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Expressionism and the Unconfined Female Protagonist in Three Novels by Patrick White

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Writing and Society Research Centre
Western Sydney University
2019

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my principal supervisor, Ivor Indyk, for his intellectual support and encouragement over the years. It was a joy to discuss these characters at length and explore these novels with a fellow Patrick White enthusiast. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Lorraine Sim, for coming on board in the middle of the project and offering constructive advice at a most crucial time. I am greatly indebted to Melinda Jewell of the Writing and Society Research Centre for always making herself available and being a compassionate advisor in Sydney while I completed this project in Melbourne. I am grateful to have spent a week at the Varuna Writers' House and I thank the residents and hosts, it was a privilege to work there - I believe it was during my time there that my research found its focus.

I thank my fellow academics and friends Rebecca Ciezarek, and Lynette Frey, for their insightful conversations and support, I always felt as though we were in this together and I'm grateful for the solidarity you provided. Thank you to the McKinnon Secondary College community for offering me my dream job and allowing me the space to complete this project as I began my career in teaching. In particular, I thank my colleagues and fellow interns, Eleonora Bertsa and Tiffany Zikou for their kindness and reassurance. Likewise, thank you to my wonderful friends, Rowena McGrath and Alysia Panopoulos – your friendship and unwavering support from the beginning has been unparalleled. I thank my parents, Tania and Steven, and my family for being my unconditional cheer squad and taking all of my teary phone calls. Finally, I thank my beautiful partner, Samuel Luther Leach. Your patience and love has been so valuable, I could not have completed this thesis without you.

Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Patrick White's expressive portrayal of the confined female protagonists in three of his novels: *The Aunt Story* (1948)*, Voss* (1957)*,* and *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) enacts their ultimate liberation. I propose that the women are restricted by the social conventions of their gender, but are given opportunities to escape these restrictions via their expressive responses to their relationships and circumstances. Scholarly research has given limited attention to the key female characters of White's novels in a way that does not closely analyse the expressive depictions of their conditions and behaviour. Passages and episodes in the novels reveal their characters, conditions, relationships, and reactions or responses to the world around them. This requires the close examination I provide in this thesis to determine how White's expressionistic style gives agency to his female characters. I analyse each novel from the perspective of the female protagonist: Theodora Goodman in *The Aunt's Story*, Laura Trevelyan in *Voss*, and Ellen Roxburgh in *A Fringe of Leaves,* and explore their narrative trajectories. The first chapter considers Theodora Goodman's life at Meroë, and her experiences as she moves beyond her home to the Jardin Exotique and later her meeting with Holstius in America. I outline how Theodora's transitory state psychologically and imaginatively enables her to reconcile illusion and reality. In the second chapter I contend that Laura Trevelyan is the true protagonist of *Voss.* I examine how her experience defies boundaries as she imaginatively joins Voss on his expedition and demonstrates: "knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist" (V 275). My close analysis of Laura's journey examines how White's use of characterisation, gender, space, and relationships leads to Laura's transcendent experience, eclipsing Voss. The final chapter on Ellen Roxburgh in *A Fringe of Leaves* identifies the masquerades and roles she plays in direct response to the men in her life. My analysis of Ellen is split into two clear parts: before and after her shipwreck and capture – before and after the social masks are removed – where I explore her agonising immersion into a more primitive sense of self. I conclude that at the end of their narratives all three discover something profound, and present a visionary intelligence that transcends ordinary existence. White's expressive portrayal of the women throughout these experiences reveals their agency.

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Introduction

Background Information

This thesis examines the confined female subject in selected works by Patrick White. I explore the narrative dynamic in each novel from the perspective of the female character. It is my contention that the female characters are confined - the aim of the thesis is to determine the nature of their confinement, and the ways in which they might imaginatively escape that confinement when they cannot do so literally. In order to do this I focus particularly on White's expressive writing style and his representation of his female protagonists.

The novels I examine in this thesis are: *The Aunt's Story* (1948)*, Voss* (1957)*,* and *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976). I have selected these three novels in particular because of their female protagonists: Theodora Goodman from *The Aunt's Story,* Laura Trevelyan from *Voss,* and Ellen Roxburgh from *A Fringe of Leaves.* Through the course of this thesis I offer a close analysis of the narratives of these women. They stand out because of their awkward nature and outsider status, as well as being women who really have to fight to be seen. Close analysis of these women reveals the power afforded to them by White's expressive writing style.

My methodology is close-analysis. This analytical method carries my argument implicitly, through demonstration and dramatisation – it is a method appropriate to the dramatic qualities of White's own style. It is integral to understanding the character's liberation and precisely how that is achieved. In order to understand White's expressive style, it is important that passages or episodes are given close attention. The nature of his style is nuanced and layered, especially when presenting the female characters' inner voice and the emotional turmoil of their relationships. The 'Jardin Exotique' section in *The Aunt's Story* for example, is an entirely interior experience written in a way that demands interrogation in order to fully empathise with the character into whose mind we are travelling. White focuses on moments of introspection to microscopic proportions. The Jardin Exotique section allows readers to linger in these psychological spaces for the purpose of demonstrating the limitations of psychological withdrawal, but also to present limitlessness – or a possible movement towards the sublime. This cannot be fully appreciated without closely examining the way in which White *expresses* this possible transcendence.

I began this research by reading White's *The Aunt's Story* (1948). The lead female character, Theodora Goodman, and the expressive ways in which she was written impressed me. It did not occur to me then that this was a contentious opinion. The more criticism I read the more disappointed I became with critics of the novel and their hesitation to see in Theodora what I saw in her expressive nature, femininity, and liberation. Despite high praise, the common critique (from critics such as Simon During, Geoffrey Dutton, Brian Kiernan, and Alan Lawson) seemed to be that the female protagonist fitted the trope of a madwoman confined to spinsterhood.

Of course, there were those who offered a more positive response to this female character in later critiques (David Tacey, Carolyn Bliss, Veronica Brady, Phyllis Fahrie Edelsen, Fiona McFarlane) but I found these reviews to be brief and lacking in close analysis. In White's autobiography he claims that his women characters are flawed and that this is why he admires them. He adds, "Those who have read my novels closely…must surely have seen this" (White, 1998). He also gives numerous hints as to the symbols of expressivity that have come to shape his lead female characters: mirrors, reflection, colour, gestures of awkwardness and ugliness and various other sources of strangeness. Importantly, he asks us to "read closely". This is what I have set out to achieve: close analysis is required to fully appreciate the enormity of detail in White's expressive style and the way in which the female characters become multifaceted and rescued from one-dimensionality.

It is important to unravel the presentation of White's lead female characters. As my analysis will show, they are on a journey that is seemingly predictable but becomes unusual and unexpected. Their lives are challenged and disturbed in regards to their gender, social dependencies, relationships, psychology, and their possibilities of freedom. White invites us into a world where expressiveness is employed to dramatise the lives of the women and help them deal with the confined circumstances in which they find themselves.

Context and Definitions

Expressionism

The so-called Expressionist decade extended from roughly 1910-1925 and is usually attributed to prominent artists of the era, such as playwright August Strindberg and Frank Wedekind, poet Filippo Marinetti, painters Vincent Van Gogh and Edvard Munch, and later Wassili Kandinsky (Weisstein 1973, p21). These artists sought to render visible the state of the soul and the violent emotions welling up from the innermost recesses of the subconscious (1973, p23). One might look at White's plays to see how he is able to produce similarly dramatic images. At times, his explicit stage directions in *The Ham Funeral* (1965) for example, ask actors to be: "tortured", "expressive", "fascinated but repelled*"*. The effect is reminiscent of expressionist playwright August Strindberg, whom White admired and Walter H. Sokel claims was "less interested in revelation than in the free composition of a universe of pure expressiveness" (1964, p38). White also appreciated poets Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire and worked alongside and was friends with artists Francis Bacon, Sidney Nolan, and Roy de Maistre (Marr 1991). All of these artists, whilst not generally regarded as expressionist, were artists who, like White, tended to exaggerate and distort objective features of the world by embodying violent extremes of mood and feeling (Abrams 2005, p90). This is particularly relevant to their depiction of female characters – the abovementioned artists often portrayed a distressed woman in a distorted way that provoked readers or viewers. White's female protagonists are not depicted as stereotypically hysterical or mad, but rather *expressively*, in a way that speaks to their conditions and experiences.

White's writing in the three novels under consideration in this thesis distorts the boundaries between his female characters' psyche and the actual world in order to break open their awkward or restrictive social experiences. The choice to include Henry Miller's quote as an epigraph to the middle section of *The Aunt's Story,* allows White to allude to the expressive quality of his writing and suggests a way of understanding his character's emotional experiences:

> Henceforward we walk split into myriad fragments…we walk with sensitive filaments that drink avidly of the past and future, and all things melt into music and sorrow; we walk against a united world, asserting our dividedness (Miller 1969, p9).

This suggests that we carry our experiences with us and emotional burdens can lead to a fragmented, divided, distorted sense of self that ultimately reveals our character. White has previously described this way of viewing the world as a "living sensuality" (1981), revealing a further link to his expressionist tendencies. Ulrich Weisstein writes that expressionists were not interested in reproducing real-life, but instead attempted to "make visible that which is not ordinarily revealed to the senses" (1973, p25). That is to say, expressionists project their emotional experiences onto the objects and into the spaces around them. Like White's illustration of Theodora Goodman painfully looking into her ugly reflection in the mirror of "green sea of glass" and imagining herself swimming there, expressionists reason that in order to "make the invisible visible, one must experience a vision" (Weisstein 1973, p25).

