On the door of my colleague, Dr Bob Hodge, an apparently appreciative student has pinned a Footrot Flats comic strip. In the four frames that make up this strip, the goose again outwits the farmer and while the latter fumbles for the chopper with which to bring this nuisance to an end, places a not insignificant length of its beak into his bottom. The goose - and here is my contribution to structuralism - ruminates, 'There are two kinds of geese. The quick and the roast.' I feel very much like the goose that's 'roast' today, especially as I'm neither an expert on Mikhail Bakhtin nor an authority on Patrick White.

In a recent review of White criticism, Alan Lawson made the point that 'there has been progress, but little in the way of radical departure from those early lines' of

Except for The Living and the Dead, The Aunt's Story and The Tree of Man, where I have used Penguin editions, all quotations from Patrick White's novels are taken from their first English editions. The following abbreviations have been employed: AS (The Aunt's Story); TM (The Tree of Man); RC (Riders in the Chariot); SM (The Solid Mandala); ES (The Eye of the Storm); FL (A Fringe of Leaves); TA (The Twyborn Affair). R.W. Rotsel's English translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics (n.p. Ardis, 1973) has been used throughout. All page references given in brackets are to this translation. [Since this paper was written in the early part of 1981, no references are made to Patrick White's autobiography Flaws in the Glass.]
Patrick White criticism. He divides White's critics into two groups: those who have read Patrick White's novels as 'exploratory structure(s)' in which authorial endorsement is undercut through ironic and satiric elements (the hermeneutic claim implied here is that Patrick White demands 'interpretative pluralism') and those who have expressed scepticism claiming that 'White cannot always enact what his rhetoric seems to insist'. There is also a third, somewhat peripheral, group of critics who, Lawson suggests, radically refuse to accept White's 'own conception of his work'. Not surprisingly the 'history of White criticism is full of utterly opposite, mutually exclusive thematic readings', writes Lawson. The reason for this is not difficult to find. The vast majority of Patrick White criticism takes the form of individual readings of texts outside any on-going theoretical examination of the overall structures which constitute White's poetics. There is a corresponding lack of methodological rigour, the imposition of consistent limits to one's theoretical enterprise. We have many fine readings of texts, we have diverse critical positions, but not, I believe, studies which would not only examine the formal 'structures of White's fictions' but also offer heuristic models (albeit limited and, perhaps, ultimately mistaken) which could advance serious dialogue. After almost thirty years of White criticism it seems to me that that dialogue must begin, once again, with certain first principles short-circuited by the early critics. To paraphrase Northrop Frye's claim ('every problem in literary criticism is a problem in comparative literature') every problem in literary criticism is a problem in literary theory.

As a preliminary step in that direction I should like to use this seminar to air a number of theoretical formulations and critiques which cannot be included in a formal paper. I have, therefore, written this paper somewhat loosely, leaving the fissures consciously open, so that other critical perspectives may be advanced. The choice of Mikhail Bakhtin as my guru I hope would enable me
not only to explore Bakhtin's conception of the novel but also, as I use The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics as my main theoretical text, to make tentative remarks about White's reading of Dostoevsky as a significant factor in Australian literary history itself. Given Alan Lawson's classification of White critics into the reputedly 'true' (the sympathisers who see textual complexity), the sceptics, and the bigots (the latter a not too accurate synonym of that class of critics) I find myself retrospectively classified as a sceptic. If I am in this respect, like Tiresias, already 'fore-damned', then let me make a virtue of this by relating - as I propose to do later on in this paper - what I have to say to another sceptical critic of White, Leonie Kramer. To recapitulate, in this seminar I wish to read Patrick White through Mikhail Bakhtin's Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics and relate my reading not only to the on-going question of Australian literary history but also to the literary criticism of the person who symbolises, in one way, Australian critical orthodoxy through her occupancy of the only chair of Australian Literature in this country.

