



NOT FOR LOAN

**AMBIVALENCE AND SCEPTICISM IN
PATRICK WHITE'S LATER NOVELS**

Andrew Tilimbe C. Kulemeka

Handwritten signature and name of the author.

A thesis submitted for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

at the Australian National University

June, 1986

DECLARATION

Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.



Andrew Tilimbe Clement Kulemeka

June, 1986

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Dr Livio Dobrez and Dr Nick Jose. Without the invaluable help I received from them, this work might not have been completed. I would also like to thank Dr Jane Adamson for reading several of my drafts and the useful suggestions which she made. I would like my graduate colleagues: Viv Foster, Nick Reid, Yasue Arimitsu and Leonie Rutherford to know that I am thankful for the assistance they gave me with the proof-reading. I also thank the typist, Norma Chin, for being fast and efficient.

I would like to express my thanks to the Australian National University for providing me with a scholarship which enabled me to study in Australia. I am indebted to the government of the Republic of Malawi for providing me with generous airfares to and from Australia. The principal of Chancellor College, University of Malawi, Dr Z.D. Kadzamira, deserves special thanks for providing me with the most efficient and reliable link with home.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to thank my wife, Mai Sheila Naduwe Kulemeka, whose love and support sustained me throughout the period of this study. To her I say *Zikomo Kwambiri Duwe*, thank you very much.

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that, in Patrick White's later novels, characters, situations and almost everything the fiction concerns itself with is shown to be fraught with ambivalence and scepticism. The concept of scepticism in this thesis is used to indicate a questioning attitude which allows for a multiplicity of varied ways of looking at things.

The first chapter examines the concepts of ambivalence and scepticism in relation to the artist. It is shown that the relationship between the artist and his work is a complex one and ever fluctuating from certainty to extreme uncertainty. It is also argued that doubt about his achievements seems to underly the artist's motivation to go on painting. The artist appears to presume that at some stage in his painting vocation he may portray a comprehensive vision of life.

The other side of the artist's life examined in this chapter concerns the relationship between the artist and his society. This relationship is shown to be fraught with ambiguities and doubts as the artist appears simultaneously to want and to reject society. While drawing inspiration from society, the artist would wish to be independent of the society, which he needs. Inescapably, these contradictory drives create great tensions in the artist. As a result, the artist at times is presented as cruel and capricious.

The chapter on *The Eye of the Storm* investigates the issues of ambivalence and scepticism as they affect human relationships and personality. The discussion here reveals that uncertainty about the precise nature of another's real feelings - which words might or might not convey - contributes to some of the difficulties in the relationship between Mrs Hunter and her children. It is shown that it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to really know another. Arnold's and Lal Wyburd's incident where the latter makes a premature disclosure to Sister De Santis about the Thorogood Village serves as a good example of humans' failure to know one another.

With respect to human personality, we see that it is enormously complex. The supposedly wholly worldly character is portrayed as having spiritual aspirations. Similarly, the apparently entirely spiritual character evinces worldly traits. In this regard, the novel shows a slight departure from White's earlier character portrayal where his 'elect' and 'non-elect' were more sharply distinguished. In *The Eye of the*

Storm there seems to be a conflation in some characters of previously opposed behavioural traits.

In chapter three the debate about the ambiguity and uncertainty of things focuses on the opposition between 'nature' and 'culture'. Through the novel's close look at, on the one hand, the life of Aborigines and on the other, convicts' life in Australia, it is revealed that institutionalized cruelty might well be the worst form of evil. Hence the discussion here shows the tenuousness of 'culture's' claim to superiority over 'nature'. The central character's experiences amongst Aborigines open her eyes to the hypocrisies of her society. As a result, she has a generous view of life which enables her to accept an almost endlessly varied way of looking at things. In turn she is critical of the narrow-mindedness of some of her people. She recognizes that contradiction makes up her authentic self, and the selves of others. She also accepts that truth has many sides to it.

The notions of ambivalence and scepticism reach their climax in *The Twyborn Affair* where the discussion focuses on the concepts of appearance and reality. The debate here dwells on a character who is uncertain about his sex and in the process of searching for a genuine sexuality seeks an authentic self. In an effort to discover his real identity the character assumes different disguises at different times. The masks enable him to try other sex roles. But as it turns out, each sex role does not seem to help him/her to find out his true identity. Moreover, the disguise itself appears to trap him in a kind of reality fabricated by the mask itself. Hence it becomes problematical to distinguish the real self from the facade. Both the authentic self and the mask are fraught with ambiguity and doubt as to their exact status. In the end the argument in the chapter is that the novel suggests acceptance of both aspects of the protagonist's personality as a resolution of a kind. In this way the central character seems to be liberated from the quest for a real self and from the conflicts within his personality. He is freed because he acknowledges that ambivalence and doubt are integral to his personality.

In some cases the following abbreviations for the central novels have been used in the thesis.

<i>TV</i>	<i>The Vivisector</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>The Eye of the Storm</i>
<i>FL</i>	<i>A Fringe of Leaves</i>
<i>TA</i>	<i>The Twyborn Affair</i>

DEDICATION

For my Son Owen Dekhani

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1. DOUBT AS THE IMPULSE FOR EXPLORATION: <i>THE VIVISECTOR</i>	8
CHAPTER 2. DIFFICULT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: <i>THE EYE OF THE STORM</i>	27
CHAPTER 3. NATURE AND CULTURE: <i>A FRINGE OF LEAVES</i>	41
CHAPTER 4. REALITY AND APPEARANCE: <i>THE TWYBORN AFFAIR</i>	53
CONCLUSION	64
WORKS CONSULTED	68

INTRODUCTION

The emphases may shift from one novel to another, but the primary concern running through almost all of White's fiction is the search for truth, reality as opposed to illusion. This preoccupation is evident in his earlier fiction, but White seems to invest it with a passionate intensity in the later, larger, and more complex novels beginning with *The Vivisector*. In each subsequent novel the author appears to examine from a refreshingly new perspective the notions of truth, reality, innermost self and essence of being. This is so in each of the four novels I propose to discuss: *The Vivisector* examines the struggles of an artist to realise in his work ultimate truth, a higher vision; *The Eye of the Storm* attempts to reveal the essence of a mystical experience, and sifts through the life of the central character in the effort to reassess things; *A Fringe of Leaves* investigates the unchanging fundamentals of life which Mrs Ellen Roxburgh gleans from her experiences in the shipwreck and sojourn among Aborigines; *The Twyborn Affair* critically looks at what constitutes the authentic self which could be unknown and at variance with the known self.

Quest is the enduring strand that links White's somewhat different novels. Each centres on the figure of a quester: someone who has a critical mind and questions accepted beliefs, modifies or rejects long-standing conventions, is a non-conformist, an outsider, and a rebel. In considering *The Vivisector*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *A Fringe of Leaves* and *The Twyborn Affair*, it is therefore rewarding to focus on the ambivalence and scepticism of the novel. Throughout this study, the term 'ambivalence' will be used to indicate the coexistence of two opposed and conflicting attitudes or emotions. The word 'scepticism' will indicate the critical faculty to cast reasonable doubt on accepted beliefs, ideas and social conventions.

As a consequence of their critical predisposition, White's characters never reach a state of absolute resolution with their tormented selves. In *The Vivisector*, for example, even when Hurtle Duffield is dying he remains as ambivalent as he has been throughout his life; the exact nature of his vision is uncertain, and so is the desirability of vision. In the same way, Mrs Hunter's ultimate vision in the eye of the storm is vague, though the experience appears to have opened her mind to the infinite. One notices a persistent scepticism in both cases. But perhaps what is the ultimate in Duffield's vision needs to be inexplicit, ambivalent, and susceptible to further modification, ever-changing, because

wholeness of vision it seems is for God alone. Since Hurtle Duffield is a subjective element of the whole, he cannot have the totality of the vision of that reality of which he is but a small part. As William J. Scheick puts it:

White's characters are enclosed by a world of which they are a mere fragment, and their comprehension of existence is confined to their subjective and partial relation to the world.¹

To the critics who have complained that Duffield's vision does not amount to much, one can only say that this is as it should be in the severely limited situation of a subjective individual.

On the whole, the questers in White's fiction impress one as misfits. Their total commitment to truth sets them apart from common humanity. Mrs Hunter's clinical analyses of past events sometimes seem to have a touch of cruelty. The following utterances to Dorothy Hunter, her daughter, are revealing:

'Yes,' Mother agreed, 'the one you were prepared to fall in love with - only you weren't in your right mind at the time - and he too self centred'

'Looking back, lust is always difficult to understand. And ugly. One's own is uglier than anybody else's. Edvard Pehl was in some respects, I suppose, a desirable man. But tedious. Frightened. He ran away that same afternoon. I thought he must have caught you up - and that was why you've never wanted to mention him.'²

Among the novels of my central concern *The Vivisector* stands out as the one showing the greatest cruelty in a quester. Hurtle Duffield has two 'murders' on his conscience. His relations with people appear all the time to be adversely affected by his obsessive search for truth through art. For the sake of his art Duffield shuns comfort and chooses to live in the dilapidated house in Chubb's Lane and Flint Street; earlier he had retreated to a shack at the barren and isolated Ironstone. In Duffield's world everything is subservient to the grand portrayal of truth. Nance Lightfoot has sensed this when she makes the apt remark:

When the only brand of truth 'e recognizes is 'is own it is inside 'im 'e reckons and as 'e digs inter poor fucker you 'e hopes you'll help 'im let it out.³

In comparison with Duffield, Mrs Ellen Roxburgh in *A Fringe of Leaves* might not immediately strike one as cruel in her search. However, her commitment to undergo '[the] ultimate in experience,' necessitates hurting some people.⁴ For instance, her

1. William J. Scheick, 'The Gothic Grace and Rainbow Aesthetic of Patrick White's Fiction: An Introduction,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979), p.135.

2. Patrick White, *The Eye of the Storm* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1975), p.417. Subsequent page references to this novel refer to this edition and are given in the text.

3. Patrick White, *The Vivisector* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1973), p.248. Subsequent page references to this novel refer to this edition and are given in the text.

4. Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1977), p.17. Subsequent page references to this novel refer to this edition and are given in the text.

infidelity to her husband in making love with Garnet Roxburgh is part of the 'ultimate in experience'. Her life among the Aborigines which at one stage involves her participation in cannibalism; her sexual relations with Jack Chance; her return to her society while filthy and naked all contribute to the ultimate transformation of her personality. Though not overtly cruel, Mrs Roxburgh's commitment to truth is equal to that of other Patrick White questers.

Similarly, Eddie Twyborn's unbending quest for a real self that he thinks is unknown to his actual self seems to be cruel in some respects. In the first place, Eddie appears relieved by the death of his companion, Angelos Vatatzes, for the opportunity it will provide him to explore further his real self. Earlier, Eddie had escaped from a possible marriage, in the process hurting Marian Dibden. It seems unavoidable that the quester will cause others pain. He will hurt essentially because he is always ambivalent and sceptical in the face of accepted beliefs and conventions. As a rebel and outsider he will be seen to be in conflict with his society. Society may try to restrain him, but will fail because he is much too strong for it, and above all, White suggests, he is fated to differ from the rest in order to discover some aspects of truth.

In analysing various states of ambivalence and scepticism in *The Vivisector*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *A Fringe of Leaves* and *The Twyborn Affair*, I hope to show that the search for truth in these novels is motivated by White's passionate distrust and uncertainty about several aspects of life. White's questioning of rigid categories begins with the almost unassailable categorization of 'male' and 'female'. In drawing our attention to male attributes such as moustaches, heavy muscles, assertiveness that are also found in women, White seems to suggest that these physical and personality traits are not necessarily male qualities. In a sense he narrows - if he does not altogether abolish - that fundamental division. In essence White seems to reveal how pernicious has been society's habit of emphasizing the differences rather than the similarities between the sexes. For as Mrs Eadith Trist says:

True friendship ... if there is anything wholly true - certainly in friendship - comes, I'd say, from the woman in a man and the man in a woman.⁵

The plethora of homosexual, lesbian and incestuous relationships in White's fiction, and his often rather disproportionate emphasis on sex seem intended to reveal what is wrong with the conventional rigid separation of the sexes. Societal taboos attached to some sexual behaviours are perhaps a clear sign of how deep seated these drives are. (White implies that it is an extreme oddity that sex which is central to procreation is often the most degraded aspect of our humanity.) White also challenges the conventions by which

5. Patrick White, *The Twyborn Affair* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1981), p.360. Subsequent page references to this novel refer to this edition and are given in the text.

sex is treated by other writers. In his novels the sexual experience is not always exalted, romantic; he often puts it at the level of sordidness equal to shitting, pissing and eating. Though White is not exactly arguing for sexual liberation, one sometimes gets the feeling from his fiction that he sees sex as the most important of all human experiences.

Nearly all his central characters are to a less or greater degree involved in frustrated sexual relationships. Hurtle Duffield images his painting in sexual terms; Elizabeth Hunter uses her sexual attractiveness to obtain social prominence; her children, Dorothy and Basil, have an incestuous relationship; the brothel in *The Twyborn Affair* sells sex.

Another related feature of White's fiction I propose to examine is the relation that he posits between reality and fantasy, actuality and vision, the exterior and interiority of being. These supposed oppositions do not seem to hold in his fiction: the transition from reality to fantasy is blurred. Indeed, the two seem inseparable. Hence Mrs Hunter's experience in the eye of the cyclone wobbles between reality and fantasy. To see it in a way that excludes seeming opposites would be reductive because the experience gains significance by being at once mystical and firmly anchored in reality. In the same way, Eddie Twyborn's experiences in *The Twyborn Affair* simultaneously seem real and fantasy-like: the story is in turn set in France, the Monaro district, and London, all credible environments. Eddie Twyborn himself, and other characters as well, appears to combine aspects of reality and fantasy. The fact that Eudoxia Vatatzes's true identity is kept a secret till the end of Part One forms part of the fantastic element in his character; Eudoxia's experiences with Angelos impress one as taking place in a dream-scape. Certainly, some of the comedy in Part One seems to have a surreal dimension: Joan Golson's comic and inexplicable attraction to Eudoxia; Angelos Vatatzes's pontifications on Byzantine emperors; and even the gross naivety of Curly Golson seem unreal.

A knowledge of recent literary theories of deconstruction can be useful in thinking about White's fiction, if only to help focus on the way he subverts binary oppositions. But there are some other factors to be taken into account in White's novels, and these essentially concern the place of fate in a character's life and the permanence of change. White sees his questers as fated to be so; in his view, permanent stasis - non-change - is unattainable by humans. Characters' relationships, attitudes, desires, philosophies are ever in flux. It seems that White is neither ambivalent nor sceptical about the permanence of change: he accepts it as unchangeable given.

On the other hand, White's few apparently inflexible givens need not have elicited the categorical criticism that has dominated comment on his writing. The often rigid focus by the critics on terms such as 'dualism,' 'mysticism,' 'spiritualism,' 'religiosity'

has so occupied the critics that they have neglected the novels' exploratory character: by relying on categories many have ignored the author's evolutionary style. Alan Lawson states the case well:

All of White's novels have an exploratory structure: that is, they approach definition by progressive approximation, and the tentativeness and prevarication are a function of this. The novels evolve through the *developing* perception of *fallible* central characters in whom much of the novelist's viewpoint is only apparently invested. This, of course, leaves readers uneasy and uncertain; the cryptic, enigmatic, ironic, and satiric elements, instead of limiting interpretation, usually demand interpretative pluralism.⁶

In my view the 'exploratory structure' of White's fiction has been much more evident since *The Vivisector*. A fundamental misunderstanding of White's position in relation to the characters in *The Vivisector* may account for some of the hostile criticism the novel has received. Some critics have commented on Hurtle Duffield as though he were an uncomplicated extension of Patrick White, and as though White endorses fully his excessive egotism. Rather than regard Hurtle Duffield as White, however, it is more rewarding to see in the developing of Duffield the author's way of exploring the nature of the artistic sensibility in an individual. Through Duffield, White explores the creative process, and the peculiar problems and joys that confront the artist. In other words White appears to come to understand the artist the better as he writes the novel. In the course of depicting the artist, White at times seems to endorse an act by Duffield: for instance, the need for isolation. But there are other times when he seems disgusted for example, when Duffield smears his self portrait with excrement. White sharply reveals what Duffield is unaware of: the extent of the latter's self disgust at the depth of egotism reflected in the painting. The movement of the plot seems generated by doubt and possibility. Duffield feels doubt about the vision he captures in his paintings, and it is this that impels him to continue trying: of course, the tantalizing possibility of achieving the ultimate vision always exists.

So too in *The Eye of the Storm*, Mrs Hunter, Basil and Dorothy Hunter seem to reach towards a state of better appreciation of their respective selves by way of exploration and approximation. Again, the plot is motivated by doubt and possibility. The same can be said of Mrs Ellen Roxburgh in *A Fringe of Leaves*, and Eddie Twyborn, whose exploration is perhaps the most intense.

I have chosen to concentrate on *The Vivisector*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *A Fringe of Leaves* and *The Twyborn Affair* because these novels may well represent the peak of White's achievement as a novelist. White's style of writing here is more assured than in

6. Alan Lawson, 'Meaning and Experience: A Review Essay on Some Recurrent Problems in Patrick White Criticism,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979), p.287.

some of his previous works. In addition to the often remarked sensitivity to colour and light, and the sharp eye for the idiosyncratic detail in a character (e.g. Shuard 'easing his fat crutch'), in these later novels White's prose is interestingly experimental. For example, he frequently fragments his sentences to great effect, often by using a subordinate as an independent clause:

It was so deadly important that he should burn the incriminating evidence: when the incinerator began to roar; and he was led easily enough back into the house. (*TV*, p.490)

The structure 'when the incinerator began to roar' functions as an independent clause, separate from both the preceding and following main clauses. It separates two main clauses as it stands incongruous, and incomplete. This is an instance where a syntactic structure attempts to emulate events. The intrusive spontaneity of the act of burning is aptly captured by the almost haphazard, less grammatical position of the 'when' clause.

In other cases, White's use of a subordinate as an independent creates a sense of echo: the present structure's lingering link with several related sentences:

When Curly had to come in. (*TA*, p.54)

The structure's isolation in its own paragraph seems further to argue for its vitality as a loaded summary of what has gone on, with 'when' serving as the lingering conjunction with preceding related sentences.

White's comedy is also of interest, as is his strange sense of beauty. Sometimes both combine as he dwells on the exotic:

Far more ominous those full moons the eyes of chattering female macaws and parakeets, their stare levelled at interlopers from beneath wrinkled mauve-to-azure lids. In contrast to the females their no less watchful, for the greater part elderly escorts, lids blackened by digestive ailments and insomnia; in more than one instance a single smoky pearl pinned into what must be a grizzled chest. (*TA*, p.83)

The baroque style White uses here suggests an exotic beauty in the aged, an attraction uniquely their own. There are quite a few instances in White's later fiction where an essentially unattractive situation is subtly suffused with a strange brilliance all its own. For instance Lotte Lippmann's grotesque dance of death in *The Eye of the Storm* appears to transcend itself and attain an ineffable beauty; the same could be said of the shrill brilliance Lotte Lippmann achieves in death. It seems that in White's fiction any situation, no matter how rank, has a latent beauty of its own; Spurgeon's boil in *A Fringe of Leaves* serves to awaken Austin Roxburgh's humanity; '... a bowl of fat with fur growing out of its skin' in *The Eye of the Storm* (p.165), appears to have a peculiar attraction in itself. Manly Johnson correctly remarks that White looks for the radical human qualities of charity, toleration, and love 'amidst the stench of life at its rankest.'⁷

7. Manly Johnson, 'Twyborn: the Abbess, the Bulbul, and the Bawdy House,' *Modern Fiction Studies* 27 (1981), p.64.

Perhaps it is for this reason that White almost always impresses one as revelling in decay, the grotesque situation. His fiction is populated by strange people of various kinds: the hunchback, Rhoda Courtney; homosexuals, Cecil Cutbush, Maurice Caldicott; incestuous siblings, Dorothy and Basil Hunter; an escaped convict and adulterous woman, Jack Chance and Mrs Roxburgh and a bawd, Mrs Trist. The absurd, the grotesque, the twisted situation are used by White to energize his fiction. Through them he attempts to explore 'the radical human qualities.'

On the other hand White's insistence on the unpleasant detail has not endeared him to some critics who have complained of too much 'physicality' in his fiction. They seem to find Duffield's frequent extended stays in the dunny particularly offensive. What such critics are unable to appreciate is White's recurring intimation that beauty and ugliness, love and hate like exteriority and inwardness, reality and fantasy or mysticism are so intertwined that they are inseparable. In White's world, God is reflected in the 'subsiding mound of human excrement,' in the hen in the dust as much as in the azure of the sky. As in Duffield's paintings the crucial factor is perspective.

Each chapter in this study of White discusses one novel, the sequence being chronological. This arrangement enables me to focus on aspects of ambivalence and scepticism as they appear in each novel, for though White's novels are related each one is at the same time very different. Chronological treatment also enables one to see how once rather tentative issues have evolved into major concerns in White's fiction. For instance, it might be argued that the genesis of *The Twyborn Affair* lies in the following opaque statement by Miss Scrimshaw:

Every woman has secret depths with which even she, perhaps, is unacquainted, and which sooner or later must be troubled. (*FL*, p.17)

In its turn *A Fringe of Leaves* appears to develop from Mrs Hunter's experiences at Brumby Island. Mrs Hunter herself seems to be a composite of Mrs Courtney, Olivia (Boo) Davenport, and Hero Pavloussi. It is possible to trace such developments throughout White's fiction. Consequently, *The Vivisector*, concerned as it is with paring the rind in order to reach the kernel, seems to provide the best entry into White's somewhat closely related later fiction - fiction characterized by greater length and complexity.