In a letter included in David Marr's biography, *Patrick White: A Life*, Patrick White writes: "I have to struggle to express myself accurately, except when I am bitter and then I express myself all too freely, but it is distorted" (Marr, 1994 p64). There is something telling in this reference to inaccuracy and imperfection. White is referring to his propensity to express his emotions through distortions, especially when he is ill at ease with events or situations. Weisstein explains that the function of distortion in Expressionist art, taken to its extreme and closely linked to the grotesque, abstractly lingers between the "numinal and phenomenal world" (1973, p23) – an expressionist writer would therefore seek to illustrate the natural state of things whilst simultaneously projecting a character's inner emotional turmoil. He asserts that Expressionism is "emphatically content-oriented", that is, the emotions are linked to real experiences but are necessarily and purposefully manipulated to express internal conflicts (1973, p24). In his essay "Refractory Visions: The Contours of Literary Expressionism" Ralph Freedman explores the notion that the inadequacy of the 'real' world encourages humans to heighten or distort its features, in order to reveal a 'higher' truth (Freedman, 1969 p54). For Freedman, as for Weisstein, Expressionism is reliant heavily on vision, "a vision derived from private insights otherwise incommunicable" (1969 p54). These visions have the ability to animate the material reality. Expressionism in White's fiction portrays the individual as living and moving through experiences and spaces of emotional turbulence. His intention is to animate and produce a heightened reality which will physically illuminate moments of emotional intensity: "Expressionism, therefore, described the relations between man and object; it commanded engagement" (1969 p59). White's merging of mind and body, body and environment, and the dissolution of the boundaries between these entities, enables his characters to express a myriad of emotional responses:

> Expressions are unique; expressing [an emotion] … has something to do with becoming conscious of it; therefore, if being fully conscious of it means being conscious of all its peculiarities, fully expressing it means expressing all its peculiarities. Put another way, expression individuates emotions (Collingwood as cited in Hanfling 1992 p188).

Expression in White's novels is necessarily individuated and disruptive; the language is metaphorical and therefore largely imaginative, unbounded, and unconfined. Once we are privy to the female character's emotional responses to their oppressive social world, we discover each emotional reaction is also shattered into figurative fragments that affect the space and people around them.

Weisstein identifies emotions depicted through Expressionism, on canvas and in language, such as: extreme moods, numinous fear or ecstatic joy, externalized by means of projection and outwardly manifesting themselves as distortions of colour, shape, syntax, vocabulary or tonal relationships (1973, p23). Patrick White's writing style exhibits the same features. For example, as Laura Trevelyan in *Voss* contemplates the social setting of a picnic and the people around her, she allows her thoughts to wander, "her own thoughts were grown obscure…herself disembodied. Air joining air experiences a voluptuousness no less intense because imperceptible" (V 68). Readers are able to recognise Laura's point of difference – that she has a unique understanding of the world around her, and White's attention to her internal monologues express Laura's ability to project her emotions into the air and visualise them there. This is further emphasised in White's writing and language choices, describing the air as imperceptible but also voluptuous allows Laura's thoughts to become tangible. Another expressionist feature, identified by Walter von Hollander in playwright Paul Kornfield's work, was "the soul finding an outlet through the body" (1973, p38). This sharpened expression of feeling via the body or through embodiment regularly features in White's work also. In *The Aunt's Story* for example, when Theodora Goodman dances with her admirer, Frank Parrot, White describes her face as "thin with music, down to the bone. She was both released from her body and imprisoned in the molten gold of Frank Parrot" (AS 81). The music embodies her emotional release in this scene. Frank represents a typically masculine, vain sort of ordinariness, and her attraction to him and decision to dance with him is out of character for her. She handles it with a combination of awkwardness and intensity and "makes an exhibition of herself", an onlooker remarks. Theodora is figuratively injected with music but also exhibits "suprasensual pleasures" (Weisstein 1973, p39) and as Weisstein describes, this is also emblematic of Expressionism. "In the works of Expressionism man is directly confronted with eternity" (Weisstein 1973, p33). This is particularly powerful when considering White's depiction of Laura, Theodora, and Ellen – all three of whom are confronted with the limits of their existence, so readers must consider their character in line with expressionists aims of finding spirituality in a "living sensuality", because this enables their transcendence and becomes a spiritual experience.

I argue that all three women experience a movement from domestic confinement into the sublime, and White's expressive writing style is how readers are able to observe that transition. Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790) theorised that the sublime could be recognised in our ideas, "it is the state of mind produced by a certain representation with which the reflective judgment is occupied, and not the object, that is to be called sublime" (1914). White pays close attention to the ideas and thought processes of his female protagonists and this allows readers to be given unique insight into their transcendence. Readers observe Theodora, Laura, and Ellen as they move into a reflective state of mind inspiring awe, defensiveness, anger, rejection and resentment in those around them as they essentially move beyond the other characters. The "sublime" in this thesis refers to what Kant theorises "as the ability to think which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense (1914). For example, when observing Ellen Roxburgh after she has recovered from her capture, the Commandant "could not help but notice the pulse beating in the throat of this woman who moved and disturbed him more perhaps than domesticity and his official position warranted" (FL 399). Ellen has been unsettled and now unsettles those around her. Although all three women at the end of each novel return to a sense of normalcy or a domestic setting, it is clear that their thoughts have reached a new plane and they look at the world in new ways, as Laura philosophises: "the air will tell us" (V 478).

Gender

This thesis focuses on representations of women and conceptions of femininity in White's fiction, how White's critics to date have evaluated the female characters, and why they deserve closer critical attention. White's female characters vary in each novel, but importantly his lead female characters are more self-aware than others. They are aware of the confined, stereotypical conditions in which they find themselves.

The novels are set in time periods in which women had clear limits to their lives. They are limited to a conventional role: that of wife, mother, daughter, aunt, and almost always in a domestic setting. They are considered always in relation to their condition as women in this setting. According to Phillis Chesler (1972) in *Women and Madness,* a 'normal' woman is often defined as the housewife who is content with passivity and limited authenticity. Barabara Hill Rigney (1978) in *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* explains, "in a society which values competition, material success, aggressiveness – characteristics considered to be essentially masculine and therefore discouraged in women – femininity becomes a negative quality, thus socializing women to devalue themselves" (p3). The time period for each of White's novels that I examine in this thesis is slightly varied (*The Aunt's Story* begins in 1899 and moves into the early twentieth century as Theodora gets older; *Voss* and *A Fringe of Leaves* being loosely based on real events are set in 1845 and 1830 respectively), but all take place during a period in which women were conditioned to behave in a manner appropriate to their sex, that is: subservient, passive, and amiable.

Although White often writes within these time periods it does not follow that he is an advocate or upholder of the stereotypes of the time in his depiction of the women. As well as his use of expressive writing techniques abovementioned, White uses irony, humour, and parody to undermine, subvert, and condemn typical gender and class roles. White will often situate his lead female character next to a more stereotypical counterpart, perhaps a sister or cousin. He does this in order to help the reader understand that the lead female character is less typical, more intelligent, individual, and unusual. She is also ugly and awkward. As McFarlane notes, "she'd be a grotesque figure if this were a different novel, with a different investment in spinsterhood, ugliness, and social failure" (2014, p17). As I will show, White admires these flawed women. The lead female characters of the novels I am exploring have both feminine and masculine traits, are not typically beautiful, and are critical of the limits of their sex. White invests in them because he values their strangeness and the power that this affords them.

White subverts gender binaries. All of his lead female characters have masculine characteristics. Carolyn Bliss suggested that it is perhaps because of their masculine traits that they are freed from the limitations a more stereotypical woman might face (1995). In this analysis it is important to understand that White's female characters often present feminine and masculine traits whilst maintaining their identification as women.

To define "feminine" and "masculine" as it is used in this thesis, and how conventional gender roles are depicted and subverted by White, I refer to Kate Millett's text *Sexual Politics*. In her critique of Freud, Millett rationalises that "'masculine' and 'feminine' are elaborate behavioural constructs for each sex within society, obviously cultural, and subject to endless cross-cultural variation"(1972, p191). This thesis examines how the expositions of White's aforementioned novels illustrate the societal expectations of women and how this impacts the female protagonist. The position of women in patriarchal society is such that they are expected to be passive, suffer, and to be sexual objects, it is unquestionable that they have been socialized into such roles (Millett, 1972, p194). White's female protagonists uncomfortably writhe against such expectations and their experiences are necessarily traumatic. Millett explains that in order to revolutionise what roles have been accepted as 'male' and 'female', a re-examination and assimilation is necessary of what is traditionally understood as "masculine and feminine": violence encouraged as virile, and excessive passivity defined as "feminine", which she says should be proven useless in either sex (1972, p62). I agree that the categorisation of these traits is stereotypical. Significantly, when closely analysing White's subversive and expressive portrayal of women in his novels, the women's response to their restrictive circumstances is necessarily violent and their "typical" passivity is employed to their advantage and ironically provides them with agency, effectively disrupting a socially constructed gender binary.

White was acutely aware of the presence of masculinity in women and femininity in men, but as he writes in his autobiography, *Flaws in the Glass,* he admired the strength that this gave women in particular (White 1998, p155). White creates his characters Theodora, Laura, and Ellen with this knowledge of plurality - their experiences and their eventual understanding of the construction of their socialised self allows them to manipulate their restrictive conditions. Similarly, modes of expressionism seek to distort, fragment, and unravel such constructions and instead highlight the importance of multiplicity and otherness. These considerations provide evidence that in order for a female character to be written out of her confinement she would need to display elements of subversiveness and expressivity, as is the case with White's female characters.

Misconceptions of women being passive and quiet are challenged by White's female protagonists' more active, violent, and intelligent behaviours. Furthermore, he champions feminine elements of awareness, sensuality, and multiplicity as the key to their influence and authority. It is especially those characters that present a combination of these elements, and who have relationships that highlight gender fluidity and are freed from narrow definitions and become unrestrained. White found stereotypical views of masculinity similarly oppressive, especially with regards to sexuality.

To investigate portrayals of gender in literature further I looked at Mary Eagleton's text *Feminist Literary Criticism* (1986), and the works of feminist and literary theorists Elaine Showalter (1985) and Julia Kristeva (1982), which helped me to consider the depiction of women in literature suitable for my analysis. Kristeva introduces her idea of the abject in her text *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,*

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated (p10).