So far as Bakhtin's theories are concerned this paper does not examine the overall validity of his claim that the essence of the novel is dialogization, the representation within this genre of the 'exchange of utterances in their social and historical context'. The essence of the novel, in this argument, is based on a conception of it as essentially 'anti-canonical', constantly violating its generic rules, parodying its formal structures, and inverting its conventions. The relationship between this theory of the dialogical essence of the novel and its opposite, the use of unconditional, absolute language as in the opening lines of Pride and Prejudice and Anna Karenina, as in Tolstoy generally, or in V S Naipaul's A Bend in the River, may be encompassed within the theory of the polyphonic structure of the novel raised in Dostoevsky's Poetics but is not identical with it. All I can do is refer you to Gary Paul Morson's thoroughly
informative monograph, 'Tolstoy's Absolute Language'. Nor
does this paper deal with Bakhtin's ideas on general sign
theory (Peirce as distinct from de Saussure), especially his
concept of the inter-relationship of sign and utterance,
with the carnivalization of literature (developed at length
in his work on Rabelais) or with his far-reaching concept
of genre as a vehicle of creative memory in the process of
literary evolution, their transmission, that is, in time on
an axis of evolution. It is important, however, for the
purposes of this seminar, to quickly summarise what are,
for Bakhtin, the overriding features of Dostoevsky's
poetics. This can be done best through a citation of
passages from his work.

The plurality of independent and unmerged voices
and consciousnesses and the genuine polyphony of
full-valued voices are in fact characteristics of
Dostoevsky's novels (....) Dostoevsky is the
creator of the polyphonic novel. He originated an
essentially new novelistic genre.

Poetics, p.4, Bakhtin's
emphasis)

The concepts underlined here are the 'plurality of
independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses' and
the 'genuine polyphony of full-valued voices'. These
aspects of Dostoevsky's works, argues Bakhtin, constitute
a radical departure from the 'established forms of the
basically monological (homophonic) European novel' (p.5).
Central to this 'genuine polyphony' are dialogical
narrative and the co-existence and interaction of elements
in a text. In an essay on parody, H.G. Ruthrof has
bracketed, on these grounds, Ingarden and Bakhtin.6 There
is perhaps a distinction that should be provisionally made
here. Bakhtin does not claim that all aesthetic texts are
totally polyphonic (texts may express varying degrees of
polyphony); nor does he extend, so far as I can gather from
Dostoevsky's Poetics, the co-existence of full-valued, independent and unmerged plurality of consciousnesses manifesting a continuous struggle of ideological voices to what Ingarden calls the 'polyphony of aesthetic value qualities', the inherent capacity of the various strata of a text to interact with each other.

I must, however, emphasise that in this paper no claim is made as to the relative merits of Patrick White and Dostoevsky - the monologically engulfing consciousness as opposed to the perpetual and constant diaologal opposition that constitutes the genuinely polyphonic text. Our aim is not to compare the two though as in all literary criticism, comparative commentary and evaluative bias may be gleaned from the critic's implied modal stance - that is a different question altogether. What we must do now is apply Bakhtin's categories consistently to Patrick White, observe their relevance and in doing so see if we can establish a more fruitful theoretical framework for an examination of White. The latter point is indeed made necessary by the fact that, in Alan Lawson's words, 'little progress [in White criticism] has been made beyond the substantial pioneering works of the early 1960's.'

At one point in Dostoevsky's Poetics Bakhtin quotes a passage from S. Askoldov's essay on Dostoevsky entitled, 'The Religious-ethical Meaning of Dostoevsky'.

...in all of his artistic sympathies and judgements, proclaims one very important proposition: the villain, the saint and the ordinary sinner, if they have developed their personal quintessence to its utmost, all possess a certain equal worth, precisely in the quality of their personalities, which resist the murky currents of the all-equalizing 'environment' (p.9).

If we omit the subject of this passage, as I have done, what strikes us is the familiar critical judgements made over the past two decades on Patrick White's novels.
It doesn't take long to construct a string of White-types — Theodora Goodman, Mary Hare, Waldo Brown, Hurtie Duffield, Elizabeth Hunter as well as those partly disfigured such as Helen Winterbotham or the Imbecile Denny Allen — who as symbols of the 'burnt ones' belong to the categories Askoldov claims to have found in Dostoevsky. The analogy is appropriate, significant and correct only insofar as we can accept Askoldov's reading of Dostoevsky's works. On this level of thematization or characteriological identification through recurring types, the comparisons are valid. Yet what is wrong with the comparison is not that Askoldov misreads Dostoevsky but, that by implication, he offers a very accurate reading of Patrick White. This point becomes clearer if we place Bakhtin's critique of the Askoldov passage already cited. Bakhtin writes

Proclamations of this sort are characteristic of the romantic novel, which saw consciousness and ideology merely as the author's deduction (vyod), and saw the hero merely as the executor of the author's pathos or the object of the author's deduction. It is precisely the romantics who gave direct expression to their artistic sympathies and judgements in the very reality which they are representing...(p.9).