CHAPTER 1

DOUBT AS THE IMPULSE FOR EXPLORATION: THE VIVISECTOR

The world of the artist White creates in *The Vivisector* is shown to be fraught with doubt, ambivalence and scepticism. Hurtle Duffield's preternatural artistic sensibility seems to forestall the possibility of satisfaction in achievement. The quest for truth and for a comprehensive vision appears to ensure that the artist is forever searching. The phases of Duffield's 'interim solutions' are marked by the paintings that he produces. Each phase is in turn abandoned as he discovers that it does not at all reflect truth as he intuits it.

Hurtle Duffield's mature painting career begins with the Nance Lightfoot phase and its associated paintings: 'Marriage of Light,' 'Electric City,' 'Animal Rock Forms'; it further develops through the encounter with Cecil Cutbush which provides the impulse behind 'Lantana Lovers under Moonfire'; and then there are Hero Pavloussi, the smallgoods girl, Mothersole and, finally, Kathy Volkov. Each of these characters provides a kind of regenerative womb for Duffield which enables him to produce more paintings. Most of the paintings have an obvious sexual bias, for apparently two reasons. First, Duffield is celebrating in his paintings his or other people's sexual experience. At another level, sex with his mistresses seems to trigger in Duffield complex psychological associations recalling the stifling possessiveness of Maman. The basis for the last appears to lie in Maman's attempts to violate him sexually when he is at Sunningdale: the experience has left an indelible impression on his memory. In addition, it is Maman who introduces him to formal education in painting. In that cultural milieu Hurtle discovers that truth or reality is hopelessly smothered by pretensions, impenetrable façades of conventions. In visual terms the padded door, the thick carpets and the dim lights of Mrs Courtney's octagonal room seem to represent both the extent of the cushioned unreality of this world, and the gestation of Hurtle's creativity that Sunningdale will provide. So much like a womb, the octagonal room is at once protective and oppressive.

Hurtle Duffield's 'priestly' vocation in life is to reach the core beneath the illusion of reality. For, as Ben Nicholson's epigraph points out:

... painting and religious experience are the same thing, and what we are all searching for is the understanding and realization of infinity.

Considering the seeming diversity of truth, Duffield's task is infinitely difficult, almost unachievable. Hence the central symbol for the artist's vision in the novel is of fractured glass reflecting a multiplicity of images: perspectives of truth. The symbol has its beginning in the chandelier baptism Hurtle receives in the Courtneys' house:

And at once he was received by his other world: of silence and beauty. He touched the shiny porecelain shells. He stood looking up through the chandelier, holding his face almost flat, for the light to trickle and collect on it. (p.32)

The chandelier suggests several possibilities for the artist: it seems to show the brilliance of the artist's perceptions; the many sidedness of truth of his portrayal; and its sharp cutting edges connect the chandelier with the broken glass motif and the central theme of vivisection.¹

Vivisection and the almost infinite irreducibility of truth constitute the central concerns of the novel, and by implication, the concerns of the artist. Even as a child Hurtle Duffield is depicted as having an uncanny ability for attempting to reach the centre of things; a capacity that alienates him from his relations.

There was so much of him that didn't belong to his family. He could see them watching him, wanting to ask him questions. Sometimes they did, and he answered, but the answers weren't the ones they wanted. They looked puzzled, even hurt. (p.14)

Hurtle assumes a role similar to that of the white pullet described on the first page: 'Because [he is] different' other people always 'peck' at him. He becomes Sid Cupple's bell possum, always on the run trying to reach an ever retreating body of humanity:

Till we tied a bell round the neck of this 'ere animal - see? Soon as 'e run after 'is mates, the mob of possums began ter disappear. It was the blessed bell - see? It was like this possum 'ud gone off 'is nut. Put the wind up the 'sane' buggers. (p.109)

The feeling that Hurtle Duffield is reading their thoughts, understanding them better than is normal in a child, makes other people resent him. Consequently often he has to pretend in order to please. We see this when, to impress Mrs Courtney, he speaks like a book. But again he is not an ordinary child:

Hurtle knew better than everybody, than all these anyway, Sid Cupples included; not that he could have explained what he knew: because he saw rather than thought. (p.106)

Hurtle Duffield's sense of alienation is to be aggravated by his being sold and adopted. For even among his real relatives and parents at Cox Street, Hurtle had felt remote, distanced:

1. Robert S. Baker, in 'Romantic Onanism in Patrick White's *The Vivisector*,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979), argues that the vivisectionary aspects of Duffield's artistic vocation are also reflected in the cutting edges of the baptismal chandelier.

There were times when Mumma didn't exactly love him less. It was as if he made her nervous, as if she had lost control of him, worst of all, control of his thoughts

When you were left alone with Pa he got the frightened look. The lines looked deeper that ran from his yellow nose almost to his blue chin, the eyebrows bristled worse, and the chocolate eyes began to flicker. (p.17)

Of course, Hurtle is further alienated in the Courtney family, but he promptly learns the guises which make life bearable. As Maman's and Father's remarks reveal, significant among these is language:

'Don't say "eh",' said Maman. 'It sounds common'

Father said 'We only didn't want to throw you to the lions before you'd learnt the same roar.' (p.122)

In adopting him as their child the Courtneys want to transform Hurtle from a 'common' Cox Street intelligent child into a 'genuine' Courtney with a 'correct' grammar and accent. But as the narrative further reveals a 'correct' accent is a relative quality because in London the whole Courtney family has to unlearn Australian which is considered substandard and colonial. In the same way the acceptable accent in London is regarded as an affectation in Australia.

The point being made here is that there are no absolutes in White's *The Vivisector*. Acceptability or the truth of a thing, as in the case of a person's pronunciation, may depend on a number of factors such as context, perspective, disposition. Any situation, achievement, or condition is therefore susceptible to refinement, redefinition, modification and further refinement, redefinition, modification *ad infinitum*. The movement of the plot in fact seems to derive from the persistence of dissatisfaction or doubt about interim achievements, and the existence of a dazzling possibility that an absolute solution can be attained: the realization of an all-encompassing synthesis of truth in a painting. But we will come back to this. For the moment let us briefly examine the way the novel is structured.

Hurtle Duffield's story is essentially composed of three parts. The first part, mostly presented through Hurtle's eyes, concerns his childhood at Cox Street and at Sunningdale. White captures the feeling of our seeing things through Hurtle's eyes by the use of simple short sentences (or fragments of sentences), the use of simple vocabulary, and sometimes the piling up of unrelated ideas. (The last may show how a child's mind may be expected to wander.)

Got out after that. Sand between your toes across the yard. The little, sharp, scratchy pebbles. Will was flopping around in the bed like a paralysed fowl. White eyelids. Glad of your brother to stop the shivers. Mothers and fathers, whoever they were, really didn't matter: it was between you and Death or something.

And now Mumma was combing out dandruff because Courtneys had asked for him. Well, he would swallow down what he had overheard

After they had passed Taylor Square, after they had got far enough on, Mumma walked with scarcely a word. Because of their important business they had left Sep with Mrs Burt, who had her new baby, and would give theirs a suck. (p.55)

The last sentence is interesting because it subtly conveys the sense of a word-for-word echoing of what someone older might have said. The structure 'who had her new baby, and would give theirs a suck' in its complexity and well-formedness contrasts significantly with the earlier structures. In the verbatim repetition here, White underscores Hurtle's small age.

In this first section of the novel White depicts Hurtle Duffield as a child of exceptional abilities. His responses to colour, light, and texture seem exceedingly developed for his age. In so far as he understands music it is through the medium of colour:

He did not understand music, but the idea of it refreshed him, as the coloured notes trickled from the darkened shops into the light of day. (p.46)

A tree in the sun with bees flying in it is perceived in light imagery:

Through the window there was a small tree whose greenish-white papery flowers were crumbling worlds of light and bees. (p.50)

Though some instances of Hurtle's responses may seem to verge on the melodramatic, White nevertheless succeeds in establishing his artist as a uniquely endowed individual. His gift as an artist, of course, sets him apart, and White hints that this is the inevitable fate of such characters. Thus, even though Mrs Courtney likes his juvenile painting of her, she apparently cannot help flinching from some of its penetrating insight:

'Do you see me like that? You've given me a melon chest.' (p.93)

It is important to notice the centrality of fate in the shaping of Hurtle Duffield's life. White suggests that Hurtle's almost instinctive understanding of such events as Mr Shewcroft's suicide, and his entry of Rhoda's room at St Yves de Trégor at just the moment when she is naked show the extent to which he is fated to be what he is:

He had decided to go into Rhoda's room, for no clear reason: he was drawn in that direction. As soon as he began to make the move he tried to stop himself, but couldn't. (p.131)

The same is true of the prediction of the planchette. The burden of hurting in the pursuit of truth is not of Hurtle Duffield's own volition. Like Rhoda's hump, there is little or nothing to be done about it. Similarly Hurtle's insight into people which in turn alienates him is a further symptom of his fated role as an artist. Therefore, White seems to suggest, Hurtle's increasing sense of alienation, beginning with his separation from his real family and exacerbated later by his enlisting in order not to be near the quasi-

incestuous Mrs Courtney, accord with his destined role. The other events such as Mr Courtney's death, Maman's marrying Julian Boileau and their subsequent settling in England, confirm Hurtle's inescapable condition of isolation.

The second part of the novel, which deals with Hurtle Duffield's life in Europe during the war, is conveyed through recollections and a series of letters his adopted family write him. Like Eddie Twyborn in *The Twyborn Affair*, Hurtle Duffield makes his contribution to the war. Both presumably find the event uniquely uninspiring as they do not dwell on it at all. In the case of Eddie Twyborn a point is made of losing distinguished service decorations. And Duffield is quite explicit about the unimportance of war to the artist: 'The war years' he says 'are too remote from art - from life, you might say - for any kind of artist. You have to get through them - intellectually, at least - the quickest way possible' (p.401).

Also in the second part, Hurtle Duffield attempts a formal adult training in painting. While working as a kitchen hand in France, he associates with some second rate artists. This does not come to much. It is at an inlet of Sydney Harbour that the drama of his life as a mature artist begins. Hurtle Duffield's encounter with Nance Lightfoot promptly establishes sex as the enabling condition of his artistic expression. The link between sex and art will predominate throughout Duffield's vocation as an artist.

Hurtle Duffield's first significant painting 'Marriage of Light' draws its inspiration from the sexual experience he has with Nance Lightfoot. Other subsequent paintings such as 'Electric City,' 'Animal Rock Forms,' in one way or another express Duffield's and Nance's sexuality. Later more important paintings such as 'Lantana Lovers under Moonfire,' and 'Girl at Piano' further show the centrality of sex in Hurtle's artistic expression. On noticing the connection between imagination and sex, John Docker writes:

Imagination and sexuality are continuous terms, the depth and power of each being interdependent. If the artist feels he is painting successfully, he will ejaculate his semen - like paint on the passive, female canvas.²

But the canvas is not exactly passive, and its equation with the female seems singularly unrevealing. Of course, Hurtle conceives of successful painting as a 'drawn-out orgasm' and failed painting is imaged as masturbation. But his relationship with the female is certainly more dynamic than the one he has with the canvas. This is so when it is considered that in Duffield's life the influence of Maman, in particular, and Mumma never seem to diminish. Besides the explicit statement: 'Of all those who came and

2. John Docker, 'Patrick White and Romanticism: *The Vivisector*,' *Southerly* 33 (1973), p.48.

went, none was more terrible than Maman' (p.251), there are numerous occasions when subtle and not-so-subtle echoes of Maman intrude into Duffield's life. In the first place, the presence of Nance Lightfoot evokes memories of Maman:

She might have learnt it from Maman herself, who rose like a genie of the scent bottle, accusing him of faithlessness: to a class which had adopted him; to the education invested in him; to a love not so very different, which smelled of melting chocolate and illicit brandy, instead of musty poundcake and a whore's powder. Maman was sniffing, though. (p.232)

In another sexual scene, again involving Nance, the following recollection ensues:

Everybody, it seemed even Maman, he remembered, had experienced the original thaw; so he fitted his mouth into Nance's similar one, and they were throbbing together in the painfully bright light of memory. (p.201)

Maman acts as an ever-present irritant to Duffield. In one sense he seems to be in constant flight from her inhibiting possessiveness. But as is clearly obvious, he cannot lay to rest the ghost of Maman's influence. For, as Robert S. Baker aptly writes:

The female characters of *The Vivisector* are, to varying degrees, avatars of Alfreda Courtney, who remains in Duffield's mind as the archetype of the threatening female.³

This in part explains why Duffield has no lasting relationship with women. The other side of his character which insists on using the female as a mere source of inspiration, a vessel in which to shape his feelings, frustrates the possibility of getting too deeply involved. Isolation in Duffield's case is necessary for his artistic expression. He fears that Nance Lightfoot and Hero Pavloussi intend to try to possess him completely, and he must resist this. And in any case his own artistic temperament, which refuses to be fixed in any one mould, but inclines him to doubt any achievement and always to wish to explore beyond the present, does not make for the kind of man Nance and Hero would want. Consequently, Nance is hurt and so is, perhaps, Duffield. As Nance observes, however, Duffield seems inhuman:

That's the trouble, Hurtle That's what you aren't. You aren't a 'uman being. (p.224)

The remark in part shows the competing tensions in Duffield which dictate that at once he needs and does not need Nance. For as soon as Nance leaves him, he longs for her presence, but as soon as she arrives to visit him he wishes she had not come. At the same time Nance's statement conveys the extent of Duffield's commitment to his art which impresses her as cruelty. But this is also egotism: Duffield's overriding belief that anything is worthwhile only to the degree that it rejuvenates and enhances his creativity. It is the last which finally appears to break Nance Lightfoot. Duffield's self-portrait reveals to her the depths of his egotism:

3. Robert S. Baker, *op. cit.*, p.214.

She made it look devilish: furtive,ingrown, all that he had persuaded himself it wasn't, and worse than anything else - bad, not morally, but aesthetically.

'There,' she said, holding her torch. 'That's Duffield. Not bad. *True Lovun 'imself*'. (p.248)

'Lovun 'imself' perhaps is all that Duffield is capable of; later in an effort to write a letter to Kathy Volkov, he is able only to assert 'I am': the beginning and the end, nothing and everything. The novel suggests that Nance's suicide stems from the realization of failure, failure to arouse in Duffield feelings similar to her own. The narrative also intimates that Nance Lightfoot's death expresses some aspects of Duffield's multifaceted vision of truth; the vivisectionary quality of the quester is implied by the splintered glass imagery which links the image with the chandelier, the shattered silver lustre jug, and with the brandy bottle Duffield throws in the gorge after a visit by Maurice Caldicott.

In the meantime the sunlight had sharpened. Its glass teeth met with glass. Along the ironstone ledge directly below the house an explosion had taken place, he realized: of glass, and less spectacularly, flesh. The splintered glass almost rose from the rock to slash his conscience, but the flesh made no move to accuse. Nance in her black dress was lying like an old bashed umbrella on a dump. (p.252)

William T. Scheick has commented well on the kind of beauty Nance Lightfoot has here. It is a beauty, he argues, that is born of pain:

Through the mystery of light's *slashing* penetration of darkness, of its wound-like opening suggestive of the generation of being out of void, beauty emerges, a *shrill* beauty correspondent to the Gothic grace of humanity.⁴

At the same time, the regenerative significance of the event is conveyed by the symbolic fertilization of the gorge by both Nance and the Sun. Her unspectacular body and the brilliance of shattered glass appear to indicate the leitmotif in White's fiction of the constant coexistence of dross and beauty. The novel presents Nance Lightfoot's death as an instance of the ambiguous interaction and copresence of creation and destruction. Nance's death encompasses the destruction of her body as well as Duffield's transition to another painting phase: it is simultaneously an end and a beginning. At the same time it suggests a kind of failure on Duffield's part: while he is able to animate rocks he induces the death of a woman he might have loved. In essence we appear to have an image of an artist engaged in a dynamic dialectic of creation and destruction. Whether or not Duffield's self-portrait is creative is problematic in the light of Nance's regenerative death: perspective may determine interpretation. In either case ambivalence and scepticism seem to be the only stable concepts. Many years after the incident, Hurtle Duffield is still not certain of his role in Nance's death:

4. William T. Scheick, 'The Gothic Grace and Rainbow Aesthetic of Patrick White's Fiction: An Introduction,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979), p.142.

They couldn't decide - whether it was suicide or accidental death. Or murder. Well, of course it wasn't murder - because I'm here. She could only have fallen over. She was drunk - and maniacal. That's what they decided. It was too obvious. (p.258)

The best judge in the circumstances is Duffield's own conscience; and that seems uncertain too.

The birth of 'Lantana Lovers under Moonfire' further reveals the complexity that underlies creative painting. To begin with lantana is a singularly uninspiring bush. That the lovers entangle in such a bush could suggest the banality, even sordidness of their sexual experience. In addition, Cecil Cutbush's masturbatory ejaculations in the direction of the lovers strike one as especially disgusting. And yet it is from such a twisted situation that a painting that attempts to capture some aspects of God is produced. Hero Pavloussi's intuitive understanding of the painting (and one recalls that White rates intuition above the intellect), Cecil Cutbush's later role as a kind of nurse to the 'stroked' Duffield, and the artist's own statement all underline the spiritual nature of the painting:

He had something rotten about him, but only slightly, humanly rotten in the light of the Divine Destroyer. I mean the grocer's attempts at evil are childlike beside the waves of enlightened evil proliferating from above; and he usually ends by destroying himself. (p.336)

This is an instance of creative scepticism which reveals the endlessness of possibilities in the narrative by showing God co-existing in the painting with the homosexual and promiscuous lovers. God, the Divine Destroyer, is portrayed as a 'shitting moon'. The moon may seem an inappropriate 'objective correlative' for the vindictive function assigned to it. White's intention appears to be to reverse the conventionally peaceful associations of the moon by introducing an exotic violence all of its own (in something like the way T.S. Eliot reverses the associations of spring: April is the cruellest month, breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and desire, stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain). Further, the painting seems to reveal the ambiguous presence of creation and destruction in God. Portrayed as the moon, the Divine Destroyer appears simultaneously to fertilize and shit on the lovers in the lantana bush. The novel suggests an ambivalent role for God, the greatest vivisector, which role is similar to that of the artist in society. Hurtle's creations are quite destructive as Nance's death and Hero's attempted suicide suggest.

The novel also shows a degree of interdependence between creativity and degradation. What is meant here is that the artist, Hurtle Duffield, seems to require dirty surroundings and disorganization in order to be creative:

He might have told her that, in his case, the only life he could recognize as practical was the one lived inside his skull, and though he could carry this with him throughout what is called the world, it already contained seeds created by

a process of self-fertilization which germinated more freely in their natural conditions of flaking plaster, rust deposits, balding plush, and pockets of dust enriched with cobweb. (p.391)

Duffield's paintings appear to feed on dirt in his house, Nance's life of prostitution, Cutbush's homosexuality and Hero's sexual lust. Like White's own writing, Duffield's paintings are energized by the seemingly degraded condition. Thus the narrative appears to point at the infinite possibilities which can be derived from any condition. This is a kind of productive scepticism that accepts that beauty can emerge even from the most degraded situation.

Another aspect of White's work concerns the role of society or other people in the life of the creative artist. As the preceding quotation suggests, Duffield believes he has the capacity to inspire himself and therefore does not need society. Some critics, notably John Docker, have made much of this:

For Hurtle, sensibility is formed in the womb - by, that is, a universal act of nature, and hence is not dependent on any specific society or line of history, particularly the Australian, socialite society around him, with its 'archetypal parties'. Hurtle's sensibility cannot be improved on by living in society, only repressed.⁵

The problem here stems from adopting an either-or position in the argument. The evidence in the novel suggests that Duffield is uncertain about the exact nature of the relationship between himself and society as a source of inspiration. Duffield uses Maman, Nance, Cutbush and Hero as sources of inspiration for his paintings. Though he finds Maman, Nance and Hero repressive, his paintings are, on the whole, dependent on them for motivation; Maman, in particular, has acted as a necessary irritant. Thus Duffield's ambiguous view of society's role in his creative work seems like an aspect of his creative scepticism: he distrusts the influence society has on his work, and yet he depends on it quite considerably. Even though Duffield feels he is on the fringes of society, and believes he needs to be there to assert his creative independence, he also needs to be inside society to obtain inspiration from it. Thus simultaneously he needs and rejects society.

A second weakness in John Docker's remarks on Duffield's independence as an artist could be explained in terms of the critic's reliance on the so called 'oracular statements'⁶ in the novel. This is the problem a critic faces because of relying too heavily on a statement or two from the narrative to support his argument. An approach of this kind may conveniently ignore other statements, or indeed incidents that contradict the critic's chosen 'oracle'. With the present argument on self-inspiration

5. John Docker, *op. cit.*, p.47.

6. Alan Lawson, 'Meaning and Experience: a review essay on some recurrent problems in Patrick White criticism,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979), p.280.

John Docker's assertion about Duffield's absolute independence from society appears purposely not to consider the influence on the artist of Maman, Nance, Cutbush, Hero, Mothersole and Kathy. If he considered these characters' influence, he would contradict his own argument. But what requires to be accepted by critics is that contradiction is an aspect of White's fiction. Some characters in White's fiction lie to themselves and others, do not know they are lying because they do not know themselves, assert views which later they contradict, modify their positions or change completely.

The novel provides a lot of evidence to support the view that Maman's influence on Duffield has not diminished. For instance, on one occasion the narrator comments:

While Maman's voice reminded him, he dusted himself with a handkerchief: it was about as close as Maman and Nance would ever come to meeting. (p.204)

Later we are told:

He realized his heart was beating as it used to sometimes while he found the courage to speak the truth in front of Maman. His repeated downfall was his longing to share the truth with somebody specific who didn't want to receive it. Was it why he had failed so far in love. (p.360)

In contrast, overt references to the influence on Duffield of Cox Street are scanty in the novel; perhaps the only painting evincing the pain of separation from Mumma is the one depicting a broken umbilical cord. In addition the Chubb's Lane side of his house recalls Cox Street. As in most things, Duffield seems unresolved about his real family as well as his adopted one. The material deprivations of his real family seem to have been transformed into a stifling possessiveness in his adopted one. Neither situation is exactly ideal for the development of an artistic sensibility. But the narrative suggests that each does in fact provide a crucial impetus for such a sensibility to develop. As White seems to feed on human weakness in his fiction, one might suggest Duffield needs those 'warped' backgrounds to heighten his creative responses to life.

