside Sedgwick’s conceptualisation of paranoid reading as a means of examining the claims that intersectional analysis stages in its commitment to justice. Central to Wiegman’s argument is her contestation of the notion that ‘imbrications of race and gender actually conform to juridical logic’ (32), arguing instead that ‘the “incoherent” intersection of various cultural discourses’ (295) belittles attempts to make race and gender function like legal precedents, where the claims to racial oppression might trump those of gendered oppression, or *vice versa*. In invoking the accusation of rape we begin to stage a similar confrontation between feminist and queer theoretical positions, a confrontation which seemingly demands adjudication and resolution. Theoretically speaking, are we to take Eddie Twyborn as a woman or a homosexual man? But, as Wiegman argues, the dynamics of competing claims between two interpretational and institutional camps do not necessarily need to be apprehended as a zero-sum game. At stake here is an understanding of the role of the critic as something other than judge and jury. Wiegman characterises her alternative critical *modus operandi* as a ‘failure to commit to the epistemological optimism provided by argumentative closure and secured through the authorising agencies of paradigmatic reading,’ and calls instead for a ‘voice that struggles to find a way to live in critical practice without giving in to arguments that are never quite adequate to the world they stand for’ (297). It should be noted that it is only in Part II of *Twyborn* that the protagonist E. figures as a homosexual male; in both Parts I and III, E. is female. Pointedly, he is also the estranged, rejected son of a judge. So why not jettison the legalistic accusation of rape and invite both feminist and queer critical apparatuses to work in tandem? The incoherent, trifurcated body of *The Twyborn Affair*’s text itself might even stand as a formal invitation to such an alliance. If a pornographic reading of *Twyborn* begins to scramble our understandings of Australia’s nationalist literary heritage, surely it is the juridical logic of either/or upon which the nation state functions through the operation of the law that we should be turning our hermeneutics of suspicion towards, rather than the sexual relationship between Prowse and Eddie.

The sexual arousal generated by Prowse, and the experience of *jouissance* that his eroticised portrayal provokes, are generative prisms through which we can refract the representation of

Australian literary nationalism in this text. Bersani places *jouissance* at the heart of his psychoanalytic conceptualisation of sexuality in his famous essay 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' Drawing on a pointed (mis)reading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Bersani posits sexual climax as an ego-destroying process of psychic disorganisation, where 'the sexual emerges as the *jouissance* of exploded limits, as the ecstatic suffering into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is "pressed" beyond a certain threshold of endurance' (24). Bersani thus equates sexuality with a loss of identity, and in doing so, offers us a way out of the constitutive oppressions that the self and subjection to the nation state entail: for 'it is the self that swells with the excitement of being on top, the self that makes the inevitable play of thrusts and relinquishments in sex an argument for the natural authority of one sex over the other' (25). Following Bersani then, a pornographic reading of Prowse subverts the very gender and sexual oppression that he allegedly embodies, through a humiliation of subjectivity. The exaggerated depiction of Prowse's physicality and the graphic depictions of sex between him and Eddie instigate a dynamic of erotic spectacle, executing another slippage that refigures mere description as a textual performance of sexual desire and 'constitutes precisely the sort of writing that is designed to be "read with one hand"' (Cante and Restivo 150). In getting off on this image of Australian nationalism that Prowse's manly frame has come to represent, we go some way towards rescuing it. Moreover, the image of Prowse 'biting the pillow' is such an arousing prospect not because it parodies the bushman myth, as Coad and Lever suggest, but because it shatters it. Bersani reminds us that 'parody is an erotic turn-off, and all gay men know this. Much campy talk is parodistic, and while that may be fun at a dinner party, if you're out to make with someone you turn off the camp' (14). According to Zabet Patterson

the pornographic image can be a particularly dense semantic site, but it is one which functions only in and through a direct visceral appeal to the body. Much of the academic writing on pornography sees this direct address to the body as grounding both its limitations and its possibilities. (106)

However, by incorporating Bersani's concept of *jouissance*, a pornographic reading broadens its appeal from the merely physical to the intensely political: pornography proffers itself as a radical mode of queer praxis and identitarian critique. Prowse's rectum is thus the grave in which the masculinist hegemony of Australian nationalism and its attendant legacies of misogyny and homophobia are not just ridiculed, but lovingly interred along with subjecthood itself. And, as Fiona Nicoll observes, dissolution and shattering have been an integral part Australia's nationalist psyche from the very beginning, as the image of the wounded, defeated ANZAC digger attests. Nicoll concludes in her study of the configurations of Australian national identity by stating that 'the composite digger is unable to function as a phallic signifier because its incorporeal nature deprives it of a (male) organ' (93). Prowse's rectum is just another sense then in which we might understand David Carter's characterisation of White's work as a 'shadow' that taps into 'an alternative stream of "Australian literature."' (275)

As a text, Part II of *Twyborn* functions not as a nationalistic instrument of juridical power but as pornography; and in doing so it invites us to consider conceptualisations of the self more flimsy than those required of us by the state. An important point of departure for the re-imagining of Australian literary nationalism is to be found in the postmodern poetics that animate what we might properly term Prowse's hyper-masculinity. Visual pornography might seduce us, but, unlike the respectable high modernism with which White's texts are usually associated, the characters and sex-acts displayed on screen in porn lack the ambition to seduce

us into accepting them as convincing representations of selfhood. If, as Frederic Jameson suggests, ‘a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense’ is ‘perhaps the supreme formal feature’ of postmodernism, and if this superficiality constitutes one of the ‘significant differences between the high-modernist and the postmodernist’ moments (9), then a pornographic reading of *Twyborn* necessitates a reevaluation of White’s standing as both a canonically Australian writer and a modernist. When Carter characterises White as ‘an un-Australian writer, anti-realist and anti-democratic’ (275), he does so as part of a manoeuvre that places White at the centre of a process that saw modernism integrated into Australia’s theretofore exclusively realist Antipodean literary tradition. A pornographic reading of White’s texts forces a similar and perhaps more disruptive accommodation of the postmodern into the canon of Australian literature, in that it emphasises White’s status as a national writer whose texts nevertheless push Australian literature outside of itself and into the world. For in stimulating White’s text with a pornographic hyper-masculinity we are engaged in a process of what Jameson calls ‘spacialization,’ or

the process whereby the traditional fine arts are *mediatized*: that is, they now come to consciousness of themselves as various media within a mediatic system in which their own internal production also constitutes a symbolic message and the taking of a position on the status of the medium in question. (162)