As Bakhtin goes on to demonstrate, what Askoldov fails to grasp is the 'plurality of consciousness centres' (p.13), the multi-voiced accents which constitute Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel. The romantic equation of authorial consciousness with hero-consciousness reads character as 'social-typical' or 'individual-characteriological', an equation which leads to the construction of the monological text that proclaims through pragmatic connections both the text's mystical autonomy and authorial domination over it. In other words, what is being claimed is that the identification of Dostoevsky with White can be maintained only if we read Dostoevsky along the lines suggested by
Askoldov. Before making a far-reaching judgement on Patrick White through implication alone, let us examine Patrick White's own utterances on the construction of fiction. In 'The Prodigal Son', for instance, we read:

"Certainly the state simplicity and humility is the only desirable one for the artist or for man. While to reach it may be impossible, to attempt to do so is important."

In other words 'the artist', here Patrick White, and man, here the hero of the text, are interchangeable, both of whom may be read, paradigmatically, as questers who wish to discover some lost unity, a silence, a kind of Buddhist nirvana. We may loosely call this process 'ideological' (the process itself is not very interesting though both Patricia Morley and Peter Beatson in their book-length studies of White clearly believe otherwise), ideological that is in the ordinary sense of 'ideas' which make their way into texts as a 'principle of the representation' (p.20, Bakhtin's emphasis). This is, of course, not the same as 'the idea' as seen by Dostoevsky. In Bakhtin's words again,

"The idea is the principle of seeing and understanding the world and its formulation from the viewpoint of a given idea only for the characters, not for the author himself, not for Dostoevsky."

(p.20).

Firmly embedded in this formulation are two related principles. The first is what in Samkhya terminology may be called the 'complementarity principle' or the admission of a multiple system of co-ordinates to one's conception of the world: viprā bahūdha vadanti claims the Rg Veda (2, 3, 23, 6). The second is the implied concept of the co-existence of equally important multiple consciousness each of which is perceived against the background of the 'I
for another person'. In Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* we find a parallel:

> I need the Other in order to realise fully all the structures of my being. The For-itself refers to the For-others.'

These two principles are crucial for the polyphonic novel, the novel, once again, of 'coexisting consciousnesses', of 'multivoicedness', of 'characteriological independence'. Like Balzac who also fails to overcome the 'objectivization of his characters and the monological finalization of his world' (p.29), Patrick White too does not write the fully articulated polyphonic novel because of his too close, and essentially romantic identification of author consciousness with 'hero consciousness'. This happens understandably enough in *Voss* but it happens also in *The Twyborn Affair* where one would expect the development of another full-valued voice if only because, on the autobiographical level, Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadith, manifest too closely the author's own problematic sexuality. Let me arrest the common encyclopaedic bent of all academics by articulating my initial, and necessarily provisional, claim about Patrick White more succinctly. What Askoldov mistakenly attributed to Dostoevsky is in fact true of Patrick White and, what I propose to demonstrate later, the implied correspondence between White and Dostoevsky belies the important differences in their respective achievements. Curiously enough, Victor Shklovskii's claims (*Poetics*, p.33) that 'Dostoevsky died without having resolved anything, avoiding solutions and remaining unreconciled' precisely because of his 'dialogical' bias (that resolution is impossible because of the very nature of the polyphonic text where multivoiced dialogue persists) can never be Patrick White's epitaph. Yet White's characters like Dostoevsky's 'poor government clerk' Goliadkin, hero of an early Hoffmanesque tale, are capable of exploring characteriological self-consciousness, either through
notions of the double (as in *The Solid Mandala*) or through the 'twice born', the persistently androgynous (as in *The Twyborn Affair*) in both of which a closed structure of authorial values struggles with the plurality of values articulated by other independent voices so that, whilst authorial domination remains self-evident, no ultimate resolution 'of dualities of life into harmonies' (a point affirmed by Alan Lawson as the essence of White's poetics) seems to be arrived at and where, finally, through the interaction of several consciousnesses, the monological text moves towards polyphony.