Through Duffield's relationship with Hero Pavloussi the novel seems to explore the issues of ambivalence and multiple possibilities in connection with the concept of redemption as it is used in orthodox Christianity. Hero's sexual desire is promptly established as excessive:

It might have sounded like talking to himself in an empty room if she hadn't again uttered that animal mumbled sound.

He couldn't tempt her: whereas she had been so hungry on arrival he had hardly closed the door on the street before she fell on him ravenously, propelling him with her greed somewhere that remained unlocated till he thumped against the padded shoulder of an old dusty sofa and cannoned off the corner of a crashing what-not. (p.348)

The pattern is set and each subsequent sexual experience appears to follow the same path to the sofa. Like Nance before her, Hero is to Duffield an avatar of Maman. So the relationship is transient, because Duffield continues to feel (as previously) that '... total love must be resisted: it is overwhelming, like religion' (p.177).

Duffield's and Hero's experiences at Perialos show the extent of the novel's doubts about religious mystery cures. The depiction of the abbess here so severely undercuts her spiritual standing that she could not be the one to offer mystery healing to Hero Pavloussi:

The abbess appeared with a suddenness and elasticity which made him wonder if she was wearing anything under her habit. She was of medium height, neither young nor old, neither plain nor pretty, but so agile, so supple. He saw her on the day bed rather than the upright chair she chose ... Sometimes it was Hero on the day bed, sometimes the abbess; at times it was Hero in the abbess's habit, at others the abbess exposing her supple odalisque contours. In each case, hands were plaited behind the head, elbows cocked at the viewer. (p.385)

The experiences at Perialos disillusion Hero Pavloussi. Through her loss of confidence in the 'saints' of Perialos, the narrative suggests an ambiguous view to sources of cure. Instead of depending on the hermit and nuns for spiritual cure, the novel presents almost infinite possibilities from which such cures could be obtained. The scene that concludes this section of the novel makes a significant comment on the sources of spiritual healing:

The golden hen flashed her wings: not in flight; she remained consecrated to this earth even while scurrying through illuminated dust. (p.393)

The suggestion seems to be that Hero needs to search in her putrid self, in ordinary life for qualities that will redeem her from the perceived state of unwholesomeness. But such a redemption implies acceptance. The novel indicates that she has to realize that her real self comprises both the part which aspires to the spiritual, and the other which is sensual; these supposedly contradictory qualities make up Hero's authentic self.

An examination of the character of Cosmas Pavloussis suggests that the concepts of generosity, or goodness, and evil are themselves fraught with uncertainty. Hero feels that her soul is putrid, though it is not at all clear what is rotten about it. Her defection from Cosmas seems acceptable, even morally justified in the light of the severity of his restrictions on her life. Looking at it closely Cosmas plants the sense of self-loathing in Hero by his seemingly boundless generosity. The paradox of Hero's predicament lies in the fact that Cosmas effectively destroys her freedom of choice by allowing her nearly endless choice. The question the novel appears to raise here concerns the category called evil. Cosmas's almost infinite generosity affects Hero as evil because it creates the feelings of guilt that we see in her. It is perhaps this quality of subtly engendering a troubled conscience which has led some critics to ascribe to Cosmas's character an indeterminate evil. It all begins at Olivia Davenport's dinner party where Cosmas is portrayed in these terms:

In brushing against one whose eyes invoked the particular of which the generality is composed, Pavloussis shied away. 'Wonderful people! Beautiful house! My wife is enjoying herself,' he pronounced, still smiling, not for his particular examiner, but for a whole abstract cosmos. (p.312)

Much later into the dinner party the narrator comments:

He was still wearing the abstracted smile, which might or might not have acknowledged his wife's sign. It was more likely directed at the whole and nothing of the room, while Monaghan the banker talked on at him. (p.316)

There is an almost infantile side to Cosmas's character, a trait that recalls the sickly Austin Roxburgh in *A Fringe of Leaves*. His 'It is too fat, and too pink' (p.321), and interest in the whorled marbles, both instances of child-like behaviour, do not anticipate his apparent callousness shown in the drowning of cats. Above all his treatment of Soso, the Aboriginal girl, as a commodity reveals to a large extent the degree of his mercenariness. In the last there is little that is subtle. But the strength of the evil associated with Cosmas does not really stem from this. Cosmas's ambiguous evil arises from his very acts of kindness and generosity. It is as if excessive kindness might itself be evil. The novel is sceptical about how absolute concepts such as generosity, kindness and evil are. It reveals a common ground these concepts seem to share where their differentiating values are blurred.

In the section dealing with the smallgoods girl the author attempts to show the uncertainty or open-mindedness with which concepts like 'essence' and 'superficial' need to be considered. Duffield has been working on the 'Furniture' paintings: the effort directed at pinning down 'the essence of table and chair-ness of chair.' Something the smallgoods girl says makes Duffield realise the dishonesty in his 'Furniture' paintings. As he comments:

... there's dishonest furniture, just as there are dishonest human beings. But take an honest-to-God kitchen table, a kitchen chair. What could be more real? I've had immense difficulty reaching the core of that reality, in I don't know how many attempts, but think I may have done it at last - or thought so until this morning: when everything died on me none of the paintings of a lifetime - had any life. (p.404)

The distinction between the essential and the superficial, core and periphery is central to White's aesthetics. In White's world the supposed superficial phenomena are so much an integral part of the essence, as the essence is in its turn constitutive of the surface of things. By the same token, the centre is reflected in the periphery in much the same way as the periphery is contained in the centre. (The opposition between these apparently mutually exclusive qualities is subverted in the fiction.) Therefore it is not surprising that Duffield is shown to fail to reach 'the chairness of the chair' because that is an illusion equal to Hero's search for miraculous healing. Duffield has as yet to discover that what he calls dishonest furniture is as much constitutive of the essence as is his so called honest furniture. The ambiguity present in either centre or periphery allows for multiple possibilities of not just regarding these commonly opposed concepts but also of subverting fundamental human categories. Perhaps it is for this reason that the novel appears to suggest that art is prostitution in the same way that prostitution is art. And cruelty is kindness in the same way that kindness is cruelty.

The penultimate phase of Duffield's painting career, which involves Rhoda Courtney and Kathy Volkov, further reveals the artist's persistent uncertainty. Though Duffield expresses the view that he needs Rhoda in order to convey what he has to, he is still unresolved about his feelings for her; she arouses in him such conflicting emotions of love and hate that he fails to interact with her consistently. (Of course Duffield himself is a capricious character.) Having just said that he needs Rhoda's company in his house, the narrator comments thus on Duffield's feelings:

He could feel her hand, her laughter running over his hair like birds or mice.
(p.450)

The image of birds and mice suggests the polarity of the feelings of simultaneous attraction and revulsion that Rhoda evokes in Duffield. This is the kind of tension that predominates in Duffield after he is reunited with Rhoda. In this instance, even as Duffield and Rhoda appear to enjoy their breakfast, the narrator points at an aspect of Rhoda's character which creates a sense of unease:

It was agreeable to prolong breakfast; though neither of them had ever admitted to enjoying its luxury, unless through irritation: which is another luxury Rhoda was at her most relaxed, her most cat-like, surrounded by her complacent cats, as she read the morning papers, particularly the advertisements and deaths. (p.599)

It is evident here that Rhoda is relaxed in the manner of cats: superficially at ease, but quite ready to pounce at an adversary. In Rhoda White presents a complex character. She represents some of the values we find in Maman because sometimes she seems repressive to Duffield. But she is also a quester, an artist in her own right. As the following examples from the novel show, what Duffield achieves through paint, Rhoda does through language:

I know you think of me on and off, because a relationship like ours is at a deeper level - like a conscience I think I was hoping to offer people something more acceptable than myself. Now I realize I shall never be anything but that, and must try to make it a truthful work. (p.175)

Sometimes her unsparing remarks seem cruel, and yet possess some truth:

Your painting. And yourself. But those, too, are 'gods' which could fail you.
(p.518)

Comments such as the preceding create the sense of uncertainty that we see in the relationship between Duffield and Rhoda. These two do not exactly love or hate each other. Their relationship is in a state of continual flux. The doubt the narrative introduces in each phase of the relationship between Rhoda and Duffield serves to point to other directions in which the relationship can develop. Instead of stagnating into a predictable pattern of interaction, Duffield's and Rhoda's relationship is full of the tensions that make it dynamic till the former's death. Even then the novel portrays Rhoda as half grieved, while her other half still behaves slyly like a cat:

Must have been Rhoda coming her mouse running skittering round the skirting-board her white squeak snout exhaling desireful powdered words into what your mouth was. (p.617)

The hearer's ultimate doubt about Rhoda's acts suggests an invitation that we regard Rhoda's relationship with Duffield as open-ended; a relationship open to multiple possibilities.

Incidents in Duffield's last phase as a painter, a period stretching between his two strokes, further demonstrate the narrative's open-endedness. This is shown by the narrative's showing of new possibilities by investing the greatest human potential in characters who might not normally be regarded as having such potential. There are two significant factors associated with this phase of Duffield's life. One is that on experiencing the first stroke Duffield was picked up by Cecil Cutbush and his wife; Cecil Cutbush is a homosexual, just like Maurice Caldicott. The latter helped Duffield by cultivating a taste for his paintings. The second factor concerns Rhoda, with the hunchback, who survives to look after Duffield after the second stroke. Cecil Cutbush, Maurice Caldicott and Rhoda Courtney are not ordinary people. But it is precisely in these three that White seems to invest some of the greatest human values in the novel. In this important respect White has departed from the usual form of character portrayal by which novelists tend to show that the physically deformed, or sexual deviants are often the embodiment of evil, or are less morally attractive. A comparison with Joseph Conrad's character presentation in *The Secret Agent* is instructive here. Conrad's depiction of characters often matches with their overall human potential. For instance, Sir Ethelred, the Secretary of State, is described as 'vast in bulk and stature' and has eyes 'with puffy lower lids'; the Chief Inspector Heat's face is 'marred by too much flesh'; Michaelis, the humanitarian idealist, is 'oppressed by layers of fat on his chest'; Verloc's vast bulk offends his Embassy employers. As it predictably turns out, the anarchists cannot bring about any destruction of present society. At the same time state security in London as depicted in *The Secret Agent* is so benighted that it cannot stop any terrorist activity. Conrad often suggests these weaknesses in the physical appearance of the characters.

In contrast, neither Rhoda Courtney's physical deformity nor her indulgence in feeding stray cats appears to diminish her stature in White's world. Indeed her stature seems enhanced by the very qualities that make her less attractive. (In an earlier novel, *The Solid Mandala*, Arthur Brown's physical grossness endears him even more to the author. This is evinced by the author's investing in him spiritual qualities that he denies Waldo, his more presentable twin brother.) Like the riders in the chariot before them, the strange characters are the heroes of *The Vivisector*.

Duffield's final painting 'The Whole of Life' is interesting as it further

demonstrates the privileged role of the physically unattractive in White's fiction. The description of the painting reads:

Cunningly, they were piling it up, detaching the difficulties one after another. (Spillikins again, he was ominously reminded.) They were all at work strewing and construing. Cec Cutbush was giggling audibly as they struggled towards the summit. Wherever their common sweat fell, the desert didn't flower, but thorns sprang up in celebration of their victory There was this day he sensed his psychopomp standing beside him. At once he began scrabbling according to direction on his rickety palette-table. He was mixing the never-yet-attainable blue. (p.616)

As Duffield's final statement, the painting's attempt to embrace people as various as Cecil Cutbush and Kathy Volkov and to assign each apparently equal credit for providing creative inspiration to the artist reiterates what is central to White's vision: the inseparability of things, the co-existence of supposed oppositions such as creativity and degradation, creation and destruction. Later, in *The Twyborn Affair*, we will see how art and prostitution, 'conventual' discipline and the running of a brothel interweave to become indistinguishable.

There are suggestions that Hurtle Duffield's ultimate vision is of God: 'I-N-DI-GO' (p.617). It is God the supreme vivisector, 'The gaps-nobody recognize' (p.616). In presenting Duffield's final vision as tentative and not categorical the narrative's ambivalence and scepticism seem perpetuated to infinity. In a sense White appears to endorse Duffield's final vision: the epiphany that comes with the transcendental attainment of a higher vision is often the ultimate aim of his favoured characters. Theodora Goodman, in *The Aunt's Story*, Arthur Brown, in *The Solid Mandala*, the riders of the chariot, and Elizabeth Hunter in *The Eye of the Storm* reach the greatest moment in their lives in a metaphysical experience akin to Duffield's second stroke. With the one exception of Mrs Hunter, the rest disappear from the narrative after such an experience. In all cases, however, White attaches the greatest significance to these intense, evanescent mystical revelations. In the same way it can be argued that the indeterminateness that accompanies Duffield's ultimate vision is, perhaps, what the narrator sees as the goal of a creative painter. This need not be surprising because the narrative intimates that God (the greatest vivisector in the novel) is always in a state of flux: the only permanence in God's world is the permanence of change.

Before concluding, it may be as well to draw attention to some instances of comedy and irony in *The Vivisector*. It is necessary to highlight White's humour because some critics have accused him of being humourless. White's awareness of moments of comedy, or dramatic irony, is continuous with his tragic vision. For instance, Cosmas Pavloussis's commendation of his wife: 'in whose taste and judgement I have every faith' (p.344) impresses one as both deeply comical and ironic. In the first

place, the compliment is being read just at a moment when Hero Pavloussi's good judgement has led her to take a lover, Duffield; as an artist Duffield will fail to appreciate her sacrifice, he will not love her. Later, her sound judgement persuades her into thinking that miraculous salvation from her sins can be attained at Perialos; her disillusionment is quite shattering. Having been separated from Duffield she ends in a mental asylum with cancer. Cosmas's line 'in whose taste and judgement I have every faith' seems to reverberate throughout the mistakes in both taste and judgement that Hero makes: the line infuses a tragicomic strain into her life's blunders.

White's finesse in conveying the comic absurdity in a situation is epitomized in the description of Duffield's and Rhoda's first meeting after a long separation:

Something extraordinary was happening: a man of distinguished head, of fairly youthful, even athletic, body, clothed, it seemed, only in the name of decency, in shirt and pants and a pair of old sandshoes, had started to blubber shamefully. Of course he was old, really; he couldn't have disguised it. As he walked along blubbering, the bugger kept blowing out his lips and sucking them in and hiccupping - well, it could have been from emotion - while leading a freak of a woman by the hand. It was the cat woman! A sour little puss herself. But what could you expect: her hump and all? As they shuffled and staggered, pulling the blood-stained cart behind them, tears had boiled up in the cat woman's cold eyes, and were running over the pink rims. (p.439)

In a different vein, White draws our attention to the social comedy which prevails at dinner parties. Through Olivia Davenport, herself a socialite, he reveals the humour underlying so called 'polished manners.' For instance, Olivia's butler's announcement is described as:

The major-domo confessed to the hostess in velvety tones that dinner was served. (p.312)

And on such occasions, White suggests, may be eaten 'the kind of soup which satisfies nobody, except possibly the cook who has sweated to clarify a convention rather than a soup' (pp.318-19).

Then there are characters bearing comical names, and depicted in a spirit of inventive humorous caricature. There is Mrs Trotter whose peculiar characteristic is presented as:

A wave had begun to rise in Mrs Trotter, from out of her bust, flooding her neck, and reaching the roots of her naturally carrot hair, till her face and throat looked completely covered with a claret birthmark. (p.272)

When the trait is again referred to in: 'The claret "birthmark" no longer rose up the muscular throat to plaster itself on the square face' (p.318), it has become a comical means of identifying Mrs Trotter. Another, Mrs Horsfall, predictably is said to be 'military looking ... in her peaked cap and studded belt' (p.272).

White's irony is both penetrating and muted. Perhaps the overriding irony in the

novel is shown in the fact that an artist of Duffield's stature is born of a bottle-oh father and washer woman. In contrast, the rich Courtneys have, as an only child, the sickly deformed Rhoda. Despite being force-fed on brains, Rhoda does not develop into the genius of their desire. Neither does she maintain her middle-class status in life, but grows to the level of an eccentric pauper. When Duffield meets her in the neighbourhood of Chubb's Lane, she is just one of the poor feeding cats with horse flesh.

White's conception of Olivia Davenport encompasses many ironies. Beautiful and a socialite, Olivia's views about sex are quite unexpected: '... I've most hated men for their lies' she says 'and presumptuousness, and their attempts to reduce love to a grotesque sexual act, I've felt that somewhere there must be some *creature*, not quite man, not quite god who will heal the wounds.' She raised her head and drew down the corners of her formal mouth. 'Perhaps that's why we look to artists of any kind, why we lose our heads over them.' (p.419)

Her rejection of sex, and the remark: 'It occurred to him on catching sight of the teeth that Boo Hollingrake still contained the kernels of reality, and that she must be able to admit to it, if only once, since she dared expose her fragile discoloured old-childish teeth' (p.415), reveal as one sided the suggestion that she may have inherited 'Mrs Courtney's over-controlled, mannered style ...'⁷ She is obviously a more complex character than the epithets 'pythonness' or 'octopus' suggest. In the first place there is a clear disjunction between Olivia's perceived real self, and the image of self she projects to society; whichever is the real self is a moot point. Nevertheless, Olivia embraces almost irreconcilable contradictions: the irony of living an essentially materialistic life, devoid of depth and reality while the other self lives a life equal in intensity and meaning to White's other illuminati, such as Christiana McBeath. The quasi-religious discipline Olivia enforces on herself is not only shown in her denial of sex, but also in the detached manner by which she deals with her numerous guests. On the other hand, her frivolous nature comes through in the meticulousness of her dress, and in her learning of several Chinese characters merely for conversation purposes. However, her taking up residence in Rome seems a further indication of Olivia's spiritual aspirations.

Some of the sense of Olivia's detached 'purity' is conveyed in the story of the death of her first husband:

When I was living with my first husband ... I experimented a little with coca I only did it to please my husband, who'd already formed the habit. He had an idea something was eluding him. He was convinced I had some secret I was keeping from him - perhaps *the* secret. As he became more degraded and desperate, he began to feel that if I joined him in taking the drug, I might share

7. John Docker, *op. cit.*, p.50.

the enlightenment he suspected me of having. So to pacify him I took to coca. And couldn't share my 'secret'. I couldn't even share his degradation. I failed him in this too! Oh, he died most horribly, in every way unsatisfied! I don't want to think about it. (p.288)

In Olivia Davenport the author has attempted to conflate two essentially different traits: the worldly or mundane, and the spiritual or metaphysical. Simultaneously Olivia belongs with the mundane Trotters and Horsfalls as much as she belongs with Hero and Duffield. White's exploration of the possibility of combining the spiritual with the worldly seems instructive in two ways: to be as worldly as Shuard, the music critic, is to be as much of a misfit as to be wholly a searcher like Duffield. On the other hand, the third alternative of combining the metaphysical and the worldly engenders its own problems of a kind of non-acceptance everywhere and anywhere. It is perhaps as a result of Olivia's self discipline that Mrs Horsfall suspects her of being a lesbian. At the same time, Duffield is not quite certain whether to trust her or not:

He even suspected that if he hadn't been present and her guests demanded appeasement, she would have denied her faith in the paintings: such was her appetite for superficiality and approval. (p.297)

What White has tried to expose through Olivia Davenport is the impossibility of attaining a mode of existence that is in every way to everyone's satisfaction.

The Vivisector explores life and truth through the medium of painting. As an artist, Hurtle Duffield would like to arrive at the essence, the core of things. Such a metaphysical vision, if he can reach it, would enable him to better understand life, truth, and God's relation with man. The search for such a vision stems from a fundamentally ambivalent and sceptical mind. And as the painting career of Duffield shows, the development of his art is almost similar to a continual whetting of his critical faculties. From one phase to the next, Duffield has shed not just techniques of painting but versions of truth. His hope has been that ultimately he would capture that higher vision in, for instance, the chairness of chair, or the collage work, or rock forms. Each abandoned phase has had its disillusioning impact on Duffield till, finally, he paints 'The Whole of Life.' As the title suggests, the painting attempts to make a statement of acceptance that truth, or the higher metaphysical vision of life, needs to encompass everything: the mound of excrement, the sexually different, the musician, the mediocre, the prostitute, the presence of Divinity in life, *ad infinitum*. The almost infinite list of all will constitute the totality of the higher vision: a vision, the narrative suggests, Duffield is granted as he dies of a second stroke on the scaffolding of his fated vocation.

Reading *The Vivisector* is therefore like embarking on a journey of exploration into the nature, and development, of the artistic sensibility. Through the experience of the novel one is brought to explore a fundamental question: Why do artists do what they

do? The answers are bound to be varied, but one of the most powerful suggestions is that they crave a more comprehensive vision of life; in other words they follow the human need to derive meaning from existence. This apparently unattainable goal forms the basis for humanity's desire for knowledge in general, in which science, religion, and art are, in different ways, aspects of the quest for order, for an all embracing vision. Uncertainty and open-mindedness underlie the search for more possibilities and infinite openness. Hurtle Duffield approaches such a vision at the moment of death, as if he had reached the transition point where the apparent subjective constraints of humanity are discarded for the seeming open objectivity of spirituality. On the other hand, *The Eye of the Storm*, to which we will now turn, dwells on a character who survives, almost as if to tell her mystical experience. The experience heightens her critical faculties, and the clinical analyses of events in her past make up the central burden of the narrative.