Kristeva's theory of abjection, when applied to White's female characters, is relevant because the experience of abjection is necessarily violent and traumatic. Often the female protagonists in White's novels need to go through what can be an awkward and agonizing transition from who they are seen as and a more primitive sense of self. The female character has to simultaneously reject and reconcile those parts of herself, those parts normally considered "essentially" feminine, and therefore she begins to recognise and delineate the abject or fragmented parts of her identity. The abject might be symbolized in the rose that looms during Theodora Goodman's final moments in *The Aunt's Story:* "So Theodora Goodman took her hat and put it on her head, as it was suggested she should do. Her face was long and yellow under the great black hat. The hat sat straight, but the doubtful rose trembled and glittered, leading a life of it's own" (AS

336). As is seen collectively in Theodora, Laura, and Ellen's resolutions, this process of abjection is an infinite source of knowledge and power.

Confinement

Confinement in my research refers to a number of classifications. The first refers to the restrictions placed on women and the role of women during the nineteenth century and then later in early twentieth century when the novels are set - the general and continuing prejudices against women and the limited expectations of women during these times. The second is the confinement of women to domestic spaces. Women's roles are often confined to the household - that of motherhood, wife, or 'spinster' especially. The language around women's daily lives is usually synonymous with confinement: housewife, homemaker, or to go into 'confinement' in the later stages of pregnancy. It is not a coincidence that the maid in *Voss* who becomes pregnant and dies after childbirth is named Rose *Portion*. However, as Tamara Wagner points out in her book *Domestic Fiction in Colonial Australia and New Zealand,* "domesticity itself was subversive in this [masculine] context…it was an alternative discourse that threatened male self-definition" (2014, p4). Wagner examines the situation for women in light of a time when men were able to explore the surrounding and harsh environment while women were forced to exist exclusively in the colonial home-space.

Thirdly, confinement also refers to the limitations and limitlessness of one's mind - to live wholly in your own thoughts can simultaneously limit and expand your experiences of the real world. Likewise, to give over to your imagination may give access to a new way of seeing the world and perceiving your self in the world. For women, being confined to domestic spaces would mean having to imaginatively escape such conditions, or to re-imagine these environments so that they reflect more honestly the limitlessness of your abilities. White's women do this often in order to figuratively escape their confinement.

Problematically, when women are written in this imaginative way their character could easily be interpreted as mad. A typical reading of White's female characters is that of emotional hysteria, loneliness, and madness, especially with regard to Theodora in *The Aunt's Story* who at the end of the novel is taken to an asylum. When a local doctor collects her from 'the house on the hill' where she has taken up residence, Mrs. Johnson (a woman who encounters Theodora as she wanders across corn fields in America) is critical of her: "That's it…where this crazy Annie has chosen to live now" (1976, p334). Another reading might be that to some extent women like Theodora are forced into their own form of "madness" as a means of escape.

To explore this means of escape further, I note Rita Felski's argument in *Literature After Feminism* (2003) that what is "feminine" is largely symbolic, that women have been occupying mostly masculine spaces and have had to manipulate these spaces accordingly. This led me to include Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay 'A Room of One's Own'. Woolf describes domestic spaces as having particular resonance for the women who have long occupied them and as such they are able to appreciate the absorbed emotions of the household. Woolf describes rooms therefore as having an "extremely complex force of femininity" (1977). Woolf's pivotal essay was an important inclusion in my thesis because it aligned with White's use of space, landscape, and environment with regard to his female characters and the way in which these spaces were a key tool for their imaginative escape.

To interrogate White's use of space, I refer to Henri Lefebvre's text *The Production of Space* (1991). Lefebvre considers the transition from absolute space to abstract space. He argues that social preconditions have a "particular way of enduring and remaining actual within that space" (1991, p229). I consider the way in which White's female characters transform domestic spaces and the intimate emotional spaces their relationships provide. Lefebvre explains that absolute space has a symbolic existence and essentially replicates the space of the imagination where self-consciousness can take form (1991). For example, Voss and Laura's intimacy in *Voss* becomes more about metaphorical and psychological spaces of communication – allowing Laura to experience her own journey of self-discovery. Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1994) also seeks to capture the poetic image and importance of the home in literature. He asserts that a space that is lived in "transcends geometrical space". He explores how the home becomes fragmented and distorted by our experiences within it – and the image of the home in writing therefore represents events and memories. Bachelard's analysis occasionally verges on fetishising the lives of women in the home: "Housewifely care weaves the ties that unite a very ancient past to a new epoch […] the housewife awakens furniture that was asleep (194, p68). However, his reference to spaces becoming transcendent via certain *expressions* helps save his description from sentiment and stereotype. As I will argue, Patrick White's use of this expressive language in his depiction of space and the lives of women is intended to reveal their unique insights as transformative and to allow his female characters to be liberated beyond 'housewifely care'. Combining White's use of expressive principles with his use of space, my thesis aims to identify how his female characters are able to move from the domestic to the sublime.

Episodes that take place in the home are also considered in relation to the more transitional spaces of gardens, hotel corridors, train carriages, seascapes, ships, bush land, and desert landscapes. The "emotional use value" of these spaces is further explored in Lehnert and Siewert's *Spaces of Desire: Spaces of Transition* (2011). White utilizes the labyrinthine qualities of a hotel in *The Aunt's Story,* where "walls yawn" and "lap elastically", as Theodora tries to reconcile overlapping memories and complex past relationships. Likewise, the vastness of the Australian desert in *Voss* comes to metaphorically represent the recesses of the mind and Laura's ability to symbolically join Voss on his expedition.

Research Questions

The key questions in my research are these. Are the female subjects in White's novels confined or unconfined, or both? Can they move from the domestic into the freedom of the sublime? How does White's expressive writing style enact this transition?

The aim of this thesis is to analyse in detail White's expressionistic style and his depiction of women to explore precisely how they change their circumstances. This requires close reading and close analysis of episodes, character, relationships, and language. I aim to find evidence in scenes where the female lead is confined and yet is able to breach that confinement. I will explore what constitutes White's expressive style - those aspects of his writing that deal with boundary dissolution, distortions of space, sensuality, and embodiment and how these qualities give imaginative agency to the confined female character. I will outline the circumstances that the women are in – despite their privilege and economic advantages. I will consider: What kind of life are the women expected to have? How do they view their circumstances? As women on the periphery, that is, as outsiders, what unique perspectives and insights do they offer? What is their view of the world and how does their isolation and marginality intensify their perspective?

My research is very specific to the novels – the world of the novel is where I frame my analysis. This intense focus on the lead female characters is significant for my research because this is an unusual entry point to the analysis of White's work. Very rarely do critics look at his work from this angle: from the perspective of the female character, applying feminist critique, and intricate analysis of the expressiveness of White's language.

Past and Recent Criticism

Undeniably, the majority view from critics of the female characters in Patrick White's novels is that they are unrealistic, solipsistic, and even mad. White also comments in his autobiography that he was aware of critics that saw it as a flaw in his novels that the women were stronger than the men (1998, p155). The past and recent criticisms and analyses of Patrick White's novels tend to concentrate on thematic and narrative concerns. This is important because critics neglect to interrogate the nature of White's writing style and its significance to the development of the female characters. Mark Williams summarises White's *The Aunt's Story* as follows: "Form, idiom, style, symbolism all develop organically around the controlling center of Theodora's consciousness" (1993 p41). Whilst correct in describing the novel's narrative focus, Williams avoids going into detail about White's particular usage of 'form, idiom, and style' and what this looks like. Peter Craven's review of *The Aunt's Story* also refers to White's spiritual quest narrative and his fragmented world (2002). Yet the development of the novel's organic portrayal of 'Theodora's consciousness' is left largely unexamined. It deserves an attention worthy of its imaginative power.

Simon During summarises White's writing categorically, under the labels "Theatrical/Spiritual", "Aggressive/Sexualised", "Familial/Sexual" (1996). Various themes are declared, and consequently the nature of White's expressiveness is evaded and replaced by issues of gender and structure. For instance, During argues that White's female characters "Do not preserve boundaries and autonomies […] There are no women 'geniuses' in White's work" (1996, p46/47). Not that one can be sure what During means by 'genius' here, but the implication is that the female characters lack private intelligence, that their male counterparts and environment wholly affect them. I disagree with this relegation of White's female characters to a secondary role. Their expression of emotion is precisely what we the reader experience. In this instance, During ignores the expressive perspectives that the female character's minds provide. He brushes over their capacity for feeling, and relates White's expression to the female characteristics of fluidity and hysteria. It is a gender related means to an end for *other* themes. During says, "they are enveloping, fluid, capable – like old witches – of myriad transformations, and all because they are not quite complete in themselves" (1996, p49). This assertion is included under the rather brash analytical sub-heading: 'Women'. A closer and more sympathetic exploration of what exactly these "myriad transformations" are in White's work is necessary. What role do 'fluid and capable' women play in his expressive narratives? Contrary to During's analysis, I believe White's characters provide a fullness of response to their confined circumstances – of a far-reaching and liberating nature. In different ways, Theodora, Laura, and Ellen essentially live a solitary life, and this allows readers insight into their incredible depths of intelligence, as I will demonstrate. They are women seemingly on the periphery but their disjointed and uncertain place in the narrative allows them to provide a private perspective on the events occurring around them. Once we are introduced to their intimate thoughts, we become more aware of their significance. Theodora is the Aunt with a story to tell; Laura's story extends Voss's; Ellen is masquerading in various female forms - and yet in many ways they are all omniscient.

White's narrative attempts to illuminate this private intelligence via subliminal spaces or what Kant refers to as "reflective judgment" (1914). White's emphasis on episodic and dramatic scenes magnifies their reflective and emotional significance. To the contrary, Geoffrey Dutton suggests that the major flaw in *Voss* is Laura's narrative. He focuses on the novel's structure and sees Laura's situation as disruptive. He bemoans "the awkward and ill-controlled emphasis thrown on certain aspects of Laura's behaviour" (1961 p39). However, these aspects of White's novel specifically characterise the extent of his expressiveness, and that his purpose is to highlight the contours of Laura's imagination and how it will serve her. Dutton has confused the elements of expressiveness with a lack of control – but it is precisely the opposite, White is ensuring the women take control of their own narratives by exploring their imagination.