At the beginning of this paper I said that Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky leads us to an examination of a recurrent problem in Australian literary history generally. Let me formulate my argument, as another feature of White's poetics, in the following manner. Patrick White's novels are organised along the lines of the classical European novel ('the homophonic European novel'); its modifications are in fact mediated by the great achievements of the Russian masters of that form and in particular Dostoevsky. Central to this hypothesis is an extra-formalist principle which locates the relationship between Patrick White and the European classical novel in the ambivalent attitude of Australia towards Europe, which is, intrinsically, no different, in literary terms, from the Russian attitude towards Europe.14 As this is essentially a problem of Australian literary history, I shall return to it later in this paper.

Meanwhile the mediating characteristic of Dostoevsky may be placed in sharper relief through the citation of two passages. The first is a passage from an unusually frank interview with Patrick White published in a work entitled *In the Making*:

> I think my novels usually begin with characters... Characters interest me more than situations. I don't think any of my books have what you call plots... I have the same idea with all my books:
an attempt to come close to the core of reality, the structure of reality as opposed to the merely superficial. The realistic novel is remote from art. A novel should heighten life, should give one an illuminating experience; it shouldn't set out what you know already ... I like The Aunt's Story and The Solid Mandala best.

The crucial sentence here is 'The realistic novel is remote from art'. Our second passage is from one of Dostoevsky's notebooks in which he had this to say about his own writings (Poetics, p.49):

To find with absolute realism the man in man ... I am called a psychologist - it is not true. I am merely a realist in a higher sense, i.e. I depict all the depths of the human soul.

Commenting on this passage, Mikhail Bakhtin makes the useful observation that 'Dostoevsky considers himself a realist, not a subjective romanticist, trapped in the world of his own consciousness'. At the same time the 'realism' that he professes to adopt is the realism of 'a higher sense'; against monological realism (the metaphysical depths within authorial consciousness) he offers 'polyphonal' realism (these depths outside one's self, 'in the souls of others'). Superficially, of course, this passage has remarkable parallels with the White passage already quoted - this juxtaposition is, on my part, intentional - but White seems to me to be too much a victim of his own psychology, too narcissistic, in one way, to let the consciousness of his characters freedom of kridati, the 'play' of homo ludens. So Mrs Ellen Roxburgh after partaking of 'half-cooked (human) flesh' is 'tempted ... to believe that she had partaken of a sacrament' (FL, p.272) and Mrs Poulter distraught upon discovering Waldo Brown dead in his house must carry the eschatology of Christian civilisation itself: 'And He released His
hands from the nails. And, fell down, in a thwack of canvas, a cloud of dust' (SM, p.303). The over-riding authorial consciousness (ultimately romantic, somewhat repressive) traps both the author and the text into a kind of 'double bind' (the phrase is Manfred MacKenzie's) situation where monological realism denies precisely the independent and multi-levelled consciousness of characters found in Dostoevsky. Two important foreign critics - and both have written, to the best of my knowledge, brief reviews only - George Steiner and Christopher Ricks, have detected this in White. Steiner calls it 'a thread of hysteria' and Ricks 'irresponsibility ... cheating ... the crucial immorality of the artist'.

On the level of Australian literary history, White's poetics may be seen in terms of a larger literary crisis and one which has been a feature of all colonial societies. As in the case of American literature there is a certain disjuncture between the need for historical readings and, in fiction, the practice of an historical reading. So Marcus Clarke, for instance, feels the need for an Australian historical novel, but writes a text whose reading of history coincides with those of Horace Walpole and Mrs Radcliffe, writers who, unlike Walter Scott, were also trapped in their fictional categories, and who failed ultimately to render meaningfully in fiction, the larger, teleological designs of history. I think White is conscious of these failures - Marcus Clarke is cited here because of the greater seriousness of his attempt at writing the convict novel, but others such as Harris or Warung would fit the bill - but he cannot repudiate the 'double-bind' situation rendered more intricate by the fact that the mode in which he writes is itself European-derived. In an illuminating article titled 'Tradition and Patrick White's individual Talent' (I think the choice of the literary history implied in the title is unfortunate as a monocultural unity is assumed by T.S. Eliot in his own essay), Manfred MacKenzie writes:
White encounters a dilemma on either hand. Either he is a Europe-encumbered artist in a continental environment which may seem paradoxically even less known to his postcolonial culture than to colonial Australia, so that he becomes extraordinarily preoccupied with a naive or vernacular vision; or, as a provincial artist with 'Australian-literary' ambitions, he feels himself perpetually embarrassed by the criterion of the European classic. In the persons of its twin heroes, The Solid Mandala suggests that he is both these kinds of artist at once. Equally, therefore, it suggests that he can be neither. The reciprocal conflict of the twin heroes seems to imply that no true cultural singularity or identity is possible in Australia, no partial art which is not either insecurely repatriated or suicidally self-expatriating.20

