

# 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'



















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