CHAPTER 2

DIFFICULT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: THE EYE OF THE STORM

The Eye of the Storm is primarily concerned to explore the possibilities of better and more satisfactory personal relationships between parents and their children, in particular, and among human beings, in general. Through Mrs Hunter's, Basil's and Dorothy's involved recollections, one comes to appreciate the difficulties bedevilling the attainment of mutually satisfying personal relationships. The difficulties apparently inherent in a parent-child relationship might suggest that it is almost impossible to have harmonious interaction between the two groups. Mrs Hunter herself remarks:

The worst thing about love between human beings ... when you're prepared to love them they don't want it; when they do, it's you who can't bear the idea.
(p.11)

The novel questions even the desirability of love, seeming to favour affection instead. The distinction between the two is a fine one. In personal relationships it may not be always clear which is predominant. The presence of uncertainty in human relationships generates the kinds of problems we witness between Mrs Hunter, on the one hand, and Alfred Hunter and the children, on the other: everybody seems to misunderstand everybody else's intentions and actions, bringing about, in the process, inescapable pain and frustration. For instance, Dorothy Hunter's behaviour on one occasion strikes one as spontaneous and, perhaps, genuine:

The princess fell against the bed, groping through the scents of Dettol and baby powder, to embrace, deeper than her mother, her own childhood. (p.45)

Mrs Hunter's response reveals the doubts she has about Dorothy's true intentions. Thus she appears cruel and insensitive when she says:

I can only - well, I'd *like* to explain your flying out here as lack of emotional control In any case you flew - to make sure you'd see me die - or to ask me for money if I didn't. Basil too. (p.62)

Though the comment is not wholly false, it is nevertheless painful as it is made just at one of those rare moments when Dorothy seems to feel real affection for her mother. Later in the narrative Dorothy is likewise (if unwittingly) insensitive when she intrudes upon Mrs Hunter's stillness, effectively rupturing a state of communication which the latter thought she had attained with her daughter:

This other state of unity in perfect stillness, which she hoped she was beginning

to enjoy with Dorothy, she had experienced finally with Alfred when she returned to 'Kudjeri' to nurse him in his last illness Mrs Hunter coughed out of delicacy for the feelers extended in the direction of her silent daughter. Dorothy said, after swallowing, 'I do think, darling, they ought to get you another carpet. This one is threadbare in places, particularly at the door.'

Mrs Hunter gasped and frowned. 'I haven't noticed.' Then she recovered herself. (p.61)

Mrs Hunter believes that better communication with her daughter can be achieved in perfect silence. We see a crucial difference between Mrs Hunter and Dorothy in this example. For although Mrs Hunter relies on speech to reassess her past actions, wound and bribe her husband and children, and penetrate the veils of her nurses, she is also able to communicate without speech. In contrast, Dorothy is solely dependent on speech to protect her and create her identity. By using French in Australia she shields her uncertain ego from a world she does not understand and which threatens her. Though there is nothing inherently superior in French over English, in using French Dorothy believes she appears a 'cultured' woman to the Australians who hear her. But in this Dorothy is being false to herself for she knows better that she is far from becoming a French lady. Her humiliating experiences in France when she was married to the elderly husband who always talked her down as a colonial Australian alienated her from French culture, but not completely. Hence, it is said she feels more Australian in France and feels French in Australia (p.47). There is an endless conflict within herself. She seems to be in constant flight from her real self which might be empty and which she is therefore unable to face.

On the other hand, Mrs Hunter's fated role as a searcher seems to compel her to face the various facets of her self; in the process this causes strains and difficulties with those with whom she interacts. Alfred, Basil and Dorothy Hunter themselves not 'elect,' can only misunderstand Mrs Hunter's motives. Since as a quester she 'must take many shapes before [she] finally set[s], or before [she is] more probably shattered' (pp.98-99), Mrs Hunter is often cold and indifferent to those around her as she pursues her goal. Leaving her husband and Kudjeri to live in a Sydney suburb is part of her effort to experience all, but to Alfred the decision appears callous. Similarly, Mrs Hunter's seduction of Edvard Pehl affects Dorothy as an act of whorishness, and it is indeed so. But at the same time these actions of Mrs Hunter are part of the many selves she, as a fallible quester, acknowledges and accepts.

In Mrs Hunter the author brings together rather incompatible character traits in a searcher: cruelty, deception, sensuality, possessiveness and beauty. In allowing revelation to a character with such attributes, the narrative suggests that her very human frailty is what qualifies Mrs Hunter for the elect position. This is a new development in White's portrayal of a seeker. For in his previous female questers like

Theodora Goodman and Miss Hare the author invests a convent kind of indifference to sex and a quasi-religious devotion to the search. Mrs Hunter here hints at the ambiguity she seems to represent:

... they would not have seen you as the eternal aspirant. (p.99)

But Mrs Hunter is also an actress. She is able to play several roles. For instance, when she visits the Warming family, she seems to succeed in the role of a good guest:

Mother could be heard at a distance charming her hosts with an impersonation of the character generally accepted as Elizabeth Hunter, involved for her present purpose in some mock-dramatic situation. (p.364)

Mrs Hunter is flexible and sensible enough to realise what aspect of her multiple selves suits the occasion. To the envious and somewhat rigid Dorothy, Mrs Hunter is being deceptive: she is hiding a real self that is unattractive and would not win friends. It is as if in being uninviting Mrs Hunter would be more true to self. But that might be equally false. There is an obvious difficulty in attempting to separate Mrs Hunter's acting self from her real self. The vacillations from supposedly acting self to seemingly real self appear rapid. In the present case it is possible that Mrs Hunter is closer to her real self in a role which impresses Dorothy as most deceptive. The novel appears to encourage an ambiguous view of what is real and what is acting or fantasy; the story blurs that distinction. For instance, Mrs Hunter's storm episode fluctuates between reality and fantasy: it belongs equally to either realm. By showing us Mrs Hunter making elaborate preparations, which include dressing up for the storm experience, White re-emphasizes the sense of reality which verges on unreality, and of living a life which seems like acting a part. The illumination which Mrs Hunter is supposed to glean from the experience remains unclear: beyond the buffeting, and a felt evanescent merging with nature, Mrs Hunter is left almost unchanged. (This contrasts significantly with similar experiences by Hurtle Duffield in *The Vivisector*.) But furthermore, the narrator deflates the importance of the incident by casting doubt on some of its details as Mrs Hunter recalls them:

For the eye was no longer focused on her, she could tell; and as it withdrew its attention, it was taking with it the delusions of her feeble mind: the black swans feeding out of her hands and seabirds nestling among the dark-blue pyramids. (pp.410-411)

The equivocation the narrative introduces with regard to some crucial metaphysical aspects of the storm serves to undercut its centrality: it is brought down to the level of other incidents in the novel, and yet it also remains apart as an important happening for Mrs Hunter. The episode stands as an imposition of grace on Mrs Hunter; by herself she would not have evolved into the elected status she obtains. In this role as a frail human quester, Mrs Hunter has closer affinities with Mrs Ellen Roxburgh than the almost unearthly, wholly spiritual Miss Hare of *Riders in the Chariot*, and Theodora Goodman

of *The Aunt's Story*. Mrs Hunter represents the presence of spiritual beauty in degradation in the same way as the divine is immanent in the earth-bound hen scuttling in the dust. (TV, p.393)

The sense of theatre and acting parts extends to Dorothy Hunter, Princess de Lascabanes. Dorothy impresses one as engaged in endless acting of roles. Her use of a mixture of French and English and the narrator's comments reveal the degree of Dorothy's confused awareness of her self:

But Dorothy floundered, imperviously, on. '*O mon Dieu, aidez-moi!*' she gasped, before assuming another of her selves, or voices, to utter, 'Mother!' and lower, 'Mum!' (p.45)

There are perhaps four personalities involved here: Dorothy as the actual unknown self that is observing; Dorothy as the French princess; Dorothy whose maternal parent happens to be Mrs Hunter; and Dorothy, the daughter of Mrs Hunter, who still has emotional feelings for her mum. Dorothy's psychological burden in the novel concerns her search to find a coherent and stable sense of self. But this is fraught with numerous difficulties. The problems are evident in Dorothy vacillating from an Australian to a French princess, a love-seeking daughter to a callous and materialistic socialite. The lack of focus in her character also accounts for her problems in interacting with people. Just as Dorothy does not know how to approach them consistently, they seem uncertain about how to receive her.

In the relationship between Dorothy and Mrs Hunter there are numerous examples of the uncertainties which undermine their positive attempts to understand each other. As on this occasion:

For a moment it seemed as though Elizabeth Hunter would try to insinuate her physical self into this void where trust should have been: she began stroking; she was threatening to hug; while Dorothy prepared to resist: she must not allow herself to be seduced by anyone so expert in the art - by anyone, for that matter. (p.392)

Most of the difficulties in this relationship arise from an absence of trust. As a result behaviour that expresses^{es} love such as stroking and hugging is thought to be threatening by Dorothy. Since Dorothy is not used to receiving affection from Mrs Hunter, she treats her offer sceptically. At the same time Dorothy seems to love and hate her mother; her attitude to Mrs Hunter is quite ambiguous. As some of her recollections about her childhood reveal, she had an indifferent mother whom Dorothy feels could have shown more affection:

Oh Mummy can't we stay together? can't you come into my bed? To sleep blissfully secure. In this dress? do be sensible Dorothy you must know Mummy's expected at dinner. (p.355)

Mrs Hunter seems to value her dress and social engagements above her daughter.

Perhaps it is an awareness of this which makes Dorothy feel simultaneously a craving for and hatred towards her mother. In the following instance, Dorothy longs for the security of the womb:

When you could have stayed curled indefinitely in Mummy she pitched you out unarmed (p.209)

The word 'pitched' conveys the sense of a hurried and forced entry into a world not ready to receive her; in other words there is an implied condemnation of Mrs Hunter for giving birth to Dorothy.

Basil Hunter's relationship with Mrs Hunter is not much different from Dorothy's. Both children suffer from the effects of a childhood when as they remember it, Mother did not love them sufficiently. Mrs Hunter herself admits it:

I was not ... what you would call a natural mother. I couldn't feed you - in spite of all that raw steak - as I must have told you - it seems. But that, you see - darling - hasn't deprived you of - of nourishment. (p.119)

The 'nourishment' Basil receives is what paradoxically makes him uncertain about his relationship with Mrs Hunter. His awareness that disappointment is 'something we've got to expect the moment we put our mouths to the nipple' (p.118), seems to have led him to devise a kind of escape from life through theatre. As bare reality is too painful to be faced, a subdued representation of it through acting is more manageable to Basil. Costumes, voice and gestures say everything for Basil in much the same way that French and French culture mediate between Dorothy and life. Both Hunter children use these devices to substantiate a fictive world they seem to inhabit.

Basil's acting spills beyond the stage into his everyday life. Here the impression he leaves on people is more important than what he genuinely feels and says. The novel's depiction of Basil's first encounter with his sick mother is superbly stage-managed:

But what was inevitable, for everybody, happened: Sir Basil Hunter entered. His mother's anguish was audible. What of his? ... On catching sight of the figure in the wheelchair, Sir Basil hesitated the tick of a second, as though he had found an understudy waiting on the spot where his leading lady should have been; then (your performance is what matters; curse the management only after the curtain calls) he continued across the carpet with that distinctive limp, probably a mannerism before it had set in slight gout, but which never weakened the power of his attack. One shoulder slouched a shade in advance of the other, he was presented in fact, though not objectionably, sideways to the audience of two He spoke, and the nurse thrilled to the riches in the voice. 'Darling - what a homecoming!' (pp.117-118)

As the story focuses on Basil Hunter, the language of theatre becomes so pervasive that his life appears like a protracted play on an endless stage. His speeches and actions are, on the whole, performed for their dramatic impact and not for their content. Take for example his gestures and statement after Mrs Hunter's death:

He sat down on the uncomfortable chair, arranging his fists knuckle to knuckle

against his chest as though one were to believe he didn't know what to do with them.

Thus disposed he looked from one to the other of his companions before delivering his line, 'There are heights of grief to which weaker mortals fail to attain.' (p.561)

The narrative focuses on properties, like the uncomfortable chair and gestures, like the way Basil places his fists and looks at his companions, in order to bring out the dramatic aspects of the scene. The line Basil delivers is suitably pompous, but false: he does not mean what he says. On the other hand, there are moments in Basil's life when repressed truths overwhelm to assert their existence. Such moments occur when the actor is off his guard in a semi-conscious state or in a dream. Sometimes it is when he is faced with a particularly poignant reminder of his past. In one instance Basil longs for a return to childhood:

He had reached that alarming stage in any actor's career where he loses the desire to perform. Suddenly. He would have liked to flop down, feel the tape closing round his neck, the clean, soft, white bib settling below his chin, then a detached hand feeding him slowly but firmly with spoonfuls of sweetened bread and milk. In such circumstances the mistakes would not yet have been made, and might even be avoided. (p.121)

There are further examples of a desire in Basil to return to childhood or to the womb:

He anticipated flopping into bed, pulling up the sheet till it became a hood to intensify the darkness, curling as tight as his stubborn bones would allow, as he remembered possums, beans, a foetus in a battle. (p.455)

Now he continued lying curled in the shape he had been longing to assume: that of a sleeping possum, or a bean before the germinal stage, or a foetus in a jar. (p.470)

In ascribing to Basil this desire to resume the foetal position, White seems a little too obvious in stating his theme. However, the imagery does suggest a craving for a return to a state of complete protection where the difficulties of living would not be faced by Basil. In that sense, Basil longs for escape even as he is involved in a kind of escapism as an actor. Perhaps Basil has good reasons to want to escape as his two failed marriages and the strained relationships with Mrs Hunter and Dorothy reveal a certain lack in his character: Basil's inability to relate satisfactorily with other human beings.

So far this discussion might be taken to imply that the reasons for the unsatisfactory personal relationships among Mrs Hunter, Dorothy and Basil stem from Mrs Hunter's unloving and indifferent attitude to her children. But one of the epigraphs to the novel suggests that there are difficulties inherent in the human condition. In a sense the epigraph exonerates Mrs Hunter, on the one hand, and Dorothy and Basil on the other:

I was given by chance this human body so difficult to wear.

If we accept this, the three central characters' search for causes for their unsatisfactory relationships is futile, as such failure as they have experienced is intrinsic to the state of being human. However, there is an exception: Alfred and Elizabeth Hunter experience real love for each other during the former's fatal illness. The narrative reveals that through acts of grace Elizabeth and Alfred attain levels of empathy never before reached.

There were moments when their minds were folded into each other without any trace of the cross-hatching of wilfulness or desire to possess. (p.61)

Then she began to realize that the brief, exquisite phase when she had been able to speak to her husband in words which conveyed their meanings was practically past; from now on, they must communicate through their skins and with their eyes. It was a climax of trustfulness; but of course they had nothing left to lose. (p.197)

Through suffering Elizabeth and Alfred Hunter have discovered genuine affection for each other. (The stress on suffering as a necessary prerequisite for understanding is a recurrent theme in White's fiction.) Such affection is best conveyed, it is implied, through the sense of touch, because words distort meaning, they are frail bridges and '... if ever you thought they were about to help you open a door into the truth, you found, instead of a lighted room, a dark void you hadn't the courage to enter' (p.258). The narrative obviously endorses the primacy or reliability of touch or actions over words. The 'simple' Macrorrys, for example, rely on touch to show their love for each other:

'Bankrupted!' Macrory beat so hard with the spoon on one side of his plate, a bit flew out.

'Ah, dear!' Anne laughed; she pressed against her husband before stooping to gather up the piece; she said she was going to bed. (p.504)

Of course the idea that physical contact is more authentic than words, or conversely that words do not convey truth and are unreliable servants is itself fraught with difficulties. Mrs Hunter's sexual experience with Athol Shreve serves as an illustration of this point: Mrs Hunter goes through this physically most intimate experience with very little emotional involvement except for the satisfaction of her lust.

At any rate, the depth of understanding Mrs Hunter reaches with Alfred Hunter in the last days of his illness is in a sense repeated in her relationship with Sister Mary de Santis. Mary de Santis is one of the most interesting characters in *The Eye of the Storm*. Though she has affinities with previous creations of White's such as Theodora Goodman in *The Aunt's Story* and Rhoda Courtney in *The Vivisector*, she seems a more dynamic character than these two. To begin with, she is not only an intense mystic and incongruous in ordinary society, but is also comical. The narrator's depiction of de Santis is humorous. We are told she is handsome, but always wears the despicable navy blue hat. On one occasion she is presented in the following way:

... here was the archpriestess, a heavy woman clumping down the stairs,

stumbling on the last of them She could feel a trickling down her back; the pores in her nose must be looking exaggerated; night had tossed her out, a crumpled, grubby stickiness. (pp.18-19)

This description which emphasizes the physical clumsiness of Mary de Santis seems intended to show the simultaneous presence of ordinariness or awkwardness and mysticism in a character. The transcendental experiences of Mary de Santis are themselves sadly mocked by the novel, suggesting, in a way, that she needs to see them as half real and half illusory, that the possibility is there that she could be deceiving herself in her role of devotion:

As she left the room, a glare from furniture and a bedpan scarcely covered by a towel, sprang at the high priestess, stripping her of the illusions of her office, the night thoughts, speculations of a mystical turn few had ever guessed at, and certainly, thank God, no one shared, except, perhaps, one malicious old woman. In her daytime form, Mary de Santis of thumping bust and pronounced calves, might have been headed for basket-ball. (p.14)

Perhaps nothing of a mystical nature took place, but perhaps it did take place. The uncertainty is a function of the narrative. The novel is concerned to explore ideas and to examine and compare the various characters' evolving philosophies of life. The narrative does not categorically endorse one philosophy of life as supreme; rather it probes and examines a range of such philosophies, questioning and testing the strengths and limits of each. Thus it continually adjusts and subverts itself during the process of this exploration. In this regard, though I broadly agree with Veronica Brady here, I find her use of terms such as 'evil' and 'good' to describe White's characters rather clumsy.

Sister Badgery is the epitome of the grimly unyielding Non-conformist conscience that in White's novels figures as the enemy of all spontaneous life. As for Sister Manhood, she is the polar opposite to Sister de Santis, the embodiment of evil as Mary de Santis is of good.

Brady's article considers the weaknesses of a character like Mary de Santis and sees dangers in her almost anti-human devotion to the other world. However, by asserting that White suggests that 'if we must live by programmes ... then [we] choose Mary de Santis's, not Flora Manhood's',¹ Brady appears to underrate the tentativeness of the novel's positions as it seeks to interrogate the nature of almost everything: the essence of a mystical experience, physicality, suffering and understanding, dedication, acting and reality. There are no absolutes in this novel. Flora Manhood might seem overtly sensual and hedonistic, but in some respects she is more kindhearted than is, perhaps, Sister Badgery. On the other hand, there is something grotesque about Mary de Santis, whose sensuality has been so severely repressed and is only experienced in fantasy in moments of intense regret for the life she has led:

As he bent her backwards with the smoothest, the most practised motion, her

1. Veronica Brady, 'The Eye of the Storm,' *Westerly*, 4 (1973), p.61.

mind rooted through, her mouth lapped at, every detail in the catalogue: she drank through the pores of his just faintly bristling skin; dragged at the creases in tight clothes; inhaled the scents of brilliantine and stale tobacco; her fingers tangled with the grey-black (unfatherly) hair, laying open the bald patch she couldn't remember, but which must have been there because here she was discovering it.

Mary de Santis was flung into one of the huge leather chairs. It sighed, and sucked at, before settling around her It smelled of. *You mustn't touch the basil Máro Papa has planted.* She did, though; she crushed it between her hands, and the scent of basil invaded, finally emanated from her body. She was anaesthetized by her own scent of basil.

Not entirely Her anger broke around her. She began unbuttoning her uniform, tearing at the straitjacket beneath to free her smoothest offerings. (pp.168-169)

Mary de Santis is attempting to break out of the constraining conventions she was brought up in. Hence, the author's use of the word 'straitjacket' is particularly apt because the term at once suggests the garments de Santis is tearing apart and the psychological restrictions she is fighting as the clothes are torn apart. The sexual fantasy reveals tensions in Mary de Santis between her religious-like devotion to the search, on the one hand, and the physical desires of her body, on the other. De Santis's further attraction to Basil when she visits him at his hotel confirms that she is as fallible as anybody else, and yet she still remains an aspirant. Mary de Santis is obviously not as sensual as Flora Manhood; and Flora Manhood is not as devoted to Mrs Hunter and the other world as Mary de Santis. But the two have qualities in common. In this respect *The Eye of the Storm* seems to present characters who appear superficially different, but are similar in essential aspects; they are neither wholly good, nor wholly evil, but something of both and therefore human.

One would expect Mary de Santis to derive total fulfilment from her devotion to work, but this is not so - as the following passage suggests:

For she had her work: that was her life, and she was happy in it.

This at least was the comfortable theory well-meaning people had thrust on her. Reserved by nature, and not given to argument, she accepted it, while sensing that the visible ramifications of her work were no more than a convenient *trompe l'oeil* to distract attention from that shadowy labyrinth strewn with signs through which she approached 'happiness'. (p.324)

Mary de Santis's 'happiness' is as dubious a state as Flora Manhood's. Through both characters, the novel seems to pose the daunting question: where is happiness in life ... in mysticism? in sensuality? ... or in both? The narrative answers its own question by suggesting that true happiness is a transient state which can be experienced in an ordinary dimension, as when Flora Manhood is with Col Pardoe driving back from Noamurra, or in a transcendental experience, as when Mary de Santis and Mrs Hunter unite hands in an intense mystical communication. But permanent happiness - so the

novel implies - is an unattainable illusion. To the extent that Mary de Santis and Flora Manhood worry about happiness, they are both explorers. Each discovers possibilities in self she never suspected existed. Mary de Santis discovers her sensuality, Flora Manhood, her spiritual desire.

All along, Flora Manhood had underrated the extent of her devotion to, and the influence over her of Mrs Hunter. But when the old woman dies, the world almost collapses around Flora, showing the degree of her involvement with Mrs Hunter:

Finally Sister de Santis said, 'Don't you realize it's long past your time?'

'Yes, I'll go. And never come back. Not even for the bloody uniform'

'I expect you'll think better of it, Flora.'