It scarcely needs to be said that such a mediatic system is today situated in the cyberspace between Australia and the US. But it does need to be said that a pornographic reading of *Twyborn* begins the task of re-imagining Australia’s nationalist literary heritage in terms of a contemporary, postmodern culture that is less easily coerced by the boundaries of the officially political—precisely because it is so superficial. By ‘mediatizing’ White’s text, by making it conscious of its interrelationships with visual pornographic media, we begin the project of constructing a virtual citizenry that is less defined by notions of nationhood and subjectivity and more concerned with getting off.

One reason why getting off on the representation of Prowse in *Twyborn* is such a satisfying experience is because *jouissance* performs a dual labour in this text: it simultaneously humiliates the selfhood of the reader and the psychic fantasy of nationalism that resides therein, while at the same time affording us the opportunity to repair that nationalism within a transnational framework. *Jouissance* performs this labour of love so effectively because nationalism and nationhood are themselves fantasmatic: they are products of the very same psyche whose pretences to coherence are dissolved in *jouissance*. Vilashini Cooppan notes that ‘the fantasmatic describes the very zone through which the discourse of nations, and perhaps imagined narratives of nationhood, come into being’ (25). The psychoanalytic genealogy of *jouissance* becomes very relevant when we consider the shattered national psyche that *Twyborn* presents to us. It is important to remember that in shattering Australia’s nationalist literary past we are not destroying it: the disparate pieces of this imagined edifice remain and it is up to us to re-integrate and re-imagine them. This is essentially a gesture of reparation. If, as Sedgwick’s Kleinian psychoanalytic formulation suggests, the reparative impulse seeks ‘to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self’ (149), then it can be said that a pornographic reading of Prowse is reparative, in that it invests Australia’s nationalist literary tradition with alternative sites of fantasmatic attachment, nourishment and pleasure for the queer reader. These sites are decidedly transnational in character: via *jouissance*, nationalism and nationhood, as fantasmatic objects, become as susceptible to reparation and repair as they do to shattering (again, either/or distinctions are quite unhelpful), and it is in this indeterminate psychological

state—between psychic nationalism and cosmopolitanism, if you will—that the discourse of transnationalism is animated. Cooppan’s description of transnationalism as a ‘world within’ is relevant here:

As we begin to imagine a history of global flows that does not leave the nation in its wake, and as we further haunt the grounded and bounded plot of the nation’s territory with a host of inner and outer zones of identification and affiliation, fantasy and desire (thinking the nation not *as* the subject but *through* the subject), we will see another version of the discourse of national modernity. (54)

In thinking the nation *through* the subject, a reparative, pornographic reading practice breaks the sense, articulated by Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney, of blockage in Australian literary studies; of a critical discourse ‘struggling to negotiate the relationship between its cultural-nationalist legacy and the consequences of globalisation’ (xiv). Cooppan argues that ‘all national subjects live their nationalism as a mode of loss, for all must contend with the difficult process of identifying with something that is not entirely there’ (32), thus privileging Freud’s theory of melancholia as a model for reading fantasmatic nations; but it is important to emphasise that melancholia, frustration and blockage are not the only affects which might characterise Australian literature’s transnational turn: the earth-shattering pleasures of the little death are another means by which we can begin to make the plot of the nation’s territory our happy haunt.

Through the act of *jouissance*, *Twyborn* can be read such that it disrupts the relation between Australian nationalism and the ubiquitous, seductive masculinity that is such an integral part of our cultural heritage. This queered masculinity, hitherto engaged with in a defensive, paranoid critical posture, is in fact a key resource for engaging with both White’s texts and Australian literary nationalism reparatively. As more recent queer scholarship of White’s work attests, of which we might take Andrew McCann’s reading of White’s work as a pioneering and emblematic example: ‘the refusal to engage with White as a gay writer is the condition on which critiques of White’s conservatism,’ both aesthetic and political, ‘remain plausible’ (70). By engaging with White’s homoerotic aesthetic we rescue his texts from a modernist sensibility, and from a parochial-canonical Australianness, both of which are by now beginning to seem quite archaic. Similarly, a reparative reading of White’s text helps to combat the paranoid nationalism, the form of nationalism articulated as border security, which has come to dominate Australian political and social discourse in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Paranoia has featured and continues to feature as a key resource in the political arsenal of Australian conservatism. As Ghassan Hage has argued, it was a nationalism suffused with paranoia that John Howard’s Liberal Party exploited so brutally during the *Tampa* crisis (3); and if we are to combat the insularity of a paranoid nationalism, whose virulence has only intensified since 2001, it is imperative that we continue to develop the open, reparative registers of nationalism and transnationalism around which we will need to rally as alternatives. In this vein, we might take a pornographic reading of *Twyborn* as an attempt ‘to imagine a literary global in intimate contact with the literary national, relationally linked as two concomitant modes of conceptualizing identity across a long postcolonial twentieth century’ (Cooppan, 19). The interaction between gay porn and Australian literary nationalism might profitably be thought of as one of the vectors of this new and seductive intimacy.

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