Simon During censures White's emphasis on the imagination of his characters and claims it may be detrimental to a feasible narrative, "White's technique of driving plot forward symbolically, in terms of two sets of contrasting states or kinds of things, remains at odds with his realist tendencies" (During, 1996 p89). In *Voss* for example, the description of a character's thought could be read as indifferent to or independent of, the physically harsh and barren Australian landscape. However, if you interpret that physical landscape as emulative of the grand scope of Voss and Laura's thoughts, the symbolic plot works through the expressive nature of the landscape. As Mark Williams suggests, White saw the Australian landscape as more receptive to 'dark verse', a land that smoldered, that possessed depth (1993, p39). White explores an animated reality, creating a prism of life and thought in each scene. He manipulates atmosphere and allows the characters' minds to have agency in the space around them. In *Voss,* one of Laura's most intimate interactions with Voss explores a similar engagement with space, "She held his bones. All their gestures had ugliness, convulsiveness in common. They stood with their legs apart inside their innocent clothes, the better to grip the reeling earth" (White, 1957 p96). The space of the garden in this instance symbolizes and reveals the intense connection of the characters and suggests that their relationship provides an unconventional realm in which to explore their more sensual nature. So too, in *The Aunt's Story,* when the light of roses intensifies and projects Theodora's mood at Meroë, "She ran, slowed, walking now alone, where she could hear a golden murmur of roses" (White, 1963 p16). This connection with the environment illustrates access to another way of thinking and a means of escape from social and domestic obligations.

John McLaren (1995) in his collection of essays on White: *Prophet from the Desert* includes criticism from David Tacey, Veronica Brady, and Carolyn Bliss. These critics acknowledge aspects of feminine strength and expressiveness in White's style; however, McLaren's summary of their critique in his foreword remains dismissive of such readings. McLaren argues that White is: "A genuinely aristocratic writer, producing a distaste to the ordinary run of humanity, as well as his uneasy relationship to the country" (1995, p2). This may be apt for White himself, but for his writing this is misleading. White is often a satirist/humorist and mocks this supposed elitism as much as he abhors the banal and superficial. He is adept at presenting outcasts and unusual looking characters, specifically awkward human behaviour, unique relationships, and the strange structures of our social lives. It is absolutely fitting and necessary then for him to have set his novels in a harsh, disturbing, troubling Australian landscape – the perfect setting for an Expressionist. McLaren goes on to note that: "David Tacey suggests that our own reading of White should follow a similar principle [that the active, initiating factor is not mind, but imagination], and that we should attend to the patterns that come through the tale and not to the explanations the author gives for them" (1995, p5). This reminds us again to not only attend to the expressive patterns, but also to the way White writes his lead female characters.

Conversely, Brian Kiernan's criticism of *The Aunt's Story* claims that White: "locked Theodora into solipsistic vision, and is unable to present any view of the world beyond her perceptions". What frustrates me about this position from Kiernan is that he equates the female perspective with solipsism. Why should we be discouraged from viewing the world from her perspective? Does it not provide us with a unique point-of-view, especially given that role of the aunt and spinster, "an institution" as Theodora explains, is often misunderstood? It is not a disappointing narrative because it is "occupied with individual sensibility" as McLaren puts it, sensibility is what gives the narrative its vitally different perspective.

Research Gap

Critics of White's work, and those that have become almost seminal in their analysis: Simon During, Geoffrey Dutton, Alan Lawson, Brian Kiernan - and later David Coad (1993) who writes that White's novels have been: "saved from the feminists" - all dismiss or deride the female leads. Their critique is steeped in more nationalistic and realistic concerns. Only a select few, such as Debra Journet (1998) and Phyllis Fahrie Edelsen (1985), have tackled his novels with a somewhat closer analysis of the female characters and highlighted the more modern and experimental aspects of his writing style. For example, Journet explores Ellen Roxburgh's violent sexuality in *A Fringe of Leaves,* and Edelsen argues White's female characters are superior and define the boundaries of their social roles (1985). While there are limits to their exploration of the female characters, they have at least attempted to disentangle the representation of women from discussions around narrative disruption and attempted to explain their impact and significance to White's expressionistic style. A recent review in *Southerly,* by Fiona McFarlane (2015), 'On Reading The Aunt's Story by Patrick White', refreshingly accounts for Theodora Goodman's journey as a positive one and one of survival, and more importantly, her article extends her reading into close analysis justifying such a conclusion.

The gap in the research is that the majority of early critics are male, and very few pay attention to the significance of a female driven narrative. Or rather, they neglect to look at the journey of the female character from the perspective and circumstances of a woman. These critics fail to make the explicit link between White's expressive style as a means of liberating the female character and undermining her restrictions. White actually gives power to the feminine, and this is often overlooked. My thesis is framed by this issue of a confined female character, who is further confined by the way White's novels have been read, and this provides an opportunity to explore the female character in the mode of expressiveness which liberates her.

Structure and Chapter Summaries

The thesis has been divided into three major parts: each chapter is devoted to one of the three novels abovementioned. The structure of each chapter relates directly to the problem of confinement and how the women evolve. The three chapters have been divided into subsections that match the chronological order of the narratives in question. The chapter on Theodora Goodman is written in three parts to coincide with her movement from Meroë to America. Analysis of Laura Trevelyan is written in five parts: those most significant to her character development and her relationship with Voss. And the chapter on Ellen Roxburgh is written in two parts: before and after the shipwreck and her capture.

My chapter on *The Aunt's Story* unravels Theodora Goodman's physical and psychological retreat from her family home, Meroë after the death of her mother. I consider her condition as a woman and her confinement to this household and how that has manifested in her retreat into her consciousness. Her relationships with her family being conservative, violent or distant meant that she was forced to rely on her imagination. The novel's main focus is Theodora having to reconcile her "illusions" with reality, but the otherworldliness of her existence tends to suggest that to submit to a new way of seeing the world means to make what is normal and limited, sublime (that is, transcendent) and open. This chapter is organised into three parts, to coordinate with the three parts of the novel: Meroë, Jardin Exotique, and Holstius. This chapter deals with the movement between and beyond domestic spaces: landscapes, labyrinthine and transitional spaces of hotels and gardens, and homes and houses. Symbols such as mirrors and reflection are also considered, leading into motifs of otherworldliness and an exploration of the psychological landscape.

In the second chapter I argue that Laura Trevelyan in White's *Voss* is the true protagonist of the novel, otherwise titled after its explorer Johann Ulrich Voss. This chapter has been broken down into five sections in order to understand the layers of Laura's confined condition and how she is able to imaginatively escape such circumstances. The first section deals with gender. This is significant because it outlines White's subversion of traditional gender binaries that can be seen in all of his work, and his belief that men and women possess both feminine and masculine qualities. The second section considers Laura Trevelyan's character and outlines her condition and circumstances in the household. The third considers the importance of relationships and the unusual nature of Laura's relationship with Voss. The fourth part considers space (domestic spaces as well as desert landscape) and how this is used to influence the characters throughout, or alternatively, how Laura is able to influence the atmosphere and space. And finally, the section on parallel lives contends that Laura and Voss are attuned to each other's experience, but at some point Laura actually transcends Voss' experience and becomes a symbolic and oracular combination of them both.

Chapter three on *A Fringe of Leaves* is split into two parts: before and after the shipwreck. I contend that Ellen employs the use of masks in her conventional life and then removes them in a sense after she is captured and taken prisoner in the Australian bush. The first part outlines the establishment of the various masks Ellen wears with regard to conventional feminine identities: maiden, wife, and lover. This part argues that Ellen's masquerade is due to her passivity – but that her passivity is actually reactive to the men in her life, making the wearing of the mask an act of agency. I consider Joan Riviere's 'Womanliness as Masquerade' (1929) as a key theory in my reading of *A Fringe of Leaves* and the employment of masks as symbolic of Ellen's confinement. It was also important to discuss Primitivism in this thesis, to note White's occasionally disturbing depiction of Indigenous Australians alongside his female lead in *A Fringe of Leaves.* The second part of this chapter deals with Ellen in the wilderness, having figuratively removed all masks and her immersion into a more primitive self. Ellen's experiences in the wilderness are more primitive and sensual. Her relationships continue to haunt her and her future relationships reveal her ultimate desire for closeness to another. She inevitably returns to civilization as a woman who has lived a less restricted life, only to return the mask once more, this time as the widow. The difference is, she knows more about her 'self' and is able to make an active choice.

Chapter One - Theodora Goodman

Theodora Goodman's possible liberation in *The Aunt's Story* is told in three parts: 'Meroë', 'Jardin Exotique', and 'Holstius'. In this chapter I will closely analyse each section and examine White's depiction of the female protagonist, Theodora Goodman, and explore how his expressionistic style illuminates her character. Firstly, White gives Theodora a childhood that awakens her sensibilities and relationships that stifle and influence her character. Secondly, White removes Theodora from the confines of her childhood home into spaces of transition and allows her to more freely access the recesses of her mind. Lastly, White explores Theodora's reconciliation between these two spaces – physical and psychological– in order to demonstrate the inseparable connection between the two. Theodora's search for liberation is unique because of the kinds of expressions a confined life can cause. White's expressionistic style must be analysed closely in order to understand the constraints on key female characters and to appreciate why this offers a unique kind of liberation.

Part one: Meroë

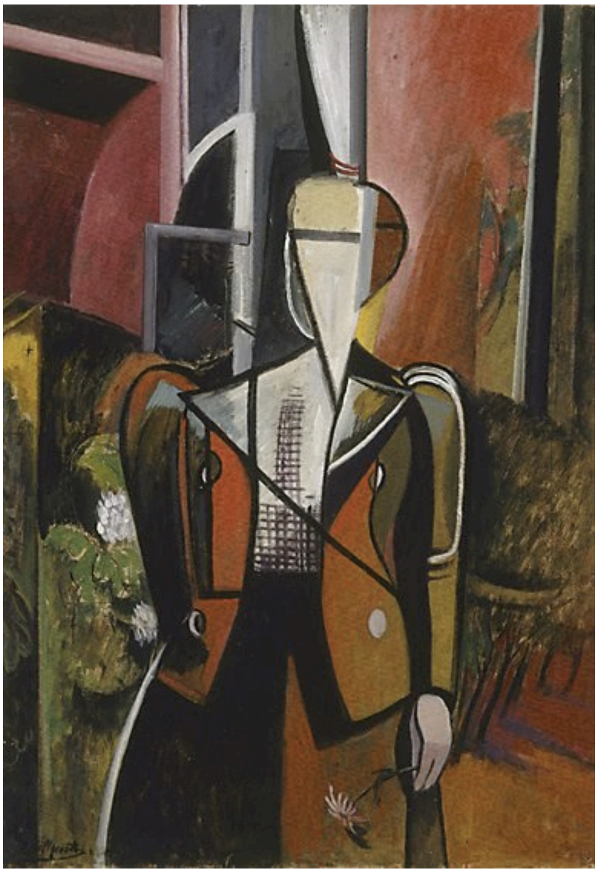
In the first of the three sections of the *The Aunt's Story*, "Meroë", White establishes Theodora's confined circumstances as a young, awkward girl with complicated relationships with her family, in particular, her parents. Their house, Meroë, also represents a range of emotional constraints for Theodora including the hostile relationship she has with her mother and father. Her brief encounters with various men offer her a glimpse at the world outside of her life at Meroë and this stirs her desire for freedom. Confined to the household, the only freedom Theodora can experience is within her imagination. In this first section Theodora's repressed sensuality is revealed. "Meroë" is where Theodora's movement between reality and illusion begins and the inseparable relationship between the two is developed.