'Not on your life!' ... she went out soberly, to guard against possible damage to a fragility she had not suspected was in her. She changed, and did not return to the bedroom As for Mrs Hunter, she did not want to look at her again: not with the handkerchief over her face. (p.548)

To Flora Manhood, Mrs Hunter's death is not the textbook death her training had prepared her for. Its impact on her is so devastating that she seems to see no meaning in her life, and even wishes to give up nursing. In a conversation with Col Pardoe, she attempts to express what she sensed would be gained by working around Mrs Hunter:

You felt that if you zombied around long enough you might find out what you can expect. (p.554)

Flora Manhood is not a quester in the same way as Mary de Santis, but she is a quester nevertheless. Like Mary de Santis, whom she mistakes for a statue, she has a spiritual dimension. Perhaps her advantage over Mary de Santis is that she gives expression to her human desires as well, whereas the other represses them.

Sister Jessie Badgery may be the one character, together with Mrs Cush, so uncomplicated as to be able to be summarized in a single word: materialistic. As a minor character, she is not shown reacting in varied situations. On the few occasions she appears in the novel, she is either feeding Mrs Hunter or feeding herself, and her last appearance is predictably at table, complaining about the insufficiency of the gratuity money awarded to her. But even so, the novel does not judge Sister Badgery categorically. It suggests that she is fated to be as she is: the kind of grace which turns Mrs Hunter, Mary de Santis and Flora Manhood into what they are, has not visited her, and for this reason she remains obtuse and fallibly human. That she has had no grace is not her fault. It is her fate, the narrative shows, to drift through life ignorant of the recesses of spirituality to which Mrs Hunter and those like her, are able to reach.

Unlike Jessie Badgery, Lotte Lippmann is a minor, but significant character in *The Eye of the Storm*; she recalls Himmelfarb, the Jew, in *Riders in the Chariot*. Incidentally, Lotte Lippmann is a black Jewess who, like Himmelfarb, survived the gas

ovens to come to Australia. The pogroms against her people, and the seeming infinitude of the evil in man which Lotte experienced in Germany, has invested her with a rare insight into the human soul which she occasionally seems able to share with Mrs Hunter through the dances. Rationality, as possibly Mr Wyburd understands it, does not account for much in Lotte's world: rationality alone would not explain the evil that embraced a whole nation in its demonic attempt to exterminate a race. That suffering has enabled Lotte Lippmann to reconcile herself to the existence of evil and good in man; excesses of either quality no longer surprise her. Her ritualistic dances seem like an endeavour to grapple with the incomprehensible in man, and because of this quality she is similar to Mrs Hunter and Sister Mary de Santis. And in death Lotte's triumph over the likes of Dorothy, whose ugly fear over the Bay of Bengal and at Brumby Island reveals the hollowness of her soul, is asserted. The crimson imagery associated with her blood matches with the roses de Santis picks for Mrs Hunter. In taking her own life Lotte Lippmann in a sense attempts to compensate for the guilt of having survived the gas ovens. Through death her body achieves a quality of gothic brilliance unattainable in her life:

If she smiled, or sank, she would drink the roses she was offering to those others pressed always more suffocatingly close around her. (p.588)

It is a metaphysical offering; it could not be expected to alter certain aspects of reality in the world. But at the same time Lotte Lippmann's death represents enduring values as it is linked with the still-to-unfold crimson rose flower to be collected later in the day by Mary de Santis. As Manly Johnson writes:

Lotte's death is luminous and tranquil. It is presented as the eye of the storm, a centre of peace inside the chaos of terrible events and deeds whirling at the periphery of Lotte's life. Transformation of the water stained with her blood into an image of roses links her death with Mary's renewed vigour, as described in the next last scene.²

The central eye of the storm in the novel is the one experienced by Mrs Hunter. She enters it after her body has been humiliated and reduced to its barest in clothing by the cyclone. At the calm centre of the storm, Mrs Hunter receives an epiphanic vision of her self:

She was instead a being, or more likely a flaw at the centre of this jewel of light: the jewel itself, blinding and tremulous at the same time, existed, flaw and all, only by grace(p.409)

The notion that brilliance and flaws or beauty and degradation co-exist is central to the novel. Mrs Hunter's realisation of this quality in her self sets her apart from those like Dorothy and Basil who still cling to the belief of either good or bad, beautiful or ugly,

2. Manly Johnson, 'Patrick White in the Eye of Language,' *World Literature Written in English* 15 (1976), p.354.

reality or illusion. Mrs Hunter achieves a kind of calm in her inner self through accepting the weaknesses and strengths of her character. Dorothy and Basil, like Mrs Hunter, Lotte Lippmann and the rest of the characters in the novel, have to experience eyes of their own storms in order to gain insight into their selves. The eye of the storm is essentially a metaphor for a crucial experience in a character's life which forces him to face up to and possibly accept the multiple facets of real self. In the case of Arnold and Lal Wyburd, their relationship also goes through a storm before reaching a centre of calm. The storm event brings to light the difficulties which stand in the way of good relationships. In a way Arnold's thoughts subsequent to Lal's betrayal of his confidence in her show the hurdles facing human relationships in general:

Who was this woman he hadn't got to know in a lifetime of intimate exchange? Because of his faith in her, a greater criminal perhaps than Basil and Dorothy Hunter themselves. (p.275)

Perhaps it is impossible to know another if one fails to know oneself. Arnold Wyburd is himself surprised by layers of self that he is still in the process of discovering. To begin with, he surprises himself by making love to Mrs Hunter; later he steals a piece of jewellery. These acts contradict what Arnold Wyburd sees as his real self. And yet the thieving part is as much a part of Arnold as the faithful lawyer. As the narrator indicates, Arnold and Lal Wyburd learn about their authentic selves through a kind of metaphysical realization:

There were no confidences after lights-out. Instead, they were clutching at a flawed reality they had been allowed to discover in each other, perhaps even taking upon themselves the healing of a wounded conscience. (p.276)

The incident reveals that the relationship between Arnold and Lal Wyburd is as flawed as any other. Previously, Arnold and Lal had mistaken superficial appearances as a reflection of the depths, deceiving themselves that they knew each other when they didn't. But after Lal's indiscretion, when she prematurely tells de Santis about Mrs Hunter's removal to Thorogood Village, Lal and Arnold find themselves at the centre of their storm having discovered, like Mrs Hunter before them, that the reality of their relationship consisted of its own weaknesses and strengths.

Whereas Arnold stole, 'honest' Lal refuses to kiss Mrs Hunter and shows a revulsion for the old woman. Through Arnold and Lal Wyburd the narrative shows that any absolute categorizing of a particular individual is bound to distort and over simplify the reality; because humans are complex beings, any judgement of a person needs to be correspondingly balanced. The author's portrayal of characters in their almost endless self-exploration and discovery appears to convey better the complexities of the human being. In part it is for that reason that Dorothy Hunter's question is answered in the affirmative:

But could anything of transcendental nature have illuminated a mind so sensual, mendacious, materialistic, superficial as Elizabeth Hunter's? (p.570)

The novel suggests that it is precisely because her mind is such a flawed one that it qualifies for the experience in the eye of the cyclone. Whereas Dorothy Hunter seems not to gain much insight from her own storms, she learns something from the Dutchman's narrative. On the other hand, Basil Hunter's experience of the eye of the storm is urged by both Mitty Jacka and Sister Mary de Santis. Especially in the presence of the latter, Basil surprises himself by admitting to the pretensions of his acting career:

From now on, you are the one who is sucked up to. Till you reach - let's call it 'the age of disgust' - when you can feel something taking place in your metabolism, and a change comes over the expression of other people's faces, and you want to reject the whole business of - of acting: all its illusions and your own presumption - not to say *spuriousness* To reject ... before you are rejected. (p.333)

This moment of candid confrontation with his self and the consequent recognition of his own deceptions and truths in its metaphysical import is not different from Mrs Hunter's time of stillness in the eye of the storm when she seems to merge with other forms of life.

On another occasion Basil Hunter's squaring up with his self takes the form of a recollection of a childhood experience. 'This screen thing -' he begins, 'it materializes again when you feel you're beginning to slip - in musty provincial theatres - a piece of disintegrating silk stretched on a rickety, tottering frame. You're less than ever inclined to look behind it. And you're sure that if it blows over, you're lost.' (p.238)

Basil would be 'lost' if he were bold enough to face the nothingness that appears to constitute his core. His acting conceals a hollowness: the lack of a spiritual dimension to his life makes it bankrupt of meaning. Basil's decision to act Alvaro is instructive:

Sir Basil has a similar mistrust of love and lack of charity that characterize Don Alvaro, but in *The Master [of Santiago]* they are not just negative qualities, but become destructive forces. It is here that White's use of the Motherlant play and its central character is so revealing. Sir Basil has no vital spark, not even the negative energy of Don Alvaro; but in his futile, sterile existence he defines one of the characteristics of Patrick White's world What White sees in Sir Basil is what Motherlant finds most fascinating in a human being, *sa facon de mentir à lui-même*; in other words, the distance between what a man is and what he thinks he is, what he is and what he would like to have been.³

If Basil played 'I,' as Mitty Jacka suggests, he would be forced to peer into the apparent nothingness of his essential self; his acting would crumble. But the experience is overwhelming, and so Basil eschews playing 'I' beneath the deceptions. Thus Basil's

3. Patricia Clancy, 'The Actor's Dilemma: Patrick White's and Henry de Motherlant,' *Meanjin* 33 (1974), p.301.

sense of grief for a childhood when he felt he was not loved at times rings false. It seems to be part of the elaborate screen he has erected between his frightening actual self and his acting self; the narrative's ambivalence here touches on Basil's most cherished grievances against his mother.

On the other hand, Mrs Hunter does not flinch from the implications of her actual self. She faces its lies, sensuality, cruelty and kindness with candour. She seems to live all aspects of her self with equal, honest intensity. The storm experience deepens her understanding and acceptance of the totality of her self, even though it is impossible for her to communicate to anyone else the exact extent of her experience:

If you could describe your storm; but you could not. You can never convey in words the utmost in experience. Whatever is given you to live, you alone can live, and re-live, and re-live, till it is gasped out of you. (p.399)

In a similar manner, Mrs Roxburgh in *A Fringe of Leaves*, to which we will turn in the next chapter, fails to communicate the full extent of her revelatory experiences. Both Mrs Hunter and Mrs Roxburgh live alone with the illumination their experiences have given them. Others cannot benefit from Mrs Hunter's and Mrs Roxburgh's experiences for, it seems, each character, on his own, must go through similar pain to attain a better understanding of his actual self.

The Eye of the Storm critically examines some concepts, character's attitudes, beliefs and philosophies of life to reveal uncertainties and ambiguities that seem inherent in them. The narrative's sceptical stance to human relationships, living and acting, mysticism and earthliness is essentially a creative one for it leads to the exploration of other possibilities besides those clearly present to a character. For instance, predominantly sensual Flora Manhood is shown to discover an inkling of the transcendental in herself through a sceptical exploration of her character. Similarly, Mary de Santis's sensuality is unearthed through a close questioning of what makes up her actual self. In both Flora Manhood and Mary de Santis, the novel shows the varied presence of the seeker and of worldly traits. Through these two and Mrs Hunter, the novel affirms the endlessness of possibilities, when it reveals that earthliness and mysticism can co-exist in a character. In *A Fringe of Leaves*, the author focuses on an earthbound character who, despite herself, gains transcendental insight into the human situation during the convict days in Australia.

CHAPTER 3

NATURE AND CULTURE: A FRINGE OF LEAVES

A good deal of the critical literature on *A Fringe of Leaves* posits a binary opposition between the concepts of nature and culture. The tendency then is to argue in terms that show nature as the uncorrupted ideal, the idyllic state inhabited in the novel by the innocent savage, the Aborigine. Ellen's sojourn amongst the Aborigines is presented as an encounter with the shadowy side of self which reveals to her evil as a constituent of self. In contrast, western culture is viewed as a distortion of the original ideal, man's tampering with nature to tame the innocent savagery that was there. Western culture is then seen as a supplement upon the crude original. It is thus suggested that in the western cultured man, the savage or evil part of the self, has been tamed or refined out of existence. Hence, for western cultured man to be humble and accept that traces of the savage could still remain in the unconscious, he needs to leave his society and descend into the domain of the savage who awakens in him possibilities of existence he had never suspected himself capable of experiencing. David Tacey is quite explicit in reference to Mrs Roxburgh's experiences amongst the Aborigines:

She becomes impure to the extent that she eats, if sacramentally, of human flesh and thereby descends to the level of the cannibal. As her journey into hell progresses she is forced to reach right down to the sources of evil itself, where she experiences her relationship with the enemy of mankind in the form of Jack Chance, the escaped convict.¹

To suggest that Mrs Roxburgh is degraded by her association with the Aborigines and by Jack Chance seems to show some misapprehension of the novel.

Moreover, the novel questions the very basis of categorizing some societies as savage, and others as civilized. The concepts nature or savagery, and culture or civilization are examined with a critical lens that shows up their tenuousness as means of describing human societies. In this novel, Mrs Roxburgh does not descend to hell through her contact with Jack Chance, so called 'enemy of mankind,' but in fact spiritually ascends or gains. In that way she bears witness to one of the epigraphs to the novel taken from Ibsen: there are gnawing things in the house of so called civilization. It is those gnawing things, in the form of institutionalized slavery in the convict system,

1. David Tacey, 'A Search for a New Ethic: White's *A Fringe of Leaves*,' in *South Pacific Images*, C. Tiffin, ed. (St. Lucia: U.Q.P., 1978), p.192.

which have created 'miscreants' like Jack Chance while shielding characters like Garnet Roxburgh, perhaps a worse criminal. The novel implies that the savagery of white society is the worst of its kind because it is legitimized and presented as just. The narrative's scepticism about the self-righteousness of the Garnet Roxburgh-like characters is shown in All Saints Church on Christmas Day. Garnet Roxburgh sits in front of the church and the prisoners sit at the back. Besides, Garnet Roxburgh is a church warden. In the light of the adultery Garnet Roxburgh and Mrs Aspinall committed, one questions the suggestion, prompted by his presence at the front, that he is morally superior to the prisoners.

The novel's ambivalent attitude about individuals also extends to the supposedly superior values of the upper classes. This is shown through the juxtapositions the author creates between the life of Ellen Gluyas and Austin Roxburgh. The former is a poor farm girl living a hard life, the latter is a well-read gentleman living a rich and protected life. When Austin Roxburgh comes to live at Zennor farm, some of the flaws in his bookish life are exposed. On practical matters of survival, Ellen Gluyas, with so little education, emerges as the more accomplished:

On one occasion she had to halt him and lead him back across the yard. 'Not that way,' she advised, her instincts persuading her that Mr Austin Roxburgh needed her protection. (p.48)

'Are you ill?' she called. 'Mr Roxburgh?'

Though he did not answer, she felt at liberty to ease her shoulder under his, the better to support and lead him. (p.51)

The relationship which develops between Ellen Gluyas and Austin Roxburgh shows the latter's dependency on Ellen. She assumes the roles of nurse, wife and mother. Austin Roxburgh is portrayed as a permanent invalid demanding constant attention from Mrs Roxburgh. But even mentally, Austin Roxburgh is an invalid because he uses literature to escape from life. He revels in the fictive world created by Virgil. To him the fictional world replaces the real one which he cannot face squarely. It is the same impulse of attempting to avoid reality that leads him to commission an artist to make a portrait of Mrs Roxburgh; Mrs Roxburgh in the flesh as a sensual woman is more threatening than her undemanding portrait. Austin Roxburgh, the novel intimates, would rather contemplate his wife in the abstract, create verse for her, than meet her in the body. Physical contact with his wife repels Austin Roxburgh and actually diminishes his love for her. The novel shows Austin Roxburgh as anti-life, over-demanding of care from Mrs Roxburgh, and obtusely obsessed by his *Virgil*. The ridicule to which he is often subject in the narrative sometimes strikes one as excessive. An instance of this is his return to the cabin when the *Bristol Maid* is dangerously listing:

By the time he reached the companion-hatch he was crawling on all fours, not entirely out of cowardice; it was dictated also by sense: the waves which were

breaking aft lashed him across mouth and eyes. When he had regurgitated most of what he had gulped, and was again looking out on a streaming world, he felt for a foothold on a ladder Mr Roxburgh peered through the gloom in his efforts to distinguish the object of his search amongst the general debris when suddenly '*My Virgil!*' floated into focus on the bilge undulating at his feet. (p.159)

Austin Roxburgh's life seems to involve 'regurgitating' what Virgil and others have understood of life. The soggy volume he rescues from the cabin symbolizes his uninspired life of borrowed ideas and the distance, mediated by the dead language, he maintains between himself and life. But Austin Roxburgh changes after the shipwreck. Events following the disaster force him to see life differently. Compelled by circumstances to do menial jobs and to live close to manual workers his education had taught him to despise, he discovers the humanity he has in common with the lower classes. He learns to respect the likes of Ned Courtney and Captain Purdew by realising that his survival depends on their skills with the boats. As a result, Austin Roxburgh becomes more sensitive, as shown in the episode where he treats Spurgeon's boil. It appears that the boil serves the ambivalent function we have come to associate with states of degradation in White's fiction. Though it is a repulsive pustular boil, it is, as it were, from the abscess that Austin Roxburgh discovers his kindness and his kinship with Spurgeon; Austin Roxburgh undergoes a kind of sea change, in the manner suggested by the death of Oswald Dignam which recalls T.S. Eliot's 'Death by Water'.

Ultimately Austin Roxburgh's character change is shown in an action which, on the face of it, is pathetic and ridiculous, but which reflects the profundity of his transformation:

But it was Mr Roxburgh who ran forward, to do what only God could know. Here he was, bestirring himself at least, in the manner expected of the male sex. Into action! He felt elated, as well as frightened, and full of disbelief in his undertaking. (p.214)

Austin Roxburgh's performance here sharply contrasts with his behaviour in the storm incident which happens as he is on a walk with Ellen Gluyas in Zennor country. Then he relied on Ellen Gluyas to protect him from danger, but here we see him attempting to assert his maleness. He dies a more attractive character.

The doubt about the superiority of old Mrs Roxburgh's culture is brought out through her relationship with Mrs Roxburgh. As the narrative looks critically at some aspects of this culture, one is made aware of the spuriousness of its claims to superiority. For instance, old Mrs Roxburgh advises her daughter-in-law to use the maid which makes her too dependent:

You should put yourself in [the maid's] hands Vetch will brush your hair, and help you to dress - and *un*-dress. (p.64)

The Roxburghs' culture seems to encourage idleness. It also fosters deceit:

... she too began accepting that there are conventions in truth as in anything else. As a young wife and 'lady' she saw this as an expedient she must convert into permanence, and former critics were soon applauding her for observing the conventions they were accustomed to obey. (p.66)

As Mrs Roxburgh transforms herself into a lady, the greater becomes her ability not to face truth and to suppress her true emotions to conform to the Roxburghs' expectations. Her other self, however, occasionally surfaces, as when she makes love with Garnet Roxburgh. The event reveals Mrs Roxburgh's sensuality which Austin Roxburgh and his mother have failed to eradicate. Similarly, Mrs Roxburgh's farm-life background makes her love nature. This attraction to nature is also an aspect of her self that Austin Roxburgh has failed to stamp out. But perhaps the greatest failure in Austin Roxburgh's and his mother's efforts to change Mrs Roxburgh is evident in the survival of the latter's original speech characteristics. In her conversations with Oswald Dignam on board ship, Mrs Roxburgh easily switches back to her original accent; and during her stay among the Aborigines she uses this accent. In a sense Mrs Roxburgh herself is the embodiment of the concept of ambiguity since she seems to belong to two cultures: the farm-life culture, and the upper-class culture of the Roxburghs.

The author's description of a quasi-paradisaal scene which the white's encounter on arrival at an Aboriginal island sets the tone of ambiguities which are also prevalent in this section of the novel:

Round them shimmered the light, the sand, and farther back, the darker, proprietary trees. Where the beach rose higher, to encroach on the forest, great mattresses of sand, far removed from the attentions of the tides, were quilted and buttoned down by vines, a variety of convolvulus, its furled trumpets of a pale mauve. Mrs Roxburgh might have thrown herself down on the vine-embroidered sand had it not burnt her so intensely, even through the soles of her dilapidated boots. (p.209)

It seems the narrative suggests a contrast between the shimmering light, the sand and action of the sea - associated with the intruding whites - and the unperturbed dark solidity of the trees together with the vines which preserve the sand beyond the reach of the tide; this appears to be linked with the Aborigines. The intense heat which makes Mrs Roxburgh unable to sit on the mattress of vines and sand might imply her rejection by the world of the Aborigines. Thus the shore on the surface invites, but in essence repels, the castaways. The putrefying carcass of a kangaroo the crew and passengers eat serves a similar double function. The rotten meat fortifies the sailors and the Roxburghs, but it also weakens them by the diarrhoea which it brings about; only Mrs Roxburgh's stomach is able to keep the decomposed meat. Perhaps in this way Mrs Roxburgh is prepared for her sojourn amongst the Aborigines: the rest of the castaways die from Aboriginal spears.

There is a close conjunction between life and death, joy and grief intimated

through the events which immediately follow the arrival of the whites on the island. The sailors' first impression of the coast is that it offers salvation, escape from death lurking in the ocean depths. Momentarily their idea of the shore seems confirmed, until the promise of life is shattered by the deaths of Captain Purdew and Austin Roxburgh; consequently the joy of having found land and food is poisoned by the diarrhoea and loss of lives. In a sense, the land presents to the castaways an ambiguous solution to their difficulties. The concepts of salvation and destruction appear indistinguishable; Mrs Roxburgh initially survives to face a more thorough destruction of her personality and the fundamental tenets of her culture and its values which she used to cherish. But as will be evident, the 'death' of the original character of Mrs Roxburgh signals the growth of a more complex and broader-minded Mrs Roxburgh. She becomes more accommodating of other people's views and values and is less judgemental.