So very suicidal because the formal castration of colonial societies heightens oedipal longings, and in the absence of the totality of European civilisation to prevent incest, the desire for it and its concomitant denial leads ultimately to a certain artistic schizophrenia, to a neurosis whose ambivalences can be articulated only in art. Here again, Dostoevsky is crucial for White. The words of Ivan Karamazov foregrounds precisely this concern:

I want to travel in Europe, Aloysha, I shall set off from here. And yet I know that I am going to a graveyard, but it is a most precious graveyard ... every stone over them speaks of such burning life ... of such passionate faith ... though I'm convinced in my heart that it's long been nothing but a graveyard.21

Another Whitean exile, Angelos Vatatzes, (TA, p.36) also exclaims, 'Nobody ... can talk of loveliness ... who
has not experienced Smyrna'. And Smyrna, as all students of Patrick White know, symbolises for White Greek genocide at the hands of the Turks. The 'loveliness' imputed to Smyrna is nothing if not ironic, but the claim nevertheless is not too different from Ivan Karamazov's, for Smyrna is also a graveyard.

At the risk of creating an unpardonable hiatus, let us return to Patrick White's peripheral polyphony and explore a related extension of this feature of his poetics. I have made the following claims: diachronically Australian literary history manifests a reading of Europe which is inevitably mediated (fiction as an artificial linguistic order with its own self-contained mode of existence requires a set of 'formal' structures of mediation); synchronically in the case of Patrick White the mediating element is Dostoevsky. The latter argument has led to a comparative examination of their poetics and to the discovery that in Patrick White there is an essential homology of author consciousness and dominant hero-consciousness which denies his texts full polyphonic existence - at best the polyphony is marginal. In the passage from In the Making we discovered that White repudiates 'realistic' fiction and affirms a strong bias for character (both these claims are also made by Dostoevsky). But if, as we have argued, total correspondence between Dostoevsky and White cannot be demonstrated, what then are the formal characteristics of his poetics?

Central to this question is the kind of metaphysical label too often applied to Patrick White. Quoting Susan Sontag's conception of 'high risk writers' approvingly, Dr Veronica Brady claims that Patrick White is a writer in the 'exploratory tradition of Dostoevsky, Kafka, Joyce', among others. Any hypostatization of this type is theoretically dangerous as this paper has indeed attempted to demonstrate. Nevertheless the 'exploratory' (it is a term used by both Lawson and Brady to designate perhaps a greater authorial concern for the representational processes of fiction itself) label imputed to White has distinct theoretical
implications and must be bracketed with what James McAuley, referring to Voss felt was a 'growing strength of meta-novelistic ambitions in his [White's] work'.