Perhaps first and foremost, White illustrates this young woman as confined not only by her relationships, but because of her status in the household as a girl with awkward and unusual features, who is eventually the unmarried woman: "the aunt", "the spinster",

> So that the mirrors began to throw up the sallow Theodora Goodman, which meant who was too yellow. Like her own sash. She went and stood in the

> mirror at the end of the passage, near the sewing room which was full of threads, and the old mirror was like a green sea in which she swam, patched and spotted with gold light. Light and the ghostly water in the old glass dissolved her bones. The big straw hat with the little yellow buds and the trailing ribbons floated. But the face was the long, thin, yellow face of Theodora Goodman, who they said was sallow. She turned and destroyed the reflection, more especially the reflection of the eyes, by walking away. They sank into the green water and were lost (AS 23).

As Theodora looks at her reflection she is forced to examine her own conscience. In his autobiography, *Flaws in the Glass* (1981), White was forced to examine and reflect on his own weaknesses. Importantly, he wrote that the female characters in his novel "are flawed, because they are human beings" (1998, p253). As Bliss notes on reading *Flaws*, "White had at least a passing acquaintance with feminist concerns and acknowledged the centrality of the female experience to human experience" (1995, p35). This image of Theodora looking into the mirror, turning her back on her reflection which then autonomously sinks into green water and is "lost", brings to mind the fractured portrait of the woman that inspired White's novel:



'Figure in the Garden (The Aunt)' (de Maistre 1945).

De Maistre's painting inspired White to create the subject for *The Aunt's Story* and was used on the cover of the first edition of this book. De Maistre and White were friends and their connection as outsiders and affinity with "distinguished, ugly creatures" (Marr 1991, p237) is clear in this character portrait. In his novel, White has included all of the same symbols as de Maistre: windows, furniture, glass, flowers, masculine dress… and his distortions are quite similar, though White moves more into expressionistic distortions rather than abstract ones. As Grogan explains, "Patrick White's favoured characters frequently experience redemptive, visionary moments wherein their socialized identities – their senses of their reflected selves – are subject to dissolution" (2012, p97). This dissolution is integral to Theodora's movement between illusion and reality – in order for Theodora to examine her identity, White has her understand it in fragments, reflections, and intensified moments wherein the objects and space around her are dissolved. Marr describes De Maistre's figure as dressed "as if her clothes were on a tailor's dummy", and "her face is entirely blank" (Marr 1991, p236). But perhaps it is more fitting that for the purpose of obscuring her image the face of the aunt in the painting is split like shards of mirror or glass, blending with the window behind her. In the passage above from the early pages of *The Aunt's Story,* White depicts Theodora Goodman in a domestic setting but also as someone who imagines she is able to differentiate herself when looking at her reflection. She becomes distorted and escapes absolute solidity by merging instead with the reflective glass and the space beyond the window. Theodora's identity becomes one of fragmentation, not obscurity. Fiona McFarlane in her study of the novel explains: "novels that begin with a protagonist's childhood are usually chronicles of the long, slow 'wound of becoming', in the poet Robert Hass' phrase […] But *The Aunt's Story* is about the long slow wound of unbecoming, of undoing the self" (2014, p22). I would add to this that it is the "undoing" or un-confining of the prescribed *female* self.

The first part of the novel introduces us to Theodora Goodman right after her mother dies. To her niece, Lou, Theodora is stoic and reliable. Theodora muses that what she has become after years of spinsterhood is that "institution, an Aunt" (AS 5). What can Theodora teach her niece about life, a young girl who possesses the same 'yellow, scraggy, and unattractive' qualities? Theodora sees in Lou's face something that is "quick as conscience, and as clear as mirrors" (AS 6). More than familial resemblance, Lou is perceptive like Theodora and they reflect each other's conscience - kindred female spirits, both unusual in their appearance. Theodora's irregular femininity appeals to Lou, and Theodora takes comfort in the child's softness towards her. So the two sit together, and Lou asks her aunt to tell her about Meroë. Theodora contemplates how to tell the story which she acknowledges in the confines of "the old house, nothing remarkable had taken place" (AS 13). And yet, she says that to tell the story makes her "blood beat" (AS 13), and that in that house "the human body had disguised its actual mission of love and hate" (AS 13). While Lou sits in readiness to hear the story, we learn that in the confines of this house the lives of its inhabitants have mostly been hidden and disguised. Theodora, self-consciously "smoothing with her toe the light on the carpet" (AS 13), finds it hard to describe her experiences. She admits to her niece: "But, my darling, there is very little to tell" (AS 13). As Carolyn Bliss rightly points out, Patrick White in *The Aunt's Story*, gives center stage to a woman and makes *her* quest the focus of narrative interest (1995, p34). Because of this choice, what is normally 'hidden' will come out into the open.

White attempts to scrutinise the fetishisation of women and the domestic. Scenes in the house, in ballrooms, and in the garden are injected with humour and subversions of conventionality. White also establishes his use of an episodic narrative. Significant encounters and episodes will become important memories for Theodora; her relationships are magnified in a way that intensifies her longing for closeness to others and her desire for meaningful experiences. Part one underlines the importance of Theodora's relationships and their role in her search for freedom.

The Aunt's Story begins with a nod to the contrary: "But old Mrs. Goodman did die at last" (AS 3). In beginning with a conjunction White shifts our focus immediately to something alternative and this encourages the reader to read with a different perspective. The sentence sits alone; atop the paragraph that illustrates the effects this death has on the character of Theodora Goodman. The reader is not, at first, privy to Theodora's former years - the assumed understanding is that Mrs. Goodman had lived a formidable life and this provides the reader with a sense of Theodora's desperation. What can be deduced is that much time has passed in waiting; for 'at last' Mrs. Goodman did die. There is a finality and relief implied in the strict sentence. The language in the opening paragraph, like Theodora's movements, is mechanical; it highlights peculiar focalisations, "She walked into the room where the coffin lay. She moved a brush three inches to the left" (AS 3). Her stoicism is juxtaposed by her slowly altering state of mind. She pats down materials and furniture. She moves into the space; feeling and sensing. There is rhythm in her movements: sweeping and landing. An analogy to Theodora's actions included in this paragraph, the flight of two flies, is unusual. It is a highlighted yet miniscule performance: "She did all this with some surprise, as if divorced from her own hands, as if they were related to the objects beneath them only in the way that two flies, blowing and blundering in space, are related to a china and mahogany world" (AS 3). They, like Theodora, ricochet off the furniture, off the inanimate objects.

Theodora it seems is teetering on the edge of reality: "It was all very surprising, the accomplished as opposed to the contemplated fact" (AS 3). The difference between what she is doing and what she understands herself to be doing changes the incident. The contemplated scene, rather than the tangible one, becomes more powerful. Suddenly perception is controlled and decisively warped. She continues: "It had altered the silence of the house. It had altered the room" (AS 3). White is referring to the relationship between reality and imagination and also to Theodora's response to death. Her agitated imagination contrasts with the acknowledgement of her Mother's death. Her mechanical and seemingly unfeeling movements are at odds with her straining mind. And so she lingers in 'the waiting room', "It was no longer the bedroom of her mother" (AS 3). Theodora is positioned in a space between sanity and other-worldliness. Ultimately, it is the perspectives of Theodora Goodman that remain insistent. 'The shiny box that contained a waxwork' is a derisive description. The 'waxwork' image illustrates only a disturbing *replica* of her mother. This opening paragraph provides a sense of solitude. It is a scene devoted to her steady removal from others and perhaps a catalyst for her transitory nature.

Symbols of Female Confinement

White employs the use of colour, light, mirrors, furniture, and nomenclature in Theodora's character development, all of which are symbolic of domesticity and types of female confinement. These symbols are introduced in *The Aunt's Story's* exposition and form the basis of Theodora's identity. Theodora is consistently at odds with or in contrast to superficial ideas of femininity. She is instead created as a character that becomes awkward and ill defined, but this distinction becomes her empowerment. The house of Meroë and the women within show conventional femininity contrasted by something more unusual. The "green sea" in the glass, for example, illustrates a long sought-after dissolution of conservatism and Theodora's ability to imaginatively identify with that dissolution.

The developing contrast begins with the sisters. White uses colour in particular to set them apart, but also to empower Theodora Goodman with colours that distort and transform her character. There are distinctive colour pallettes associated with the two Goodman sisters in *The Aunt's Story*, used by White to illustrate the differences in their character. These colours shift from a lighter spectrum for Fanny, to a darker spectrum for Theodora, "Fanny was often afraid. She sat up in bed and screamed when the nightlight sank in the saucer. But in the mornings Fanny shone" (AS 67). The contrasting aesthetic illuminates aspects of their personalities. Theodora's colour wheel is richer. Her colours are moody and obtrusive. They are mostly yellows, greens, black and reds. These colours carry a heavy burden. They work in two ways: firstly, Theodora being associated with unattractive colours gives the sense of an ignored, rejected persona. Yellowness becomes Theodora's emblem of variance. We learn that her associated colours are considered by other characters to be repellent. When Mrs. Goodman looks at Theodora, she admits that Theodora is at best "an odd, sallow child in that yellow dress that was such a mistake. If it were Fanny, ah Fanny is different, who wore pink, and married well, and is a bright young woman" (AS 101). Here the colour yellow is made vile as opposed to Fanny's preferred pink. The sallowness of yellow is used as an insult, or to explain something distasteful. Secondly, as a result of these initial effects, the colour associations made toward and around Theodora result in isolation.