The process of change in Mrs Roxburgh begins when she witnesses the death of her husband and Captain Purdew. The experience is most terrifying as it leaves her isolated and at the absolute mercy of the Aborigines. Then she is undressed and left naked. But the reality of being naked in public is something Mrs Roxburgh's moral training cannot accept. Hence, she uses vines and leaves to cover her nakedness. She keeps her wedding ring as a gesture of her faith to her husband; the ring seems to represent for her the only surviving connection with the white society to which she once belonged. The present society appears different, almost in every respect, from her society. For example, the Aborigines do not seem to attach any real value to jewels:

An almost suppressed murmuring arose as they examined the jewels they had been given, but their possessive lust was quickly appeased, or else their minds had flitted on in search of further stimulus. (p.218)

This shocks Mrs Roxburgh. Moreover, she is made to feel that her white skin is something to be ashamed of when she is blackened by charcoal. Her hair roughly cut, blackened, and naked, Mrs Roxburgh is turned into a slave. As the lowest individual in the society, she almost becomes a beast of burden:

Again pulled to her feet, the slave was loaded with paraphernalia, and last of all the loathsome child, (p.225)

At the same time one notices some uncertainty in the Aborigines' attitude to Mrs Roxburgh. Mrs Roxburgh is sometimes treated as a supernatural being. Her position in Aboriginal society appears to vary from that of the most degraded person to the most feared; she is at once a goddess and a slave.

Mrs Roxburgh herself displays a similar ambivalence about the supposedly dirty and haphazard life of the Aborigines;

Despite her misery and the child in her arms, Mrs Roxburgh could not remain unmoved by the natural beauty surrounding her. Evening light coaxed nobler forms out of black bodies and introduced a visual design into what had been a dusty hugger-mugger camp. (pp.220-221)

The passage also shows some of the subtle changes that are taking place in Mrs Roxburgh. Where before was total confusion and ugliness, Mrs Roxburgh is beginning to see order and beauty. Similar changes are revealed in:

She looked down once and saw the pus from her charge's sores uniting with the sweat on her own charcoal-dusted arms.

Disgust might have soured her had it not been for a delicious smell of dew rising from the grass their feet trampled and the bushes they brushed against in passing. (p.225)

Increasingly Mrs Roxburgh seems attracted to some aspects of bush life. It appears she discovers a kind of exotic beauty and order amidst superficial repulsiveness and disorder. This is an indication of the degree of Mrs Roxburgh's acceptance of a seemingly totally alien culture and civilization. But Mrs Roxburgh is not merely attracted by the bush, her sensuality is aroused by the male Aborigines:

... a fever ... frequently glittered in the divine as well as the human eye, stimulated less by the craving for food than by the forthright stench of male bodies (p.240)

In this instance, Mrs Roxburgh acknowledges a basic similarity between the males of her society and the Aboriginal males: both can satisfy her sexual desire. On the matter of make up or decorating oneself, the novel makes an interesting comparison:

As she had conciliated Austin Roxburgh and his mother by allowing herself to be prinked and produced, she accepted when some elderly lady of her own tribe advanced to adjust a sulphur topknot; it might have been old Mrs Roxburgh adding or subtracting some jewel or feather in preparation for a dinner or ball. (p.240)

The circumstances are different, but the practice is essentially the same with similar goals in both cases. Where one culture uses glittering stones, another uses bright feathers. The novel, in short, implies a sceptical attitude to categories such as civilization and the primitive.

The extent of the change which has taken place in Mrs Roxburgh is shown through her participation in cannibalism. This incident alone, which wholly undermines the foundations of her moral beliefs, reveals that Mrs Roxburgh's doubts about her original cultural values are serious. In addition, the incident shows Mrs Roxburgh's readiness to try to work by other cultural values, however radically different these might be from her own:

She had raised the bone, and was tearing at it with her teeth, spasmodically chewing, swallowing by great gulps which her throat threatened to return. But did not She was less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed by the fact that she had been moved to do it. The exquisite innocence of this forest morning, its quiet broken by a single flute-note endlessly repeated, tempted her to believe that she had partaken of a sacrament. But there remained what amounted to an abomination of human behaviour, a headache, and the first signs of indigestion. In the light of Christian morality she must never think of the incident again. (p.244)

The uncontrollable impulse to participate in cannibalism is what surprises Mrs Roxburgh more than her eating of human flesh. Given her background, she had expected nothing but revulsion at the possibility of eating human flesh. That she finds herself irresistibly involved in cannibalism aggravates the doubts she has about the cultural values of her society, and about the extent to which they are deeply rooted in an individual. At the same time she seems uncertain about the precise nature of her difference, as a civilized person, from the so-called savage.

Having eaten bits of flesh from a human thigh bone, Mrs Roxburgh experiences a certain form of tranquility. In a sense, through the event, Mrs Roxburgh crosses the bridge from being an alien to becoming part of the community in which she is. Although Mrs Roxburgh feels much closer to the Aborigines through her participation in cannibalism, she remains troubled by the memory of her old values. From the perspective of white society the episode she has gone through is an abomination. Hence she will do her best to forget it; on the whole the narrative points to multiple possible ways of looking at the incident of cannibalism. Through cannibalism it seems Mrs Roxburgh is initiated into, perhaps, one of the most sacred rites amongst the Aborigines. At the same time, cannibalism as presented in the novel, appears to challenge one to reject it as heathen when it has similarities with the most sacred ceremony in the Christian faith: the Eucharist.

Through suffering amongst the Aborigines, Mrs Roxburgh gains spiritually as her sympathies broaden. The peace and happiness she sometimes feels while living a basic life casts doubt on material possessions as sources of happiness in her society. Lacking institutionalized cruelty, Aboriginal life might impress one as much better than the life of whites at settlements. However, as the novel shows, Aboriginal life has its own difficulties, such as its almost total dependence on the land. The absolute reliance on foraging makes life look hard. Furthermore, the tribal war that breaks out on the night Mrs Roxburgh flees indicates some of the cruelties in Aboriginal life. For these reasons the narrative seems slightly ambivalent about Aboriginal life, culture and civilization.

Mrs Roxburgh's relationship with Jack Chance serves to bring to the fore the novel's sceptical attitude about a society based on the convict system. The system is rigid and inhuman. Jack Chance has a life sentence for the murder of Mab, his wife. But it is obvious that he killed out of love and jealousy, the last arising from his wife's infidelity. There are sufficient grounds to warrant a less severe punishment. But this is not so even though

No one is ever ... is ever wholly to blame. (p.262)

The inflexible penal system appears uninterested to find out factors which might reduce the extent of the gravity of a man's crime. For murder, the punishment is a whole life as a prisoner, in disregard of the fact that:

There's often reason why the condemned is not to blame, but the law don't always reckonize it - not what it don't see written down. (p.291)

Of course, the system strikes one as hypocritical because it seems based on the false assumption that some people are good and others are evil. In the case of Jack Chance, it is suggested that he loved Mab. From his recollections about the night Mab was murdered, one senses Jack Chance's deep remorse, particularly when he says:

I knowed the 'ardness of the bed, but 'adn't always noticed it. That night I learnt every corner of the room by 'eart. And Mab, Ellen. I was never worse in love and she never give 'erself so trustful as on the last night I spent with 'er.' (p.292)

The narrative might not be condoning Jack Chance's murder of his wife, but it also seems to suggest that he should not be judged merely by the letter of the law. The settler community which enforces this dubious form of justice consists of criminals like Garnet Roxburgh. The only reason why the likes of Garnet Roxburgh continue to play their hypocritical roles as the pillars of society is because they have not been discovered: Hence Pilcher comments on the convict as

The criminals they found out about! That's th' injustice of it. How many of us was never found out? (p.135)

Guilt in this instance is equated with discovery, innocence with non-discovery. The novel intimates that the death of Mrs Domer Roxburgh was arranged by Garnet Roxburgh. But, as Pilcher puts it, because Garnet Roxburgh was not found out, he is innocent and need not feel perturbed in his contempt of the unfortunate whose crimes were discovered. Through Garnet Roxburgh and Jack Chance, the novel reveals its ambiguous attitude to the concepts of guilt and innocence, good and evil. The narrative suggests one adopts a creatively sceptical view which enables one to recognize these concepts' simultaneous presence in characters.

The relationship between Jack Chance and Mrs Roxburgh also serves to explore the possibility of a more authentic kind of love, different in its depth and expression from the sterile type we have seen between the latter and Austin Roxburgh. Austin's and Mrs Roxburgh's marriage was hardly founded on living love. The marriage appears to have been based on some literary ideal to which Austin Roxburgh attempted to give shape and substance in a woman. Mrs Roxburgh fails to meet the ideal because she is fallibly human, and not a poetic perfection. However, with Jack Chance, it is different. Through situations of abject degradation experienced by Mrs Roxburgh and Jack Chance, the novel reveals possibilities of real love:

'My love? My darling?' She gathered in her arms this detached object, or rare fruit, his head. (p.281)

And she had loved this man, even if she also pitied and needed him. She did still love him It was love, whether selfless or sensual, which had restored the youthful skin to her breasts, the hollow in a smooth, leaf-patterned flank;

the tendrils of hair singed off ritually by her black mentors were again stirring in the armpits. (p.284)

The two passages suggest a warm and candid love expressed by Mrs Roxburgh's gestures and Jack Chance's responses to them. This love rejuvenates Mrs Roxburgh, a fact which is evident from the new lustre her breasts acquire and the singed hair which has begun to grow again. Understanding and acceptance of each other's strengths and weaknesses seem central to Mrs Roxburgh's and Jack Chance's love. The hard experiences both have undergone incline them to be more generous in the range of their sympathies. Hence Mrs Roxburgh sees in Jack Chance not just a criminal, but also a loving man. As for herself, Mrs Roxburgh recognizes in her self both the faithless and the ever trying character traits.

Mrs Roxburgh loses her garnet ring when she is in love with Jack Chance. The loss of the ring symbolizes the end of her connection with the pretentious manners which were forced on her by Austin Roxburgh and his mother. It also suggests the beginning of a genuine love that is untainted by lust, which seems to have been the motive for the sex Garnet Roxburgh had with Mrs Roxburgh. Mrs Roxburgh's love for Jack Chance transcends social categories. The love seems based on the belief in the co-existence in people of supposedly opposed qualities such as good and evil, guilt and innocence. As the diary reveals:

How much of the miscreant, I wonder, is in Garnet R.? Or in *myself* for that matter? I know that I have lied when necessary and am at times what the truly virtuous call 'hypocritical'. If I am not all good (only my dearest husband is that) I am not excessively bad. How far is it to the point where one oversteps the bounds? (pp.79-80)

Mrs Roxburgh acknowledges the presence of miscreant and good qualities in her self; she suspects Garnet Roxburgh of being a miscreant too. The recognition of the presence of an evil quality both in her self and in Garnet Roxburgh implies that the two are not different, in essential respects, from Jack Chance, the convict.

Mrs Roxburgh's return to white society is foreshadowed by the observation: 'Now, as they escaped from one hell into what might prove a worse, however fulsome their reception at Moreton Bay, this man was leaning on her ...' (p.299). Mrs Roxburgh's attempts to re-integrate with white society and the difficulties she faces alert one to the ambiguities implicit in the concepts of prisoner and of free person. Living amongst the Aborigines Mrs Roxburgh is treated as a prisoner. Her return to white society should represent a return to freedom. But as revealed by the parochialism of people like Captain Lovell, the pressures on her to conform to conventions and its hypocrisies, the invisible and yet powerful restrictions Mrs Roxburgh re-accepts amount to her being placed in a psychological prison. An instance of her society's narrow-mindedness and inflexible attitudes is shown during Mrs Roxburgh's interrogation when Captain Lovell says:

It's by hearing different versions of the same incident that we arrive at the truth ... in any court. (p.326)

and Mrs Roxburgh responds:

I was never in court. Perhaps that's why I was never sure whether I'd arrived at the truth - ... (p.326)

The narrative displays an ambivalent view about the notion of truth. It suggests that it might take more than different versions to arrive at truth, if truth itself is at all achievable. But even if it were possible to reach truth, such truth, as Mrs Roxburgh's comments indicates, would be dependent on perspective:

... the truth is often many-sided, and difficult to see from every angle. (p.341)

For this reason Mrs Roxburgh exhibits a lot of generosity in the way she receives Pilcher's fabricated story about the separation of the pinnacle from the long boat. She is aware that she has also lied by not telling all. She has suppressed the story of her love affair with Jack Chance; her participation in cannibalism has also not been revealed.

For there are conventions to be followed:

It only now occurred to Mrs Roxburgh that self-knowledge might remain a source of embarrassment, even danger. (p.307)

Like Mrs Hunter in *The Eye of the Storm*, Mrs Roxburgh will live with her knowledge, unable to share it because no one would really understand her.

Jack Chance's flight back to the bush represents the narrative's bitterest indictment of the convict system by showing the extent of his distrust of white society. Despite the good deeds he has done by Mrs Roxburgh, Jack Chance's awareness, the novel implies, of his rigid and unforgiving society forces him to return to the bush. Life in the bush might be hard, but as Austin Roxburgh - paraphrasing Pilcher - says:

Prisoners ... will sometimes escape. And wander for years in the interior. Supporting themselves off the land. Suffering terrible hardships. But as a life it is more bearable than the one they have bolted from. (p.137)

In this way the novel shows that there are indeed gnawing things, not only in the house of culture, but also in the house of nature. On the whole, however, the house of culture appears to have greater difficulties in the form of its institutionalized method of oppression.

Mrs Roxburgh's ultimate gain from her experiences after the shipwreck, her sojourn amongst the Aborigines, her association with Jack Chance and her subsequent return to white society appears to be her capacity continually to adjust her perspective and to accept that there are other ways of seeing and doing things. She learns about the presence of apparently contradictory attributes in both her self and the selves of others. Her insight into human nature, the novel suggests, does not alienate her from society. On the contrary, Mrs Roxburgh is shown to be much closer to reality:

Oh no, the crags are not for me! ... A woman, as I see, is more like moss or lichen that takes to some tree or rock as she takes to her husband. (p.363)

The woman clings to the man in the natural manner that lichen takes to rock or tree. It is a normal relationship. Thus significantly the novel concludes with the prospect that Mrs Roxburgh will marry Mr Jevons. Furthermore, in the last scene Mrs Roxburgh is shown alongside a pregnant woman. The narrative seems to have gone back to the family, where it began, to seek meaning in life. It appears to imply that the love such as that found in a family is what makes life worth while. In the same vein one of the epigraphs to the novel asserts:

Love is your last chance. There is really nothing else on earth to keep you there.

Louis Aragon

In the light of the complexities of the issues the novel raises and the apparent lack of solutions to them, love as shown between Mrs Roxburgh and some of the Aboriginal children, between Mrs Roxburgh and Jack Chance, between Mrs Roxburgh and Austin Roxburgh, brings a kind of meaning to life which it would not otherwise have. The love intimated here transcends racial, social and class categories. It is the kind of love captured by the wretched lettering in Pilcher's church, which proclaims: 'God is Love.' The crude church, without a door in the doorway, ultimately indicates the divine immanence in the ordinary. By implication the narrative is critical of the likes of Mr Cottle, the priest, who look beyond this world for a divinity who seems unconnected with life as Mrs Roxburgh has lived it. Mr Cottle strikes one as the worst example of a priest whose love is wholly abstract. His generosity does not extend to those whom he considers guilty: he makes a distinction between the so-called innocent and guilty. Everything is summed up in his comment:

... this is a penal settlement for hardened criminals But punishment must be administered, in certain cases, when it is due. (p.350)

It is this either-innocent-or-guilty attitude that the narrative is clearly uncomfortable about. Through sceptical filters the novel reveals uncertainties that appear intrinsic to concepts such as nature and culture, good and evil, guilt and innocence, slavery and freedom, and love, lust and fidelity in marriage. The novel encourages a flexible attitude to these concepts in its exploration of them. Similarly, *The Twyborn Affair* explores notions of love, beauty, sexuality, art and religiosity in a manner that shows them as having a multiplicity of possible meanings.

It may be worth noting, however, that in the section dealing with Mrs Roxburgh's sojourn amongst the Aborigines, *A Fringe of Leaves* evinces an altogether different kind of ambivalence, and one which concerns the overall impression conveyed about Aborigines. This appears from the author's choice of incidents focused on and the manner in which the Aborigines are presented. The novel dwells extensively on white perceptions of the Aborigines as degraded. It does not at any point present experiences

from the Aborigines' perspective. As a result, one is left with the feeling that Aborigines might well be as they are perceived. Since they are not shown to think, to reflect on things, they strike one as having no mind, as being less than human, creatures leading aimless, haphazard, beastly, dirty and speechless lives. At the very least, Mrs Roxburgh's view of them as savages and natural innocents appears, perhaps unintentionally, to be confirmed by the author. To the extent that this is so the larger theme of love and reconciliation is undermined.

CHAPTER 4

REALITY AND APPEARANCE: THE TWYBORN AFFAIR

A distinguishing feature of *The Twyborn Affair* is the pervasiveness of dissatisfaction one notices in its characters. Almost every character is unhappy with the present awareness of his self and seems to believe that there might be another self which is unknown, but more real. Thus these characters are shown to crave for this other self. In this sense *The Twyborn Affair* is essentially a novel about exploration: the search for an actual self that exists though hidden to the owner. The question which opens the novel promptly signals the theme:

Which road this afternoon, madam? (p.11)

The question concerning the choice of road represents the dilemmas the characters face on the journey of exploration. The road taken might or might not reveal to one the truth about real self. In Joan Golson's case the road taken is one that leads to an examination of the idea and practice of lesbianism. We witness her fantasies, transient joys and endless frustrations as she attempts to establish a relationship with Eudoxia Vatatzes. As for Eudoxia Vatatzes, the road she is on is one in which disguises seem to shroud reality - whatever that might be. The façade itself may be taken for the real, as is evident from the way Joan Golson reacts to Eudoxia Vatatzes, thinking she is a woman.

The schism between the self one senses and the other self one thinks is more authentic and needs to be discovered creates in the central character ambiguous feelings about her self. Eddie as Eudoxia is as ambivalent about her self, as was the Eddie who was supposed to marry Marian Dibden:

... nothing of me is mine, not even the body I was given to inhabit, nor the disguises chosen for it - A. decides on these, seldom without my agreement. The real E. has not yet been discovered, and perhaps never will be. (p.79)

It seems there are three levels to be distinguished in the personality of Eudoxia: the real E. who has not yet been discovered: the 'I' that observes itself and sees itself as incomplete. Eudoxia's diary comment suggests that the body, which is separate from 'I,' is a disguise, like clothes. The body hides the genuine 'I' which is unknown to 'I'. The quest in Eudoxia's case is for that real 'I'. But in this novel the mask itself at times appears to replace whatever the real self might be. For example, Eudoxia's sense of

being a woman hinges almost entirely on the clothes she wears. In this respect the mask becomes her perception of her real self. Then it is problematical to separate the disguise from the authentic self. For the supposed real self is in doubt and could be a fabrication.

An aspect of Part One of the novel is its surreal atmosphere. The air of unreality promotes the characters' feelings of doubt about their identities. Firstly, the landscape in which the plot is set fluctuates between the real and the dream world:

Where the villa was situated there opened a view of the sea, its hyacinth deepening to purple at that hour of evening, islands of amethyst nestling in tender feathers of foam, clouds too detached in every sense to suggest anything physical, only a slash of brash sunset to warn of the menace invariably concealed in landscape and time. (p.17)

The feeling of perfect balance and harmony, with a little intimation of disharmony, in the landscape here transports one to an idealized world; an Eden of some kind. In this water-colour scene, Joan Golson suitably watches Eudoxia and Angelos Vatatzes play the piano. The music surges around Joan Golson, having escaped from a well-lit interior. Joan Golson's desire for Eudoxia, whom she mistakes for a woman, compounds the sense of unrealness. Moreover, Eudoxia knows Joan Golson as his/her mother's lesbian partner; on the other hand Joan Golson fails to see that Eudoxia is Eddie Twyborn. This fantasy-like plot where Eudoxia's true identity is kept hidden till the end of Part One, where Eudoxia recognizes Joan Golson - whereas the latter cannot see beyond the clothes - greatly contributes to the dreamscape in this section of the novel.

There is also a sense in which some characters and incidents impress one as incomplete and random, in need of no explanation, as in a dream. One such event is when the Golsons visit Crimson Cottage:

He opened the door. '*Qui est là?*'

'*Nous sommes les Golsons.*'

'Who?'

'Joan and - Curly - Golson.'

...

'You met my husband. You are Monsieur Vatatzes, aren't you?'

'He is not at home.'

...

'But how tiresome of us! Have we come on the wrong day? I'm sure your wife said Thursday.'

'Anna died.'

Joan Golson thought she might burst into tears, when Madame Vatatzes appeared at the end of what must have been a poky hall, but which in the circumstances had taken on the endlessness, the proportions, of a dream perspective, down which this vision was advancing, burnt arms outstretched towards them from long, floating, carnation sleeves. (p.99)

Angelos's first utterance to the Golsons is in French. In this way he seems to confirm

Joan Golson's illusion that he is French, though he is in fact Greek. From French, Angelos switches quickly to English. However, both languages are foreign to him; they do not serve to reveal his identity. The languages here are like clothes whose function is to mask reality. The use of French and English confuse^s and thus contribute^s to the feeling of unreality in the situation in which we find Joan and Curly Golson, and Angelos. The description of Madam Vatzes's entry, with its specific reference to a dream perspective, clinches the dreamlike impression the scene conveys. It is a characteristic of Part One of the novel that events straddle reality and fantasy. While the *dramatis personae*, including Eudoxia, are haunted by doubt about their sex and real selves, the narrative itself is ambiguous as to whether it is functioning at a realistic or a fantasy level.