Our starting point here once again is White's claim that the 'realistic novel is remote from art'. On the purely surface level, this claim implies a concern with a particular kind of linguistic discourse, with metaphorical displacements and with the development of what Virginia Woolf in 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' called the inevitable thrust towards 'prose-poetry'. Ironically enough, this apparent complexity of style has led critics from Hope, Buckley and Heseltine through to Beston and Walsh to comment on White's peculiar 'syntactic dislocations'. I think that the dominance of this claim reflects not so much its intrinsic truth but, conversely, the absence of any critical challenge to it. True, even after his most notorious linguistic phase (the phase that ends with The Vivisector), dangling adverbial phrases, defiantly elliptical formations (such as 'But did arrive', on p.17 of TA) and synaesthesia acquire the status of a sort of leitmotif. Nevertheless the very existence of linguistic complexity gives the lie to White's 'anti-realist' stance, that indeed on the level of narrative hierarchy as opposed to 'discourse grammar' (perspective, voices, view, modality in general in fact), Patrick White indeed writes realistic fiction. In this latter respect what is apparently a contradiction (that on this premise neither Beckett, Borges nor Robbe-Grillet may be so accommodated), emerges as a mode of existence, a definitive White dialectic. In other words Patrick White writes, in formal terms, realistic fiction. Yet no reader would make such a bold claim. Why do I stick my neck out amongst those more circumspect because more familiar with White? I have two reasons for making such a claim. The first is that at the level of narrative 'text grammar', Patrick White does not work against the established hierarchies of the European classical novel. And whilst there is that element of the unheimlich in the full etymological sense in which Freud uses the word in his essay on 'The Uncanny').
neither the 'carnivalization' nor the Menippean that Bakhtin detects in Dostoevsky (elements which contribute to his polyphonic achievement: this does not, of course, mean that Dostoevsky wrote metafiction). Secondly, the Patrick White sentence does not disrupt deep structures of language and never questions the basic propositional quality of the predicate vis a vis the subject. The opening sentences of both *The Aunt's Story* and *Voss* ('But old Mrs Goodman did die at last' and 'There is a man here, miss, asking for your uncle') carry, structurally, the kernels of the respective narratives which they herald. At the same time the mode of discourse that is dominant in Patrick White (nearly all his novels begin with dialogue with the exception of *The Living and the Dead* and *The Tree of Man* both of which seem to me to be more centrally within the genre of allegory) attests to the importance of character and 'idea-images' over plot in Patrick White. Here, of course, the resemblances with Dostoevsky are marked. What Patrick White does not offer us is metafictions. In one way this is comforting as it places White within the so-called tradition (both Australian and American/English/European). Yet one can flip through the White corpus and reading the following:

*Sometimes he laughed in her face, sometimes he beat her with a switch, but at others they rode together on the tiger, until that slashed and fiery beast turned into an empty skin* (RC, p.382).

If we were to analyse this sentence (which, incidentally, may be read as metafictional if we ignored, temporarily, the larger novelistic matrix in which it occurs) in terms of the relationship of its formal elements to their corresponding deep structures, we would discover what may be termed a paradigmatic model of the Patrick White narrative discourse. The sentence carries, in other words, a microcosmic rendering of the larger macro-structure, one in which narrative is not a series of actions (actor-process-affected), though formal transaictives do occur, but a
discourse mode which is heavily symbolic, ultimately poetic. White has himself maintained that he is not interested in plot, not primarily interested in plot at any rate; he is exploring those aspects of discourse which carve open some deeper, symbolic recess of the mind. To understand the White sentence, is in some ways akin to understanding the White text. A partial hermeneutic at this level of White's poetics may be formulated as follows: in coming to terms with the 'core of reality', 'depths of the human soul' (Dostoevsky), the Patrick White text begins with a straightforward subject/predicate stance (the dialogical mode that marks the beginning of most of his novels) but quickly 'regresses' to a symbolic-perceptual position which heightens authorial idea, the trappings of his consciousness or the expansion of the epigraphs which are prefixed in his texts. Yet the regression is not towards metafiction, either on formal, linguistic grounds, or on ideological grounds. The temporal validity of the discourse is never denied by White, a fact which leads to the outwardly conflicting nature of the design of the Patrick White novel, simultaneously narrative and symbolic with a pervasive 'solidarity' (incorporating Sartre's *En soi*, 'the being of things') which permeates all of his mature works (from *The Aunt's Story* onwards), indicating in all a certain 'domination over his material', what Leonie Kramer calls 'verbal aggrandizement'.

Among Alan Lawson's sceptics who have been often vilified is Leonie Kramer. I believe she has been misunderstood but not because of any inherent complexity of thought but because the framework in which she explores White's authorial domination is couched within a metaphysical claim of humanistic primacy over religious experience in Patrick White. Her papers on *The Tree of Man*, *Riders in the Chariot*, and *The Eye of the Storm* in particular demonstrate this. Referring to Stan Parker's well-known mandalic vision at the end of *TM*, Kramer suggests that 'White himself has to work in the last chapters ... to ensure our sympathy'. In another essay
she is more explicit:

*I would argue [she writes ] that White's assertion at this point shows up a weakness in the handling of Stan's dying revelation. The only way in which White can make the point about wholeness and oneness is by stating it himself; he cannot, though, validate it in terms of Stan's actual experience.* 