However, the privacy enforced by her unlikeable image affords Theodora the opportunity to re-imagine her image. For example, close to the end of this section, as is her custom, Mrs. Goodman comments on Theodora's physical state. She uses a repeated insult: "Theodora has grown thin and yellow" (AS 91) denoting sickliness, as though Theodora's existence is fragile and ungainly. Yellow also implies cowardliness. This insult must be particularly scathing for Theodora, a woman very aware of her social ineptitude. Interestingly, what the reader begins to understand about Theodora is that her emotional capacity is anything but cowardly. Her desire for singularity overwhelms the insult. Perhaps Mrs. Goodman's act of pointing out Theodora's awkwardness is cowardly in itself, a way of projecting her own inadequacies. Mrs. Goodman cannot make out

Theodora's character and these insults are the result of frustration and jealousy of her daughter's private musings. Cleverly, when Mrs. Goodman delivers these insults, White shows Theodora manipulating their intended meaning into something profound. Her response shows she is provoked, but is attempting liberation from that provocation:

> The hills burnt yellow. Thin yellow scurf lay on the black skin of the hills, which had worn into black pockmarks where the eruptions had taken place. And now the trees were more than ever like white bones. Out of all this exhaustion formed the clear expectant weather of autumn, smelling of chrysanthemums and first frost. Theodora filled the house with the gold chrysanthemums. Their stalks snapped and ran strong sap in her hands (AS 91).

Unlike the confining connotations of sallowness and yellowness earlier, Theodora's colour pallette is flattering and liberating here. She immediately imagines a freer space. The hills are particularly a comfort in their connection to her Father. It is the end of the summer now, and the sun has dried the hills. More than that, they have been burnt. A harsh Australian summer is evoked. So the yellow connotations are made more impressive. She gives the colour strength and merges it with the blackness of the hills. She understands the colour yellow alongside her fondness for the black hills of Meroë, so often described to her by her Father. The landscape is personified; she imagines the bare trees now look like "white bones". Her emotional upheaval easily enables her to embed her thoughts into the landscape, the atmosphere, and the objects around her. Finally, she discusses "gold chrysanthemums". Another version of yellow, gold is grand and ethereal. Theodora has now managed to turn yellowness into something magnificent. It is a yellowness that she can embrace. To emphasise that feat, the sap from the gold flowers is literally grasped in her hands. The colours here, at one time ugly, have become striking and saturated with emotional resonance.

In contrast, Fanny's colours promote a light elegance. Fanny is often featured in daylight or sunlight, while Theodora is often seen "in the darker corners of the house" (AS 101). Or alternatively Fanny is draped in soft coloured clothing; a vision in a bright ballroom. Her pastel pinks and whites are the dominant colours, emulating freshness and the idea that Fanny shines against such a backdrop. Yet, at their most poignant these colours show a transparency of character. Fanny belongs to a frivolous, decadent, embroidered sociability. Her pastel pallette is illustrative of her superficiality.

White consistently shows the sisters side by side to heighten their characteristics. While Fanny's superficiality borders on caricature, the development of Theodora's mind is more nuanced and fluid. It is given that range because we are made aware early in the novel that her understanding of the world around her is multifaceted, as opposed to Fanny's one-dimensionality. We learn that the binary opposition established is undermined by the weight of Theodora's character. Her characteristics are not typical:

> Her eyes fell, except in moments of necessity, frizzing out the little puffs of hair, when she outstared, with a somewhat forced detachment, her own reflection. This thing a spinster, she sometimes mused, considering her set mouth; this thing a spinster which, at best, becomes that institution an aunt (AS 5).

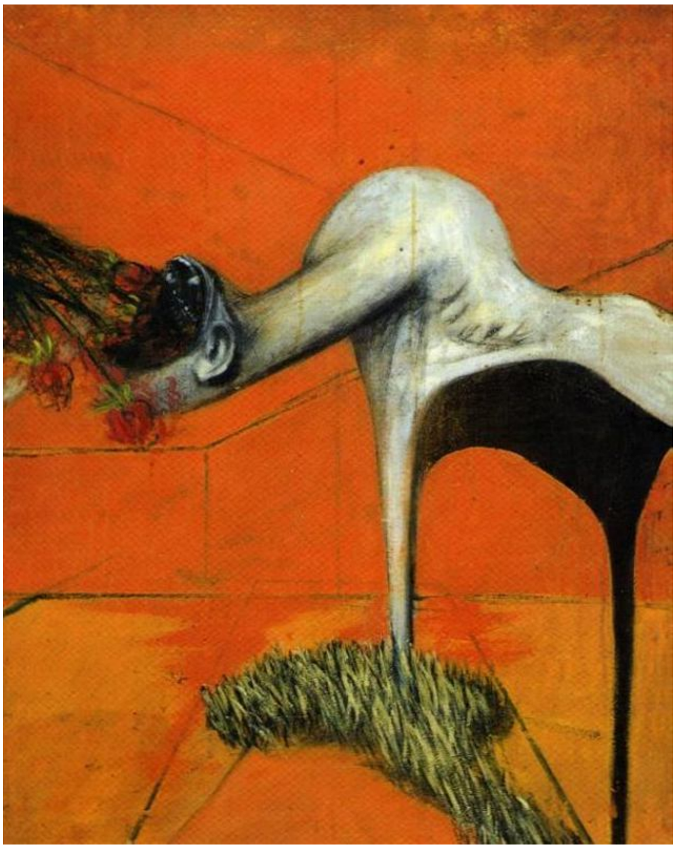
Alongside Fanny, a picture of feminine conventionality, Theodora appears strange, and again agonises over this in her reflection. Also, Fanny is a wife and mother while Theodora limits herself to those 'other' titles: spinster and aunt. "White's calling aunthood an institution connects with his presentations of it as an official designation, rather than as a solid reality with reliable guidelines and expectations" (Wolfe 1983, p71). These critiques are important to interrogate because they propel a gendered reading of the text that misunderstands White's illustration of strong women. I can't help but feel, even in his positive review of her journey, Wolfe continues to ignore Theodora's life *as a woman*, "Theodora and her kind" he begins (by 'her kind' he means as an outsider, but the silent inference is *female* outsiders) "keep social institutions like the family from going flat and stale because, though outsiders, they have also participated enough in these institutions to view from the inside" (1983 p85). Again, the implication is that only a woman can understand this institutionalised familial and domestic life. But more so, when White calls his aunt "an institution", he does this because her role is absolutely specific in its expectations – they are *limited.* It is a role confined to the domestic and familial, a role implying a life doomed to spinsterhood. Theodora is not attempting to keep families from going stale. She is a woman with her own needs and desires and is trying to break free from this kind of institution altogether.

Theodora is acutely aware that her physical appearance is conspicuous and unbecoming. She senses her awkwardness, and recognises the family's resentment towards her. Theodora is the family member on the periphery.

> Because she felt her own awkwardness. After she had hidden in the garden, she looked at her hands that were never meant to do the things that Fanny did. But

> her hands touched, her hand became the shape of the rose, she knew in its utmost intimacy. Or she played the nocturne, as it was never meant, expressing some angular agony that she knew. She knew the extinct hills and the life they had once lived (AS 29).

Theodora's awkwardness often unearths a heightened sense of self. White enables her to embody objects and infiltrate their presence as a psychological reaction to conventionality. She believes her emotions to be at one with the sensuality of roses or the "extinct hills". The unnatural playing of the nocturne is prophetic of the dance later in this part of the novel and being evocative of the night it implies a darker mood. There is then a vague reference to an expression of "angular agony". This is an apt description of her temperament for it is ambiguous in nature, but completely forceful. White alludes to a multiplicity of identities and feelings. At its height, Theodora's personality is as expressive as a character from a painting by Francis Bacon (Bacon was a friend of White's and another artist of particular influence). The "angular agony" described above puts one in mind of Francis Bacon's painting:



'Study for a figure at the base of a crucifixion' (1943-1944)

What is striking about this study is the semblance of a body; a body not ordinarily positioned but distorted and tormented. There is openness in the burnt orange colour, though the lines included across the background interrupt our perception of the space; the containment increases the intensity of the space and causes agitated expressions. The shadows existent under the main body and around the mouth/neck work as both ominous and supportive. The darker presence seems to be lifting the body and pushing it towards emotional release. One limb of the body is buried directly in the ground, through blades of grass. In line with this disappearing limb the chest rises in the opposite direction. It rises in a heaving, dramatic way. Like an engorged heart, overwhelmed. The neck draws back and assists the image of a deep, dramatic intake of breath. The open mouth, and visible teeth recaptures the presence of flesh and body. Both a gasp and a wail may be issuing from the opening. But interestingly in this version red roses smother the mouth. Roses feature heavily in the novels of Patrick White. Their images connote both menace and perfection. The black stems in particular look like two hands and hold a deeper darkness than the shadowed areas of the painting. That the roses are over the mouth is significant because the character seems to be both smothered and gluttonous. This body battles with the overwhelming and indulgent release of emotion. This angular expression of agony is a different illustrative example of the fractured distortion of De Maistre's portrait of 'The Aunt'. Bacon and White's more expressionistic style is what we come to expect of Theodora's emotional upheaval, which is so often expressed via her body and her awkwardness.

For example, the physical opposition between Fanny and Theodora is demonstrated in a later scene in the ballroom when they are older. In this scene of social convention White further enforces Theodora's shift in consciousness and desire to withdraw.

> Theodora walked about the rooms where the people that she knew laughed and prepared to loose their excitement in the dance. And now it began to stir her too, but also an uneasiness. She stood upright and alone amongst the furniture that had been pushed back along the edges or into corners of the room, abandoning its normal functions. In one corner of the room there was a statue, holding her hands in a position of ugly and unnatural modesty, and this was all wrong. Theodora wondered where she could put her own hands, but she could not think. Wherever she put them, these too were ugly and unnatural (AS 77).