The narrative's questioning of categories in this section of the novel is also shown through the concept of foreignness. Joan and Curly Golson are aliens in England, where they have been, and in France, where we find them now. Unknown to them, Eudoxia and Angelos Vatzes are also foreigners in France. But there is another sense in which Eudoxia and Angelos Vatzes, and Joan Golson are foreigners even in their own countries of origin. This concerns their deviant sexual preferences. The homosexual relationship between Eudoxia and Angelos puts them on the fringes of society anywhere; as for Joan Golson, she is on the outskirts of society because of her lesbianism. The feeling of being abnormal makes Eudoxia hide her true identity when she is living at Crimson Cottage and My Blue Home. Before then, Eudoxia/Eddie's awareness as an outsider drove him to escape from the possibility of marrying Marian Dibden. But as it happens her/his attempts to escape and hide amount to little because uncertainties are intrinsic to his sense of self. Thus Eudoxia's ambivalence about her sex and self cannot be got rid of by simply fleeing to another country. As a matter of fact, in running away Eudoxia aggravates the feeling of disjunction between her real self and the kind of self society expects from her. In consequence, as she feels more and more unable to meet society's expectations, the more foreign becomes her perception of real self. In other words, she becomes more alienated from her real self because she is compelled to wear heavier disguises. In turn the postures and masks by themselves appear to replace her authentic self. At this point the narrative seems to show its own scepticism about the separation of the real self from the façade. The suggestion might be that the supposed real could itself be the mask, while the mask is the genuine self: it seems difficult to tell the difference.

Some of the ambiguity about the reality of events in Part One is brought about through the atmosphere of theatre, role playing, which is evident in certain scenes. For instance, on leaving Crimson Cottage Eudoxia and Angelos Vatzes leave behind things

that seem to function like props. In the kitchen Joan Golson finds: 'the squalor of unwashed dishes, smeared glasses, coffee grounds, a great over-ripe tomato melting into the papered surface of a dresser shelf' (p.114). The bathroom is filthy with spilt powder, balls of hair, cotton-wool swabs. There is also 'an enema of enormous proportions' (p.115). These, some might say, 'stage aids' eloquently convey the picture of the life Eudoxia and Angelos Vatzatzes led at Crimson Cottage. The reality of Eudoxia's life as she lived it, contrasts sharply with the illusions of splendour Joan Golson had imagined. The novel appears to show that the surface, like the name Crimson Cottage, could be a facade hiding an inner reality that is radically different. In this respect the make up Eudoxia uses serves an analogous function. It creates the surface image of a woman, who is a man. Eudoxia's identity continually wavers between the two sexes. The sex roles she assumes provide her with a kind of temporary refuge from the endless search for her authentic self. In addition, the narrative intimates the ambiguous copresence of degradation and beauty through its focus on the one hand on the attractiveness of Eudoxia and on the other the dirty surroundings in which she lives.

Another aspect of the uncertainties in Eudoxia's mind concerns the death of Angelos at My Blue Home. His death evokes conflicting emotions in Eudoxia:

'He is dead,' she said, in what sounded not only a broken, but at the same time, an awakening voice. (p.126)

Eudoxia is at once relieved and grieved by the death of Angelos. The homosexual relationship with Angelos used to arouse in Eudoxia ambivalent feelings of disgust and attraction. Her diary reveals the simultaneous wish to flee from and to stay with Angelos. The death seems to bring about a kind of rebirth in Eudoxia. But the vague reawakening appears to lead to other difficulties. The novel suggests this through the image of the night. Eudoxia is described as leaving My Blue Home only to enter another night. Her exploration of self in the disguise of a woman has not diminished doubts about her sex and identity. Eudoxia's sentiments are still confused. In a way she is like Joan Golson, who concludes Part One with revealing gestures:

She laughed up at him. And while still holding this confetti of a letter, she accepted with the other hand the one her husband was offering. (pp.129-30)

The letter contains Joan Golson's confession about her fragmented sense of self. The difficulties of her twilight position in society are symbolized by her two hands: one holds pieces of the letter which expresses her lesbian feelings, the other holds the hand of her husband. Joan Golson's real self consists in what her two hands express here. The narrative suggests that to try to live one or the other alternative life might still leave Joan Golson incomplete. An acceptance of both her lesbian tendency, and her heterosexuality will make up the total Joan Golson. Thus it appears that to the question: 'Which road this afternoon, madam?,' the narrative suggests 'both' as the

answer. This answer anticipates Eudoxia's reconciliation with her mother at the end of the novel. Then Eudoxia/Eddie appears to accept the reality of her fragmented self.

Part Two of the novel begins six years later when World War I is finished. Eudoxia, now Eddie Twyborn, is returning to Australia on board ship. His experiences in the war have done little to resolve his uncertainties. As a male version of Eudoxia, Eddie is still troubled by doubts about his real self:

I'm a kind of mistake trying to correct itself ... I am the Resurrection and the Dead, or more simply, the eternal deserter in search of asylum. I did not leave Angelos, but might have done so. I did not desert from the army because it would have been too difficult. In such situations you're sucked in deeper, while remaining a deserter at heart. (p.143)

Eddie feels the impermanence of his self; hence he calls himself the eternal deserter. As he is unable to reach a stable sense of his self, situations dictate whatever he becomes. The death of Angelos led him to join the war which was already there. Since the war is over, Eddie is returning to Australia. The return to Australia, like the assumption of the male mask, is decided for Eddie by circumstances. In Australia, as in any other country for that matter, Eddie is a foreigner. Thus an Australian at Fremantle calls him a 'pom'. Eddie belongs nowhere, even his self is a stranger to him.

The period when Eddie stays with his parents serves to reveal the intensity about his sense of impermanence. The novel accentuates the feeling of doubt and transience by its recurring use of verbs in the subjunctive mood.¹

... the situation might have grown intolerable ... the mysteries of which might never be solved. (p.148)

... might have been unbearable ... (p.149)

The overall impression one gets from this part of the novel is of the uncertainty of things. Eadie is the lesbian mother who might have been happier if she had no child or had a daughter instead of a son. Similarly, Eddie might have had a more stable personality if Edward, his father, had been more demonstrative about his love for his son. On the other hand it is doubtful if things would have been much different if Eadie had had a daughter, Edward had shown more love, because these three - Eadie, Edward and Eddie - suggest aspects of the same character trait. As Jean-Pierre Durix puts it:

[the three characters] seem almost mere declensions on a single pattern. 'Eddie,' 'Eadith,' 'Eudoxia,' [Eadie], and 'Edward' are the different facets of a broken up figure which the author tries to fit together.²

Eddie seems to seek to combine the three possibilities being at once his own self, his

1. Dorothy Green in *The Music of Love* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984) has described *The Twyborn Affair* as 'a novel in the subjunctive mood.'

2. Jean-Pierre Durix, 'Masks and Travesties: *The Twyborn Affair* by Patrick White,' *Commonwealth* 4 (1979-80), p.42.

mother's and father's selves. Two possibilities - as Marian Dibden's husband-to-be and Eudoxia - have already been explored. In Part Two, through his retreat to the Monaro district where he takes up a labouring job, the narrative investigates several other possibilities which might enable Eddie to discover his real self. Eddie's relationship with Marcia Lushington looks like an attempt to merge with a proxy of his mother. For as it happens, Marcia is an acquaintance of Eddie's mother. (We presume that Marcia and Eadie are about the same age.) However, the relationship fails, though after several sexual encounters. It seems to fail essentially because in Eddie's mind the relationship represents a regressive return to the womb:

She was ready to accept him back into her body; she would have liked to imprison him in her womb (p.222)

Moreover, it appears Eddie fails as Marcia's lover partly because of his ambiguous feelings towards Greg Lushington, Marcia's husband. Even when Eddie is apparently in love with Marcia he is homosexually attracted to Greg Lushington:

At the moment he was perhaps drawn to Greg's unexpected dedication to poetry as much as to his wife's voluptuous charms. (p.234)

Marcia's charms exert an influence similar to Greg's poetry in Eddie's mind. But Eddie has not had more than one poem read to him and yet inexplicably loves Greg's poetry. In fact what Eddie appears to love is Greg himself as an avatar of Edward. Thus Eddie's emotions are torn between Marcia, a proxy of Eadie, and Greg, a representative of Edward. Eddie's feelings in this particular instance are confused the more by Greg who shows some affection for him. Eddie, as Marcia explains, reminds Greg of the son he has always wanted to have. To Eddie, however, Greg recalls Angelos Vatatzes as well, with whom he had an extended homosexual relationship. As if this were not complex enough, Eddie is also attracted to Don Prowse:

He was becoming aware of Don's torso at the bedside: nipples surrounded by whorls of rosy fuzz opening out into flat expanses of ginger bristle. Don smiling (p.235)

This dream reveals Eddie's unconscious expectations from his relationship with Prowse. It also prefigures the homosexual rape of Eddie by Prowse. Given the contradictory impulses evident in Eddie it is no wonder that he goes on questing, seemingly unable to find his sensed real self. Appearances and their supposed underlying reality are ever in flux to make their distinction difficult, if not impossible, to establish. Maleness might seem Eddie's real self till it is questioned through his brief return to the personality of Eudoxia in the homosexual rape. When Eddie submits to Prowse, his psyche acknowledges the uncertainties which haunted it as Eudoxia. Then the arrival on the scene of Joan and Curly Golson again precipitate Eddie's escape. But as previously on the occasion involving Eudoxia and Angelos Vatatzes, Eddie's escape takes him nowhere, since the burdens of trying to find an authentic self persist.

One other aspect explored in Part Two concerns the possibility of life as presented in an ordinary family; the family is ordinary if one chooses to ignore the fact that Dot has a child by her father. Using Denny and Dot Allen, the novel examines this facet of life. One evening when Eddie is invited for a drink to the house of Denny Allen, he glimpses the uncertainties attaching to married life. The episode ends with an ironic comment:

As Eddie Twyborn untethered his horse and rode away, he wondered whether he wasn't leaving the best of all possible worlds. (p.278)

There are doubts about the paternity of Dot's child. Above all, Denny is presented as an imbecile. The suggestion seems to be that for marriage to survive in the circumstances we find Dot and Denny one or both partners would have to be mentally defective. And in order to experience happiness in such a marriage one needs to be possessed of innocence or self-delusion, which borders on stupidity:

Happiness was perhaps the reward of those who cultivate illusion, or who, like Denny Allen, have it thrust upon them by some tutelary being, and then are granted sufficient innocent grace to sustain it. (p.249)

The point of the novel appears to be that happiness pure and simple is unattainable. Experiences associated with the concept of happiness are fraught with ambiguities.

On the whole, Eddie's sojourn at Bogong serves to make him even more aware of the conflicts within his self. His relationship with Marcia on the one hand, and with Prowse on the other, heighten Eddie's sense of ambivalence about his sex and the self he must discover. His flight from Bogong is in fact an escape from the possibility of exposure of his hidden self at which he cannot bear others to look. In a sense Eddie prefers to remain a stranger to some aspects of his self. The other side of Eddie's aspirations which he needs to hide are represented by Mrs Joan Golson whose dissatisfaction with life stems from her deviant sexual desires. Hence each time Joan Golson appears on the scene, Eddie flees to some other place to try on another mask; Joan Golson reflects to Eddie an aspect of his self he cannot face.

Part Three of *The Twyborn Affair* is set in a brothel in London. Eddie has worn another mask and presents himself/herself as Eadith Trist. Like earlier versions of herself as Eudoxia and Eddie, Mrs Trist belongs to a twilight category. Her dawn walks and eccentric dress are some of the indications of Mrs Trist's position on the fringes of society. While running the brothel, she dresses like a nun and maintains for herself 'conventual' discipline and observes sexual abstinence. At the same time the prostitutes are presented as works of art:

All her spring flowers, her vernal nuns, appeared scrupulously sprayed. She aimed at cultivating in them that effect between the tremulous and the static which the flowers in an expensive florist's window derive from artificial dew. (p.324)

'Spring flowers' and 'vernal nuns' intimate two kinds of regeneration the narrative associates with prostitutes: physical and spiritual rebirths. At the physical level, the prostitutes seem to provide an outlet for perhaps what would be repressed obsessions. For it is said that sexual perversity in the brothel increases correspondingly with the dislocation and fear brought about by the war. But there is a sense in which the brothel serves a spiritual healing function. This is suggested by Mrs Trist's dedication to her bawdy house, and the role played by Bridie:

Admittedly Bridie had a rather more esoteric clientele; she specialised in whips and chains. ('If I draw the line, madam it's when it comes to the shit-eaters.')

...

She engaged Bridie for her good humour, her intrinsic beauty, and what she sensed to be a gift for dealing with the perverse in human beings without condescending to the afflicted or martyring herself. (p.331)

Bridie appears to offer the body upon which the different clientele can give free rein to their vices. Bridie's own intrinsic goodness prevents her from becoming contaminated by the excesses of her clients. In a sense Bridie appears to exorcise her perverse customers of their obsessive desires while she remains untouched, though she is central to and involved in the ritual of cleansing. Bridie has a club-foot and might not be physically attractive. In a way, she seems to represent the contradictions we have come to associate with White's fiction: the physically most unattractive have the greatest spiritual potential. In other words, in Bridie we witness the ambivalent presence of physical unattractiveness and spiritual beauty. Bridie recalls Cecil Cutbush, the homosexual in *The Vivisector*. Cutbush's deviant sexual practices, rather than diminishing his spiritual standing in fact seem to enhance it.

The brothel appears to serve multiple functions which are similar to those of Bridie. It is obvious that there is filth and degradation in the brothel, as suggested by the rats' infestation, the smell of food and excrement and Dulcie's abortion. But in the midst of all this the narrative reveals a kind of exotic attraction in the brothel through the severe dedication Mrs Trist shows in the running of the house. Her unbending concern and the novel's religious and artistic intimations about the brothel seem to place it in a more attractive light:

It was her work of art: its reflexions, its melting colours, the more material kitchen quarters

Her whores. She would expect them to obey what she saw as almost a conventual rule. (p.322)

The narrative suggests that there might be no distinction between art, prostitution and a religious order. Perhaps it is in the extent of one's dedication that art, prostitution and a religious order are similar. The other common denominator of the three is that all seem to rely on human weakness. At least White's art appears energized by human

fallibility. As for Mrs Trist herself her role is indeed ambiguous. She is at once an artist, a bawd and an abbess:

An artist must guard against the tendency to sentimental indulgence, an abbess resist threats to a vocational ideal. The inspired bawd has in her a little of each. (p.323)

The artist in Mrs Trist directs her in her choices of the 'flowers' for her house and stifles the conscience that would lead her into making aesthetic mistakes, perhaps for moral reasons. The abbess in her ensures that principles of the bawdy-house are strictly kept. And as a madam, Mrs Trist presides over her prostitutes.

Mrs Trist's multiple ambiguities as a bawd reflect the conflict and turmoil about her sense of self. Though dressed as a woman, Mrs Trist is uncertain about what she is and wants to be; previously she has explored the possibilities of being female and male. In each of these roles Mrs Trist found herself/himself facing contradictory desires. Now her dress strikes one as just a thin veil which attempts to present a consistent personality. However, the only unchanging aspect of Mrs Trist's self may well be her continual fluctuations:

A 'woman of character' to her clients and her girls, she continued swimming out of mirrors and consciousness, her elasticity her only strength, like a cat which refuses to drown. (p.351)

It seems that Mrs Trist's knowledge of her self does not go beyond the image of herself which she sees in the mirror. That awareness of self only lasts during the period she is looking in the mirror; it is transient, changeable and unreliable. The extent to which Mrs Trist will remain ever an explorer and ambivalent about her real identity is conveyed in the following:

In any of its permutations her life had never been simple. Would she have enjoyed it more if it had? She thought she wouldn't, then that she would. And again, not; she did not covet the confidence, the 'strength', the daguerreotype principles of even the most admirable one-track male, nor, on the other hand, those mammary, vaginal, ovarian complications, the menopausal hells of a sex pledged to honour and obey. (p.328)

Mrs Trist's complex personality appears to disallow the attainment of a stable sense of her self. Every situation she finds herself in is fraught with its own doubts. As Eddie he/she flees from the tennis court and Marian Dibden because he/she cannot face marriage; similar doubts plague her as Eudoxia Vatatzes. When she returns to the mask of Eddie in Part Two, she/he hopes to find an authentic self through manual labour. As it turns out, Eddie is no more certain about his real self than Eudoxia. The revival of his former disguise by Prowse's rape prompts Eddie's escape; the escape takes him nowhere different. For in the mask of a bawd in London, Mrs Trist is still a foreigner from one of the Dominions. In an inward sense Mrs Trist is also a foreigner to herself. In her quest for an authentic self, she finds herself alienated from both society and her

real self. The masks she uses are alienating since they trap her in a role. In turn the role playing seems to be valued for itself only. Thus the mask and the search are confused because the searcher appears trapped by the mirror image. At the same time Mrs Trist is liberated through the exploration for she learns the truth about her real self which consists in instability and uncertainty. So, all in all, the quest has not been in vain because Eddie and Eadie, his mother, have progressed towards reaching an understanding and acceptance of their fragmented identities. To Eadie's question -

Are you my son Eddie?

- Mrs Trist replies:

No, but I am your daughter Eadith. (p.422)

And Eadie remarks:

I am so glad. I've always wanted a daughter. (p.423)

Eadie's acceptance of Eddie's sexual ambivalence seems to liberate her son; it puts the seal of acceptance on his doubt about his sex and self as an aspect of Eddie's reality. Thus, when he dies in the bomb raid, Eddie is not totally burdened by the disguises. The woman's make up on his face, together with the male clothes he has worn, suggest that his authentic self consists in these two facets. And whereas on previous occasions these two sides were kept apart, here they are brought together.

The occasion for the acceptance of the two aspects of Eddie's real self is brief, as such moments in White's fiction often are. It is a moment of triumph as Eddie's splintered self appears to come together: 'Eadie said I must not fail Eadith now that I have found her Eadith Eddie no matter which this fragment of myself which I lost is now returned where it belongs' (pp.431-32). In consideration that Eddie's whole life is spent in the frustrating effort to merge with Eadie or Edward either directly or through their representatives such as Marcia and Greg Lushington, and Angelos Vatatzes, Eadie's symbolic reconciliation with her son/daughter is of the greatest significance to the novel. Eadie accepts Eddie's fractured self as his/her reality. In turn it seems Eadie sees her identity reflected in Eddie's contradictory character.

Through doubt about sex and inward self, *The Twyborn Affair* explores the concepts of appearance and reality. The novel's sceptical attitude to these concepts shows them at times to be difficult to distinguish. Eddie's mask as Eudoxia is at the same time his present reality as Angelos Vatatzes's 'wife'. The narrative reveals that separating the disguises of Eddie, Eudoxia and Eadith from the real Eddie is problematical. The real self seems as much an illusion as the façade. The ambiguity present in an either-or approach leads one to think that the genuine self consists in the acceptance of both the supposed appearance and real self. In Eddie's case, the male garb and the female make up symbolize his acknowledgement of the seemingly incompatible opposites as constitutive of his complete self.

In this respect *The Twyborn Affair* is the most ambivalent and sceptical among White's later novels for it shows that resolution lies in accepting ambiguity. The kind of uncertainty the novel suggests needs to be acknowledged concerns the protagonist's awareness of his real self. Eddie accepts that his authentic self is neither male nor female, but the endless fluctuations between those two possibilities. Thus it is precisely the doubts which plague him that make up his identity.

In a sense Eddie represents the merging of several characters such as Duffield, Rhoda and Maman, in *The Vivisector*, Basil, Dorothy and Mrs Hunter, in *The Eye of the Storm*. For instance, the incest Basil and Dorothy commit at Kudjeri seems to symbolize their attempts to reach a state of completion through a kind of fusion of their bodies. As it turns out, the sense of wholeness is transient since Basil and Dorothy must soon return to the reality of their separate selves:

Such thoughtless candour poured them back into their separate skins: to turn to ice. (*ES*, p.508)

The mention of island in the same scene underscores Basil's and Dorothy's isolation when both crave completion which is unattainable in the circumstances. In contrast, Eddie in *The Twyborn Affair* achieves a kind of wholeness by acknowledging the many facets of his fractured self which is also in continual flux.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has investigated the different ways in which ambivalence and scepticism are manifested and explored in *The Vivisector*, *The Eye of the Storm*, *A Fringe of Leaves* and *The Twyborn Affair*. The four novels have been shown to be linked together by the underlying theme of doubt. Doubt and ambiguity seem to generate the movement of the plot in each novel. The novels suggest that the search for truth and real self is embarked on and continued because the characters involved feel uncertain about their selves and achievements, and thus crave a better understanding of themselves, others and reality. For instance, Hurtle Duffield's quest for truth, which is in fact the search for a comprehensive vision of life, reveals the uncertainties and ambiguities that seem inherent in his artistic sensibility. Thus the drive behind his creativity appears to be a feeling of dissatisfaction with whatever is achieved in his paintings. Each painting represents to Duffield the possibility of arriving at the truth. But as it happens these achievements have to be abandoned because they are not adequately comprehensive; the paintings are exclusive, like those on 'the chair-ness of chairs'. Truth, as Duffield discovers at the end of his life, is non-exclusive and complex. The supposedly non-essential and the essential all make up the truth. The painting 'The Whole Life' is nearer to capturing this truth because it encompasses, inter alia, the homosexual, Cecil Cutbush, the musician, Kathy Volkov and the painter, Duffield.

In this respect the painting appears to be making a statement of acceptance - that an authentic vision of life proceeds from a variety of people, including the artist who panders to societal demands, the sexual deviant and the unbending artist, such as Duffield.

The Eye of the Storm probes the concepts of ambivalence and scepticism as they affect personal relationships. Mrs Hunter's complex personality, with its selfishness, cruelty and mystical leanings, partly accounts for the unsatisfactory relationships she has with her children. As if in reaction to Mrs Hunter's character, the children adopt escapist tactics. Basil is an actor and Dorothy acts as a French princess. The novel suggests that Basil's and Dorothy's attempts to seek only the attractive part of Mrs Hunter is unrealistic. Hence the frustration the children experience in the interaction with their mother. It is intimated that the relationship between the Hunter children and their mother would be without some of its sting if the former accepted that the truth about their mother's self comprises the 'flaws and jewels'.