What Kramer fails to tell us is that at moments such as these White's peripheral polyphony, his marginal dialogical mode, are over-taken by too strong an identification of author-consciousness with hero-consciousness: Stan Parker's is not a full-voiced presence, he is not an independent consciousness co-extensive with that of the author. Yet again we read Kramer (this time on ES):

*So that Elizabeth Hunter scores her victory, and preserves her moment of illumination by virtue of the author's insistence that she do so, not through his account of the mysterious logic of motivation and experience.* 

The problem in all these passages is that critical judgements such as 'White himself has to work', 'by stating it himself' and 'the author's insistence' imply the existence of the aesthetics of polyphony in literary texts without any real examination of the formal dimensions of that aesthetics. At the same time Leonie Kramer's objections to White can be accommodated within the Bakhtinian framework developed in this paper. Reversing one of the crucial passages in Dostoevsky's *Poetics* (p.14) we can more adequately represent Leonie Kramer's argument.

*The Patrick White novel is constructed as the entirety of a single consciousness which absorbs*
other consciousnesses as objects; not as the entirety of the interaction of several consciousnesses, of which no one fully becomes the object of any other one.

In this paper I have explored some theoretical problems of White's poetics. These are early days yet but the observations made so far may be quickly summarised. It seems to me that Patrick White writes essentially in the genre of monological realism with novelistic polyphony only peripherally, and incidentally, achieved. This is because there is too strong (and romantic) a tendency in White to conflate authorial consciousness with hero-consciousness a fact which eventually denies the plurality of consciousnesses found in the fully articulated polyphonic text, the Dostoevskian novel. The latter is also marked by an aesthetic conception of the idea, a principle by which characters see the world from the standpoint of a certain idea different from that of the author. Yet White clearly identifies, both in his formal utterances and in his fiction, with Dostoevsky. There is, quite possibly, an historical problem involved here and I have argued that it reflects the way in which Dostoevsky mediates between the Australian artist and European civilization: Ivan Karamazov's words to Alyosha are therefore crucial here. The confluence of the two - Dostoevsky's poetics and the sense of historical mediation - leads us to a fuller understanding of Patrick White's own references to the realistic novel which, like intellect to Himmelfarb seems to have 'failed us' (RC, p.198). At the same time the 'anti-realistic' stance does not lead to what would have otherwise been its natural corollary, metafiction. In terms of narrative hierarchies, Patrick White's fictional structures still belong to those of the classical European novel, albeit with a significant toning down of plot, and like Dostoevsky, an upward revaluation of character. It is White's subjective romanticism', the vision of one 'trapped in his own consciousness' which denies what could have otherwise been
a natural bent towards metafiction. If we examine what I think constitutes a significant ideological shift in metafiction - the independence of objects, the underlying critique of a disjunction between work value and use value, the foregrounding of the presentational process at the expense of the presented world - we again find that a metaphysical (authorial) consciousness arrests such a tendency. By transferring objects to the levels of the signified - and thereby giving them fixed, reasonably permanent value - White denies his text metafictional status. They become, in a way, readerly texts, only moderately polysemous, produced according to what Roland Barthes in *S/Z* calls the 'closure system of the West'.

In 'The Prodigal Son' Patrick White, somewhat evangelically, denounced the usual Australian 'dun-coloured realism'. One recalls Ivan's words to his brother again, but this time after he had failed to convey the enigma of the Grand Inquisitor: '...if you are so corrupted by modern realism and cannot stand anything fantastic'. Patrick White is clearly struck by this and has a predilection (though only a predilection) for the fantastic, for a certain grotesquerie (the whore Bridie in *TA* comes to mind here) which is itself a feature of carnivalization. We get a glimpse of this in *Voss* too where in an anecdote the drunken sailor cannot recall whether in fact he had slept with his friend's wife (dream versus reality again). It is this oscillation between authorial-consciousness and the free-play of character-consciousness and both of them compounded by a non-pragmatic reading of Australian literary history (yet to be written) which simultaneously challenges the literary theorist and, on the level of literary criticism, attests to the need for a sharper theoretical perspective on Australian literature.

NOTES

1. Alan Lawson, 'Meaning and Experience: A Review


14. This attitude is developed in George Steiner Tolstoy or Dostoevsky (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1967).
27. Quoted in Kiernan, op. cit., p.81.


32. F. Dostoevsky, op.cit., p.256.

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