The stirring Theodora feels suggests a natural wish to be involved in the party, but the drawback is her feeling of uneasiness. Theodora harbours a certainty that she is an outcast and will surely make a fool of herself. A feeling that is the combined result of her peers' expectations, her mother's insults, and her own social ineptitude. This is an ironic consideration given that her behaviour towards the end of the dance is particularly spectacular. Here though, she immediately positions herself apart from the crowd while she contemplates her discomfit. More than just 'positioning herself apart', she attempts to blend into the furniture. This is not the first time Theodora has imaginatively animated objects around her. There is a similarity to this moment in the reflection in the mirror, where her reflected self sinks back into the green sea of glass. It happens again at the end of this part, when her Father is dying. These episodes imply that her imaginary self is merging closer to her real self: a self that is fluid and fluctuating and inseparable from its surroundings. The connections with the furniture serve to both reflect her mood and provide her odd persona with a kind of companionship. As she animates the furniture, she creates a plethora of shadows amongst whom she can stand alongside unnoticed. She describes the area she is now situated in as the corners, the edges. Theodora personifies the furniture by describing it as having "abandoned" its normal function, an action she herself has now undertaken. That personification is taken even further with the statue. The use of pronouns in her depiction of the statue is significant. It provides a strong association between her and the statue. The statue is now a female, capable of clumsily situating "her" hands – just as we watch Theodora do.

Fanny's entrance is quite the opposite. When Fanny enters she fears her lilies will wilt due to her excitement. While the language maintains theatricality, it is employed to heighten her frivolity to a ridiculous extent,

> And as the music swooped, it caught up the pink tulle and the white satin, and the coloured bundles rose and fell on the wave, shook and giggled with the little twiddles that Miss O'Rourke's hands so cleverly made. But it was above all the sea on which Fanny Goodman sailed. Her words and her laughter were the spray that would whip the dancers into a consciousness of eternity. Fanny always said she could die, she could die in the arms of a waltz (AS 78).

Here again objects are animated and given motion and rhythm in the space. The music is included to provide a sweeping movement and in its wake are pink and white skirts that catch the "wave" of music and delight - White stresses surfaces and the superficial. The romantic image of the frilly petticoats as white peaks rising out of the ocean is mockingly overemphasised. It emulates Fanny's likely impressions of the evening, for it is "above all the sea on which Fanny Goodman sailed". The tone is light and full of her gained attention and popularity. She is the embodiment of decadence; her happy temperament is described as “the spray that would whip the dancers into a consciousness of eternity”. The ‘consciousness of eternity’ is a nonsensical concept when captured in this moment. It is merely an expected, melodramatic finale to her entrance. And yet, the reference to consciousness is ironic because those lost in the general splendor appear particularly *unconscious* of their behaviour. The more alert consciousness belongs to Theodora. As for a consciousness of eternity, it is Theodora who appreciates that possibility most fully. She is the character who engages so closely with her consciousness as to willingly linger in it, perhaps forever. This is the beginning of Theodora’s movement from the confinements of her gender, into the murkier confinements of her imagination.

Confined to House and Garden: Theodora’s Relationship with her Mother and Father

The setting of Meroë is seemingly a picture of an idyllic home life and representative of class and sociability. But, as we see in Theodora, something more unusual becomes apparent. We learn that the name of the estate has connections to a foreign place and that members of the household are painfully isolated. Likewise, the garden is meticulously cultivated and managed but also becomes the setting for sensual identifications and awakenings.

“‘Let us play at houses,’ Fanny said. ‘I shall have a house with twenty rooms. In one room there will be ivory, and in another gold, and another amethyst” (AS 27). Fanny is made to be a portrait of silliness and femininity at its most conventional. She continues, “You are my husband, Theo, but you will be out riding most of the day, riding round the place”(AS 27), making plain the difference between the two. This allusion to Theo playing Fanny’s ‘husband’ illustrates a distinction between their feminine and masculine traits. Fanny’s game shows little imagination and reinforces stereotypes of domesticity. As Rita Felski (2003) points out in her book, *Literature after Feminism*, “Almost all nineteenth century women were in some sense imprisoned in men’s houses […] These [domestic] rooms stood for the constraints placed on female mobility and freedom: they are the graphic reminders of the places off limits to women who are consigned to the margins of culture and the periphery of the father’s house” (2003, p67). Theodora’s role in this household demonstrates this strain. She is going against the usual expectations of a daughter. This game playing is made more significant because Fanny makes her the husband. It is Fanny’s unconscious recognition that Theo (note: a masculine abbreviation of her name) is not conventionally feminine. In the context of the game and the context of their own household, this does not allow for much respect. Their father is reclusive. As a husband he is hardly patriarchal. Their mother is the fierce controller of the household. Fanny ironically appoints Theodora to a role that to Fanny must seem of little significance.

Surrounding the real house of Meroë is a rose garden and hills and pine trees. The "roses" and the "hills" are a continuing symbol for Mr. and Mrs. Goodman. The rose garden is on one side of the house, occupied primarily by Mrs. Goodman. And the hills and pines are on the other side; a vast surrounding landscape greatly preferred by Mr. Goodman. Theodora is confined to this household by the same limits of any young woman of the 1940s, but she is confined even more so by her relationship with her parents. Her mother brutalises her confidence, reducing her to spinsterhood and un-marriageability. And her father, while an ally to Theodora, remains detached and distant in his affections towards her. Both characters are exaggerated in their roles.

Mother

Theodora's mother's femininity is cultivated in a similar fashion to Fanny's, but with an edge. Mrs. Goodman is aggressively manufactured, she is violent, territorial, and headstrong. Theodora's and her mother's attitudes are seen in their relationship to the roses. Whilst there are some clear lines of difference between them, both women exhibit violent tendencies. Theodora's mother is represented in the powerful and devious connotations of the roses she cultivates.

> On the south side there were roses. An artificial rose garden so untidy that it looked indigenous, and which was made because Mrs. Goodman wanted one. She said from her sofa, let there be roses, and there were […] For a moment it gave Mrs. Goodman a feeling of power to put the roses there. But the roses remained as a power and an influence in themselves long after Mrs. Goodman's feeling had gone (AS 15).

The dominant nature of her character is revealed here; she wanted the garden and "there was one". The simple fact of the roses presence because of her wishes fills her with a sense of control. Yet, something more sinister becomes discernible in their effect on Theodora. This sinister influence goes beyond any ordinary disparity between mother and daughter. From the beginning, Theodora's describes her time at Meroë as an "epoch of roselight" (AS 13), and her difficulty in not succumbing to their stifling scent.

> 'Theodora, I forbid you to touch the roses,' said Mrs. Goodman.
> 'I'm not,' cried Theodora. 'Or only a little. Some of them are bad' (AS 16).

The roses have significance because they represent something intense, passionate, and forbidden within the confines of her regular life. Her mother tends to them painstakingly and forbids Theodora to touch them – but Theodora wants to *experience* them, to draw on their influence.

> Theodora, lying in her bed, could sense the roses. There was a reflection on the wall that was a rose-red sun coming out of the earth, flushing her face and her arms as she stretched. She stretched her feet to touch the depths of the bed, which she did not yet fill. She felt very close to the roses on the other side of the wall (AS 15).

This passage indicates an awakened sensuality. Theodora knows the roses are beyond the bedroom wall. Her relationship with the roses goes further than her forced exclusion from them by her mother. Overpoweringly, Theodora appears smothered by thoughts of them:

> These years had the roselight of morning, but there were also the afternoons, in which the serious full white roses hung heavy, and the lemon-coloured roses made their cool pools in a shade of moss. There were the evenings when red roses congealed in great scented clots, deepening in the undergrowth (AS 16).

There is a reference to blood. An overwhelming redness connotes a heightened sensuality; a greater state of awareness. The roses are penetrating her very veins. Theodora characterises and personifies the roses. She then develops their permanence by weighting them in the space; they are 'scented', 'heavy' and 'deepening'. She finds her need for affection met in this seductive garden of roses. But it is now a version of the garden she has created. She allows the roses to inhabit her consciousness.

From the bedroom, the "reflection on the wall that was a rose-red sun" (AS 16) intensifies their effect on her. Because it is a reflection, the rose-light seems brighter and more ethereal. And this enhances the warmth it gives Theodora. Her body is influenced and moved by her thoughts of the roses. Her face is flushed and her young body, in a "bed which she did not yet fill" (AS 16), is mesmerised with captivating new desires. The sequences that follow involving the roselight are similarly solitary. What the roses trigger in her emotionally is a private experience. The influence is all the more strident for its secrecy, "She ran, slowed, walking now alone, where she could hear a golden murmur of roses. Above her she could see red thorns, and sometimes she reached, to touch. She felt on her cheek the smooth flesh of roses. This was smoother than faces. And more compelling. The roses drowsed and drifted under her skin"(AS 16). The roses become a part of Theodora. At this point they figuratively reside in her body. Although enlivening of her spirit, it seems they are as stifling as her mother's influence. This is another example of a reverie in which Theodora's identity fluctuates and dissolves – in sensual identification with the roses.

Theodora's mother's constant insults and belittling seem to contribute to a growing violent resentment within her daughter. And the anxiety is increased by her mother's own fierce behaviour and growing sense of powerlessness,

> She had a temper Julia Goodman. The time she took her riding crop and beat the window in the dining-room because the horses were not brought round, beat the window with the handle of her riding crop, and the glass shivered, and she beat, she beat the jags that were left in the frame (AS 69).

This memory is revealed in chapter four. Mrs. Goodman's behaviour is developed as aggressive by the use of repetition in this passage, "she beat, she beat" and escalates in intensity by the lack of full stops. Her anger is seemingly relentless and the beating action is reinforced. Her power is also given strength by her ability to shake the glass. Perhaps most concerning is that this anger is the result of so trivial a problem: "the horses were not brought round". This makes her all the more dangerous because she is erratic. We see that shivering glass echoed by Theodora. Her mother's temper leaves Theodora similarly affected. Theodora's countenance is often nervous, leaving her "trembling" or hearing her "blood-beat". While social pressures cause these symptoms: for example, long silences, awkward conversations and private reveries, they are also in response to scenes of violence.

