

DECONSTRUCTING MARTIN BOYD

HOMOSOCIAL DESIRE AND THE TRANSGRESSIVE AESTHETIC

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

The University of Sydney

by

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Department of English, 1998.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DYM	Martin Boyd	<i>A Difficult Young Man</i>
WBS		<i>When Blackbirds Sing</i>
BM	Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick	<i>Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire</i>
EC		<i>Epistemology of the Closet</i>
IP	Alfred Adler	<i>The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology</i>
HN		<i>Understanding Human Nature</i>
SMH		<i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i>

EPIGRAPHS:

What truth is there for a friendship without proximity, without presence, therefore without resemblance, without attraction, perhaps even without significant or reasonable preference? How can such a friendship even be possible, except in a figure? Why still call this 'friendship' except in a misuse of language and a diversion of a semantic tradition?

Jacques Derrida
(Politics of Friendship)

...the true sins against the holy ghost would be to read without risking oneself, to write or utter without revealing oneself however esoterically, to interpret without understanding the perverse danger of setting in motion all the contradictory forces of any only semi-domesticated canonical text.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick
(Epistemology of the Closet)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to those who have inspired, encouraged, and borne with me in good grace towards producing this thesis. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick deserves a special mention for providing me with the necessary impetus and analytic strategies. Thanks are also due to Brenda Niall for her courteous and constructive responses to my enquiries; to Phyllis Boyd who, as custodian of the Boyd papers at the National Library, has been of invaluable assistance in kindly permitting me access to Martin's Rome diaries; to Neil Boness of Rare Books, Fisher Library, for being instrumental in the Library's acquisition of Robert Lindsay's copy of Boyd's book of poems *Retrospect*; and to Boyd's friend Sam Wood who, together with Tony Bradley and Louis Lodge, has supplied interesting snippets of first-hand information.

Of the others who have contributed enthusiasm and stimulus I should single out two in particular: my co-supervisor Dr Catherine Runcie for her radical notions of the 'kinky' Christ; and Dr Noel Rowe for his similarly adventurous and perceptive insights. My unbounded appreciation also goes to Helen Hewson, who has supplied unfailing support and interest, and to my daughter Lisa Moore, without whose technological know-how and good humour I could not have managed.

To my supervisor Associate Professor Adrian Mitchell I am deeply indebted. As ever he has been painstaking, conscientious and unstinting. I thank him unreservedly for his astute guidance, and perhaps even more pertinently, for a faith that I trust has not been misplaced.

ABSTRACT

Following on the proposition that the history of Western thought is importantly constituted by a discourse of male-male pedagogic or pederastic relations stretching in narrative form, according to Allan Bloom, from the *Phaedrus* to *Death in Venice*, the deconstructive project of reading 'against the visible grain' has been mobilised in the interests of interrogating and unsettling what can only be defined as homophobic misreadings of Martin Boyd. Critical discursive practice, by the near-uniform imposition of a tacit censorship, has refused by means of erasure, silence and repression to reflect on Boyd from the perspective of sexual definition or same-sex love and desire, presumably in the belief that there are no interpretive consequences. In the process, an hypothesis of Boyd as himself mounting an act of social criticism by surreptitiously contesting conventional and hierarchical typologies of masculinity in the margins of institutionalised and popular hegemonic culture, seems to have escaped inscription in the canonical records.

Martin Boyd's 'dividedness', 'doubleness', ambivalences and dichotomies point to a complexity that is not ultimately or ontologically resolvable. The Derridean 'de-sedimentation' *modus operandi* used here makes no claim to a relevatory hermeneutics of Hegelian essence. It does, however, utilise the various tropes of ambivalence, uncertainty, anxiety and incoherence — aspects of Boyd which may be correlated, perhaps, with his sense of the *unheimlich* or not being at home with himself or his environment — to reposition him in terms of his psychosexual constitution. In the process, the advocacy of aestheticism and pleasure for which he is recognised is found to be tempered and/or subverted by an overt recourse to the transgressive and 'decadent', elements irretrievably linked to his fetishization of the beautiful male body and his obsessive redeployment of the Hellenic ideal of manly love.

The interpretive frameworks applied in the reclamation of the 'different' sensibility Boyd articulates by means of an alternately subtilized and strenuous challenge to sex/gender identity and behavioural norms encompass a field ranging from late nineteenth century theoretical discourse on homosexuality through to the intertextual influences of cultural innovators like Pater and Wilde. It includes reference to the literary strategies devised by Sedgwick to uncover deviance and 'erotic pathways'; it surveys the psychoanalytic hypotheses of Freud and Adler as relevant; and it pays heed to an aesthetics of the religio-erotic.