Through acting, Basil and Dorothy try to mute reality. But at the same time the narrative shows that it might be difficult to separate reality from acting; the two seem intimately involved with each other. An analogous ambiguity in the novel concerns reality and fantasy. Mrs Hunter's experiences in the eye of the cyclone straddle the two. It is characteristic of *The Eye of the Storm* and the rest of the later novels that most events and situations are liable to ambiguous interpretations. For instance, Sister Mary de Santis is not simply presented as the devoted nurse, she is also seen to harbour repressed sensuality, which surfaces when she meets Basil. Similarly, Sister Flora Manhood is not merely a straightforward hedonist, she evinces spiritual aspirations especially when Mrs Hunter dies. In exploring human relationships and showing the copresence of seemingly opposed traits in its characters, *The Eye of the Storm* adds a different facet to the concept of ambivalence and scepticism in White's novels. As the narrative critically examines each character, we are made to see layers of possibilities in the characters that would not be immediately evident.

A Fringe of Leaves exposes some of the tenuousness in the opposition between nature and culture. By focusing on the weaknesses and strengths of both nature and culture, the narrative reveals the peculiarities of the two. In essence the novel shows that there are more gnawing things in the house of culture than in the house of nature. It does this by laying bare the excesses of the convict system and the hypocrisy of those who run it. The perpetrators of institutionalized cruelty are portrayed as worse than the criminals themselves. Thus such people are ridiculed as having no moral right to preside over the convict institution. The greater value the novel seems to attach to nature is shown through Mrs Roxburgh's experiences amongst the Aborigines. Her sojourn amongst the Aborigines enables the protagonist to see through some of the pretensions of her own culture. At the same time she is also able to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of Aboriginal culture. The novel suggests that on the whole Mrs Roxburgh benefits immensely from the exposure, because it broadens her range of sympathies. From the experiences Mrs Roxburgh becomes more acceptant than before. The experience compels her to look more closely at her self and she finds that she is made up of contradictory qualities. She is at once enduring, faithless, loving, cruel, sensual and mystical. Having been rescued by Jack Chance, the convict, and having subsequently fallen in love with him, Mrs Roxburgh comes to understand the convict better. She realises that like any human, he has his flaws and strengths. He is not therefore 'the enemy of mankind.'¹ Rather it is the system of incarceration with its rigidities and excesses which creates the Jack Chances of Australia. Unlike condemnatory characters

1. David Tacey, *op. cit.*, p.192.

like Mr Cottle, Mrs Roxburgh accepts the co-existence of goodness and evil in her self and the selves of others. Another important truth Mrs Roxburgh gains from her experiences in the shipwreck and the bush lies in the realization that truth itself is an ambiguous concept; there is nothing absolute about it.

The ambiguities found in *The Vivisector*, *The Eye of the Storm* and *A Fringe of Leaves* reach their peak in *The Twyborn Affair*. As the title of the last novel suggests, its central character goes through a series of transformations. The sex changes which Eddie makes with the help of disguises show the continual uncertainties plaguing him. In the varied roles we find him, Eddie is always ambivalent about both his authentic self and his sex; the doubt about the latter seems to be a corollary to Eddie's confusion about the former. As Eddie is shown to wander from one uncertain role to another and back again, the narrative itself appears to possess some degree of ambiguity, in so far as it may be taken as working either at a realistic or a fantastic level. The description of incidents and situations suggests both a dream and a real world:

Except for a sound of cutlery from the kitchen quarters, the house was heavy with silence, which did not prevent slabs of the past moving round in it. They pursued her as she fled upstairs past Courbet's peasant of the livery jowl. A cloying tortoiseshell light clung as insidiously as the misty future in her dream of the night before.

She stood bathing her face in front of the bathroom glass.

He burped back at her, out of the past or the future.

She felt the better for it, however. (p.381)

The sound of cutlery conveys a realistic detail that is coupled to memory which is portrayed as palpable, 'slabs of the past'. 'Cloying tortoiseshell light' is directly linked with a dream about a hazy future. Finally, Mrs Trist's identity seems to change from the self, which is female, to her reflection, which is male, and back to the female who feels better after burping. This is a good example of the kind of ambiguity which is found in the narrative itself. Such uncertainty in the novel serves to enhance the doubts in the characters. Almost every character, event and occasion in *The Twyborn Affair* is open to several, and often contradictory, interpretations. For instance, Mrs Trist, the bawd, might also be seen as an artist. Her concern about aesthetically appropriate choice of girls, and her role as the omniscient puppeteer in the bawdy house give her a status analogous to that of the author. The author manipulates his characters in a manner similar to Mrs Trist's control over the house; Mrs Trist is able to see almost all the things her girls do without their knowing or seeing her do it. At the same time Mrs Trist might be said to be both male and female. In that sense, she resembles the artist who is able to enter the minds of both male and female characters. This ability which derives from the feeling of having a dual sex seems to be uniquely advantageous to the artist, as White himself sees:

In spite of looking convincingly male I may have been too passive to resist, or else I recognised the freedom being conferred on me to range through every variation of the human mind, to play so many roles in so many contradictory envelopes of flesh.²

The 'contradictory envelopes of flesh' form the substance of *The Twyborn Affair* which in turn provides a fitting conclusion to the progressively complex theme of doubt and the search for other possibilities which unify White's later novels.

2. Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1983), p.35.

WORKS CONSULTED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Texts

- White, Patrick. *The Vivisector* (1970). Ringwood: Penguin, 1973.
 ----- . *The Eye of the Storm* (1973). Ringwood: Penguin, 1975.
 ----- . *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976). Ringwood: Penguin, 1977.
 ----- . *The Twyborn Affair* (1979). Ringwood: Penguin, 1981.

Other Works by Patrick White

Novels

- White, Patrick. *The Living and the Dead* (1941). Ringwood: Penguin, 1967.
 ----- . *The Aunt's Story* (1948). Ringwood: Penguin, 1963.
 ----- . *The Tree of Man* (1956). Ringwood: Penguin, 1961.
 ----- . *Voss* (1957). Ringwood: Penguin, 1960.
 ----- . *Riders in the Chariot*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961.
 ----- . *The Solid Mandala*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966.

Autobiography

- White, Patrick. *Flaws in the Glass* (1981). Ringwood: Penguin, 1983.

Article

- White, Patrick. 'The Prodigal Son,' *Australian Letters* 1 (1958):37-45.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Articles Relating to Patrick White

- Anderson, Don. 'A Severed Leg: Anthropophagy and Communion in Patrick White's Fiction,' *Southerly* 40 (1980):399-417.
 Baker, Robert S. 'Romantic Onanism in Patrick White's *The Vivisector*,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979):203-225.
 Beatson, P.R. 'The Skiapod and the Eye: Patrick White's *The Eye of the Storm*,' *Southerly* 34 (1974):219-232.

- Beston, John B. 'Patrick White's *The Vivisector*: the artist in relation to his art,' *Australian Literary Studies* 5 (1971):168-175.
- '. 'The Influence of John Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven* on Patrick White,' *Australian Literary Studies* 6 (1974):317-319.
- '. 'Review of *The Twyborn Affair*,' *World Literature Written in English* 19 (1980):200-203.
- Blamires, David. 'Patrick White: *The Twyborn Affair*,' *Critical Quarterly* 22 (1980):77-85.
- Brady, Veronica. '*The Eye of the Storm*,' *Westerly*, no. 4 (1973):60-70.
- '. 'The Artist and the Savage God: Patrick White's *The Vivisector*,' *Meanjin* 33 (1974):136-145.
- '. 'A Fringe of Leaves: Civilization by the Skin of Our Own Teeth,' *Southerly* 37 (1977):123-140.
- '. 'A Properly Appointed Humanism: Australian Culture and the Aborigines in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*,' *Westerly*, no. 2 (1983):61-68.
- Brissenden, R.F. '*The Vivisector*: art and science,' in *The Australian Experience*, pp.311-324. Edited by W.S. Ramson. Canberra: ANU Press, 1974.
- Bunerjee, Jacqueline. 'A Reassessment of Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot*,' *Literary Half Yearly* 20 (1979):91-113.
- Burman, Beyla. 'The Misanthropic Painting or Settling an Account with the Almighty Mother: *The Vivisector* - Patrick White's Universal Work of Art,' *Orbis Litteratum* 39 (1984):266-283.
- Cantrell, L. 'Fiction Chronicle,' *Meanjin* 30 (1971):125-129.
- Clancy, Patricia. 'The Actor's Dilemma: Patrick White and Henry de Motherlant,' *Meanjin* 33 (1974):298-302.
- Coe, Richard N. 'The Artist and the Grocer: Patrick White's *The Vivisector*,' *Meanjin* 29 (1970):526-529.
- Colmer, J. 'Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*,' *The Literary Half Yearly* 23 (1982):85-100.
- '. 'The Quest Motif in Patrick White,' in *Review of National Literature*⁵; xi, pp.192-210. Edited by Anne Paolucci and L.A.C. Dobrez. New York: Griffon House Publications, 1982.
- Core, George. 'Poetically the Most Accurate Man Alive,' *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 53 (1977):766-772.
- Cotter, Michael. 'The Image of the Aboriginal in Three Modern Australian Novels,' *Meanjin* 36 (1977):582-592.
- '. 'Fragmentation, Reconstitution and the Colonial Experience: the Aborigine in White's Fiction,' in *South Pacific Images*, pp.173-185. Edited by Christopher Tiffin. St. Lucia: U.Q.P., 1978.
- Crowcroft, Jean. 'Patrick White: A Reply to Dorothy Green,' *Overland*, no. 59 (1974):49-53.
- Cvetkovski, Vladimir. 'Linguistic Reconstruction of Patrick White's Graphemic [Sign] in Translation,' in *Australian Papers: Yugoslavia, Europe and Australia*, pp.283-286. Edited by Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana: Edvard Kardelj Univ., 1983

- Dobrez, L.A.C. 'Australia and the Legend of the Forties,' in *Review of National Literatures*; xi, pp.114-145. Edited by Anne Paolucci and L.A.C. Dobrez. New York: Griffon House Publications, 1982.
- Docker, John. 'Patrick White and Romanticism: *The Vivisector*,' *Southerly* 33 (1973):44-61.
- Durix, Jean-Pierre. 'Masks and Travesties: *The Twyborn Affair*,' *Commonwealth* 4 (1979-1980):39-49.
- Edgar, Suzanne. 'A Woman's Life and Love,' *Quadrant* 21 (1977):69-71.
- Flower, Dean. 'Fiction Chronicle,' *The Hudson Review* 30 (1977):766-772.
- Ghose, Zulfikar. 'The One Comprehensive Vision,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979):260-279.
- Green, Dorothy. 'The Edge of Error,' *Quadrant* 17(1973):36-47.
- '. 'Queen Lear or Cleopatra rediviva? Patrick White's *The Eye of the Storm*,' *Meanjin* 32 (1973):395-405.
- '. 'Patrick White's Nobel Prize,' *Overland*, no. 57 (1973-74):23-25.
- Hadgraft, Cecil. 'The Theme of Revelation in Patrick White's Novels,' *Southerly* 37 (1977):34-46.
- Hansson, Karin. 'The Terrible Nostalgia of the Desert Landscapes,' in *Australian Papers: Yugoslavia, Europe and Australia*, pp.255-262. Edited by Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana: Edvard Cardelj Univ., 1983.
- Harries, Lyndon. 'The Peculiar Gifts of Patrick White,' *Contemporary Literature* 19 (1978):459-471.
- Heltay, Hilary. 'The Novels of Patrick White,' *Southerly* 33 (1973):92-104.
- Hergenhan, Laurie. 'The Past as the Present Rendered Fabulous: the Confronting of European Origins in *Bring Larks and Heroes* and *A Fringe of Leaves*,' in *Australian Papers: Yugoslavia, Europe and Australia*, pp.269-275. Edited by Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana: Edvard Cardelj Univ., 1983.
- Herring, Thelma. 'Patrick White's *The Vivisector*,' *Southerly* 31 (1971):3-16.
- Heseltine, Harry P. 'Patrick White's Style,' *Quadrant* 7 (1963):61-74.
- Johnson, Manly. 'Patrick White: The Eye of Language,' *World Literature Written in English* 15 (1976):339-358.
- '. 'A Fringe of Leaves: White's Genethlicon,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979):226-239.
- '. '*Twyborn*: the Abbess, the Bulbul and the Bawdy House,' *Modern Fiction Studies* 27 (1981):159-168.
- * (See below)
- Kiernan, Brian. 'The Novels of Patrick White,' in *The Literature of Australia*, pp.461-484. Edited by Geoffrey Dutton. Rev. ed. Ringwood: Penguin, 1976.
- Kramer, Leonie. 'Patrick White's Götterdämmerung,' *Quadrant* 17 (1973):8-19.
- '. 'Patrick White: "The Unplayed I,"' *Quadrant* 18 (1974):65-68.
- Lawson, Alan. 'White for White's Sake: Studies of Patrick White's Novels,' *Meanjin* 32 (1973):343-349.
- * Jurak, Mirko, ed. *Australian Papers: Yugoslavia, Europe and Australia*. Ljubljana: Edvard Cardelj Univ., 1983

- . 'Unmerciful Dingoes? The Critical Reception of Patrick White,' *Meanjin* 32 (1973):379-392.
- . 'Meaning and Experience: A Review-Essay on Some Recurrent Problems in Patrick White Criticism,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979):280-295.
- Maack, Annegret. 'Shakespearean Reference as Structural Principle in Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* and *The Eye of the Storm*,' *Southerly* 38 (1978):123-140.
- Macainsh, Noel. 'Patrick White: A Note on the Phoenix,' *LING* 5 (1976):15-19.
- . 'Nihilism, Nature and *A Fringe of Leaves*,' *Quadrant* 27 (1981):36-41.
- . 'A Queer Unity - Patrick White's *The Twyborn Affair*,' *Southerly* 43 (1983):143-154.
- Mackenzie, Manfred. "'Dark Birds of Light:" *The Eye of the Storm* as Swansong,' *Southern Review* 10 (1977):270-284.
- . 'Tradition and Patrick White's Individual Talent,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979):147-168.
- Maes-Jelinek, Hena. 'Fictional Breakthrough and the Unveiling of "unspeakable rites" in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* and Wilson Harris's *Yurokon*,' *Kunapipi* 11 (1980):33-43.
- . 'Altering Boundaries: the Art of Translation in *The Angel at the Gate* and *The Twyborn Affair*,' *World Literature Written in English* 23 (1984):165-174.
- McAuley, James. 'The Gothic Splendours: Patrick White's *Voss*,' *Southerly* 25 (1965):34-44.
- McCulloch, Ann. 'Patrick White's Novels and Nietzsche,' *Australian Literary Studies* 9 (1980):309-320.
- McLaren, John. 'A Search for Truth,' *Overland*, no. 46 (1970-71):37-38.
- . 'In Search of Identity,' *Overland*, no. 53 (1972):49-51.
- Morley, Patricia. 'Doppelgänger's Dilemma: Artist and Man,' *Queen's Quarterly* 78 (1971):407-420.
- . 'The Road to Dover: Patrick White: *The Eye of the Storm*,' *The Humanities Association Review* 26 (1975):106-115.
- . 'Patrick White: "World of Semblance, World of Dreams",' *St. Mark's Review*, no. 86 (1976):30-38.
- * (see below)
- Perkins, Elizabeth. 'Escape with a Convict: Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*,' *Meanjin* 36 (1977):265-269.
- Phillips, A.A. 'Patrick White and the Algebraic Symbol,' *Meanjin* 24 (1965):455-461.
- Riemer, A.P. 'The Eye of the Needle: Patrick White's Recent Novels,' *Southerly* 34 (1974):248-266.
- . 'Eddie and the Bogomils - Some Observations on the *The Twyborn Affair*,' *Southerly* 1 (1980):12-29.
- Ross, Robert. 'Patrick White's *The Twyborn Affair*: A Portrait of the Artist,' *Commonwealth Novels in English* 2 (1983):94-105.

* Paolucci, Anne and L.A.C. Dobrez, eds., *Review of National Literatures* : xi (1982).
New York : Griffon House Publications.

- Salter, Elizabeth. 'The Australianism of Patrick White,' in *The Commonwealth Writer Overseas*, pp.231-241. Edited by Alastair Niven. Liège: Revue des Langues, 1976.
- Sampson, David. 'Black and White: *A Fringe of Leaves*,' *Meridian* 2 (1983):109-115.
- Scheick, William J. 'The Gothic Grace and Rainbow Aesthetic of Patrick White's Fiction: An Introduction,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979):131-146.
- Senn, Warner. 'Crisis and Reconstitution of Self in Recent Australian Fiction: the latest novels of Patrick White and Randolph Stow,' in *Australian Papers: Yugoslavia, Europe and Australia*, pp.277-281. Edited by Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana: Edvard Cardelj Univ., 1983.
- Smith, Terry. 'A Portrait of the Artist in Patrick White's *The Vivisector*,' *Meanjin* 31 (1972):167-177.
- Steiner, George. 'Carnal Knowledge,' *New Yorker* 50 (24 March, 1974):109-113.
- Tacey, David. 'A Search for a New Ethic: White's *A Fringe of Leaves*,' in *South Pacific Images*, pp.186-95. Edited by Christopher Tiffin. St. Lucia: U.Q.P., 1978.
- Turner, George. 'A Hurtle Duffield Retrospective,' *Overland*, nos. 50-51 (1972):93-95.
- Vladimir, Cvetkovski, 'Linguistic Reconstruction of Patrick White's Graphemic [Sign] in Translation,' in *Australian Papers: Yugoslavia, Europe and Australia*, pp.283-286. Edited by Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana: Edvard Cardelj Univ., 1983.
- Walsh, William. 'Patrick White,' *A Manifold Voice: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1970:86-125.
- '. 'The Vivisector,' *Encounter* 36 (1971):81-82.
- '. 'Patrick White's Vision of Human Incompleteness: *The Solid Mandala* and *The Vivisector*,' in *Commonwealth Literature*, pp.420-425. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.
- '. 'Patrick White: the Religious Connection,' *Sewanee Review* 85 (1977):509-511.
- Ward, Jill. 'Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*,' *Critical Quarterly* 19 (1977):77-81.
- '. 'Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*: History and Fiction,' *Australian Literary Studies* 8 (1978):402-18.
- WHALEY, SUSAN. 'Food for Thought in Patrick White's Fiction,' *World Literature Written in English* 22 (1983):197-212.

Books Relating to Patrick White

- Beatson, Peter. *The Eye in the Mandala: Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God*. London: Paul Elek, 1976.
- Berg, Mari-Ann. 'Aspects of Time, Ageing and Old Age in the Novels of Patrick White, 1939-1979,' *Gothenburg Studies in English* 53 Göteborg, 1983.
- Björkstén, Ingmar. *Patrick White: A General Introduction* Translated by Stanley Gerson. St. Lucia: U.Q.P., 1976.
- Hansson, Karin. *The Warped Universe*. Lund: Gleerup, 1984.

- Kiernan, Brian. *Patrick White*. London: Macmillan Press, 1980.
- McCulloch, Ann. *A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White*. St Lucia: U.Q.P., 1983.
- Morley, Patricia. *The Mystery of Unity*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1972.
- Shepherd, R. and K. Singh (ed.). *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literature in English, 1978.
- Walsh, William. *Patrick White: Voss*. London: Edward Arnold, 1976.
- . *Patrick White's Fiction*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.
- Wolfe, Peter. *Laden Choirs: The Fiction of Patrick White*. Kentucky: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1983.

Background Reading

- Brady, Veronica. 'Why Myth Matters,' *Westerly*, no. 2 (1973):59-63.
- Clayton, John J. 'D.H. Lawrence: Psychic Wholeness Through Rebirth,' *The Massachusetts Review* 25 (1984):200-221.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*. London: Paul Elek, 1974.
- . *Structuralist Poetics*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.
- . *On Deconstruction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
- Daniel, Helen. 'The Aborigine in Australian Fiction: Stereotype to Archetype?' *Modern Fiction Studies* 27 (1981):45-60.
- Dinnerstein, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.
- Docker, John. *Australian Cultural Elites*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974.
- . *In a Critical Condition: Reading Australian Literature*. Ringwood: Penguin, 1984.
- Dutton, Geoffrey. *White on Black: The Australian Aborigine Portrayed in Art*. Melbourne: Macmillan Press, 1974.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.
- Green, Dorothy. *The Music of Love*. Sydney: Penguin, 1984.
- Green H.M. *A History of Australian Literature: Pure and Applied*, 2 vols. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961.
- Hergenhan, Laurie. *Unnatural Lives*. St. Lucia: U.Q.P., 1983.
- Heseltine, H.P. 'Australian Image,' *Meanjin* 21 (1962):35-49.
- . *Acquainted with the Night: Studies in Classic Australian Fiction*. Townsville: Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, 1979.
- Hope, A.D. *Australian Literature, 1950-1962*. Parkville: Melbourne Univ. Press, 1963.
- Jaspers, K. *Nietzsche* Translated by C.F. Wallraff and F.J. Schmitz. Tucson: Univ. Arizona Press, 1965.

- Királyfalvi, B. *The Aesthetics of Gyögy Lukács*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975.
- Kramer, Leonie (ed.). *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*. Melbourne: O.U.P., 1981.
- Lindsay, Jack. 'The Alienated Australian Intellectual,' *Meanjin* 22 (1963):48-59.
- Orr, Leonard. 'Digression and Nonsequential Interpolation: the Example of Melville,' *Journal of Narrative Technique* 9 (1979):93-108.
- '. 'Vraisemblance and Alienation Technique: The Basis for Reflexivity in Fiction,' *Journal of Narrative Technique* 11 (1981):199-215.
- '. 'Random Verbal Generators and Verbal Constraints in Fiction,' *Modern Fiction Studies* 30 (1984):203-215.
- Walker, Shirley (ed.). *Who is She?* St. Lucia: U.Q.P., 1983.