Later in the chapter Theodora is accused of stealing her mother's paper knife and a history of violence is revealed,

> “Mother broke in, ‘Theodora, Theodora, where is my little silver paperknife?’
> Mother’s voice made the hot air quiver.
> ‘What should I do with it?’ Theodora called back over her shoulder. ‘I haven’t seen your paper knife.’
> But Mother’s voice implied that she had. The little silver paper-knife still rapped knuckles playing a scale” (AS 85).

Again we see the reverberations of her mother’s temper affect the atmosphere. Her voice has the ability to make the already hot air, “quiver”. The air being hot already suggests a constant tension in the air between mother and daughter. The accusation she makes seems quite empty. But as we have learnt, even the smallest mistake can cause an outburst from her mother. Though, readers now begin to understand that Mrs. Goodman looks for moments to show her dominance, “Mother was afraid she was no longer Mother. It gave her indigestion, not to find proof” (AS 85). The characters in White’s writing consistently feel physically affected by mood. Each emotion appears to affect the body. It is not surprising then that Theodora has similar reactions throughout her life. Mrs. Goodman convinces both herself and Theo that she has stolen the object, her “voice implied that she had”. Interestingly, that voice also has the ability to recall the sting of rapped knuckles. Mrs. Goodman is often seen with her hands on a ball, or “hard with rings” (AS 69). The reference to her mother’s hands and disposition is key to understanding her violent character. This is a grotesque exaggeration of the dominance exercised by Mrs. Goodman. Her penchant for violence is unconventional and inconsistent with stereotypes of proper domesticity and femininity. Mrs. Goodman exhibits a muted secrecy and her use of apparently domestic and ladylike objects – her rings make her hands looks defensive and the “paper knife”, while likely harmless, is still a knife. Her mother provokes Theodora’s need to escape the overbearing femininity imposed upon her.

Also revealed in this chapter is further evidence that Theodora may have inherited from her mother a similar penchant for violence. Unconsciously, it appears, Theodora *did* take the silver paper-knife. As expected, she is fighting back.

> ‘Why, here,’ said Theodora, ‘is Mother’s like silver paper-knife’.
> And it was. On the dressing table.
> She looked up. There was never any question. It could not have been otherwise.
> It was like this between mother and daughter (AS 90).

The power struggle between the two increases tension. Given that the object in question is a dangerous one, it is concerning to the reader what motive Theodora had for taking it. It leaves the slightest suggestion of violent intentions. Theodora seems unsurprised by her "realisation" that she had the knife in her possession. Theodora seems to regain some power here. It is this powerfulness in her character that will later cause difficulties in her relationships with men.

Father

Subversively, the masculine influence in her life is what offers Theodora softer, subtler, more introverted characteristics. However, these characteristics bring their own restrictions: detachment, distance, and oppressive privacy. The pines, the hillside and the volcanic rocks of Meroë are all connected to Theodora's father. Scenes involving him are often staged in or beside these surroundings. As Theodora notes, "the room where her father sat was the side the pines were"(AS 17). While her mother is connected to the roses, Theodora's father is attached to hills and pines, "On the north side of the house there were also live trees. There was a solid majority of soughing pines, which poured into the rooms the remnants of a dark green light, and sometimes in winter white splinters, and always a stirring and murmuring and brooding and vague discontent" (AS 15). Her father introduces her to the hills of Meroë. He is associated with their "dark green". He often refers to dead trees, or tussocks, or roots, or live trees. The colour green provides her father with a natural sense. He appears to be genuinely at one with his environment. The sparse hillside is more than land off which he can make a living. It becomes the setting for all of his private thoughts. His thoughts are never directly divulged, but are figuratively taking place across the landscape. Many times he is seen looking out at the pines and offering up his inner thoughts. As the description suggests, even the pines have a sense of brooding. When these soughing pines penetrate the house they offer up a dark green light. Their image through the window is so prominent, the colour green literally spreads through her father's room. The energy from the pines, and the mysterious contemplations of Mr. Goodman, ricochet across the space. The trees and her father's mood stir this "vague discontent". These feelings are expansive, whereas the social world is restrictive. The emotion of restlessness and dissatisfaction is forever caught up in the landscape of Meroë.

The lamp on his desk is also green, enhancing that colour spectrum even further. This is also linked to Theodora's reflection in the mirror, where her thoughts are confined to the imagination but expansive. The study and the pines are the places of the house her father occupies. He is so blended with these spaces that he is likened to the trees themselves, "really Father was not unlike a tree, thick and greyish-black, which you sat beside, and which was there and not. Your thoughts drifted through the branches, or followed the up and down of the breathing that lifted Father's beard" (AS 17). There are consistent allusions to his unhappiness but the root of his unhappiness is never made clear. There is a mystery to his countenance, "It was so good that Father had come to the surface, and his eyes saw" (AS 20). He is a distant and impenetrable character. Theodora longs to share his thoughts, to perhaps understand him and have him understand her. She likely believes they have a similar sense of the world. The colour green is also appropriate for this feeling of envy. She resents his distance from her and that his true character is never fully revealed to her. His unhappiness and remoteness from Theodora has a great effect on her. She bares these feelings in the following passage:

> Or else you waited for Father to come out from behind his door. It was a solemn and emotional event. Your father is not to be disturbed, said Mother, which gave to his door a certain degree of awfulness. But Father himself was not awful. He was serious. He sighed a lot, and looked at you as if he were about to let you into a secret, only not now, the next time. Instead, and perhaps as compensation for the secret that had been postponed, he took you by the hand, about to lead you somewhere, only in the end you could feel, inside the hand, that you were guiding Father (AS 17).

She describes his rare appearance as an event. As it is an event it also implies there must be an expectation from Theodora. She states it is a solemn and emotional event, but this is not necessarily unwelcome. Theodora seems eager to experience any feeling associated with her father, gloomy or otherwise. Adding trepidation to any interaction with her father is her mother's warning to not disturb him. However Theodora prefers to deflect this threat to the door of his study. She muses that her mother's warning "gave to his door a certain degree of awfulness" (AS 17). Any proper terror she feels is often embedded into surrounding objects. In this case, she links her nervousness to the door, and later to the hills that surround his study, "So you walked past Father's door with a sense of awfulness, especially as it was that side of the house, where sometimes the pines, when the wind blew, flung themselves at the windows in throaty spasms" (AS 17). Her father's emotional unpredictability is represented in the pines. She imagines his worries to be as fierce as the wind, and the reference to the pines flinging themselves in "throaty spasms" invokes the sound of wailing. The implication is a storm of emotion takes place within this private room of her Father's and the room itself may also represent the guarded quarters of his mind. It is a space to which he is confined both physically and mentally. This experience of distance with her father gives Theodora a sense of the distance she will experience in all of her relationships, and importantly, it becomes an experience she will wish to overcome in herself.

Theodora does not allow his intensity to affect her opinion of her father. She shows compassion in her unfaltering wish to be closer to him. She makes the important distinction: he "was not awful. He was serious"(AS 17). She takes an interest in his woes. She is sympathising with his preoccupations, perhaps because she recognises her own concerns in his countenance: feelings of inadequacy and reclusiveness. Finally, there is a clue to the extent of his distant thoughts and confused state of mind. She sees in his eyes a wish to communicate not just his thoughts but "secrets" – suggesting a more magnificent disclosure, but this disclosure remains just out of reach. It is always hinted that he is on the edge of revealing his thoughts, or at least will "the next time". This keeps Theodora in a constant state of readiness, perhaps feeling that each interaction with him may reveal to her his true nature. This yearning becomes a central part of her character and lies behind her rejection of convention and reveals her desire for something more. Though sadly, she feels a sense of responsibility in that prospect. As she explains, it was she who would be guiding her father. Theodora is determined to break down the distance that has trapped him.

As discussed, her father alerted her to the existence of another Meroë, "'A second Meroë', said Father, 'a dead place, in the black country of Ethiopia'" (AS 18). We learn this at the beginning of her tale. It shows a significant connection between her intense view of the landscape and her Father's knowledge. His telling her of this other place makes his world and thoughts appear as vast and distant as the surrounding hills, and further still, the hills of Ethiopia. She is intrigued by this information and made anxious by this revelation of another place to which her father might mentally disappear- perhaps even prefer. He often relates his unhappy existence at Meroë, and it terrifies her,

> She looked with caution at the yellow face of the house, at the white shells in its placid, pocked stone. Even in sunlight the hills surrounding Meroë were black.

> Her own shadow was rather a suspicious rag. So that from what she saw and sensed, the legendary landscape became a fact, and she could not break loose from an expanding terror (AS 19).

Theodora knows that if her father prefers to be somewhere else, it may suggest that he has no absolute connection to her. This feeling of irrelevance is implied when she imagines her shadows to be a "suspicious rag". She feels she has been discarded. Her comprehension of her own existence, and the existence of Meroë, is faltering. She grows terrified about the possibility of another place to which her Father's mind is wandering. She says later that the second Meroë became a dim apprehension because she preferred to love the first. She consciously clasps the Meroë she knows: it is tangible place and a place to which her Father belongs.

Learning of the death of her father at the end of chapter four, Theodora responds to the loss with a sense that her own identity has dissolved, linking their confined condition:

> When Theodora woke in the night she heard that it was happening. Her heart was cold. Heavy skeins of smoke fell from the lit candle. The fold of her nightgown fell from her like folds of falling wax, from which her hair streamed. She was walking in the passages of Meroe, a reflection walking through mirrors (AS 92).

Theodora's identity dissolves in moments of crisis, as when her mother dies, and here she becomes the image of the candle she sees lit in the hall. Her emotions are entangled and reflected in the space around her. By distorting the tangible environment, and infusing that space with emotion, White allows a palpable experience to emerge. This is not merely stream-of-consciousness, but a magnification of emotional responses and their visualisation in thought. White's expressiveness brings a microscope to the individual's emotional experience. The reader experiences seemingly minute instances on a grand scale. A walk through a hallway becomes an entry into the mind.

Theodora's Encounters with Men: Frank Parrott, Huntly Clarkson, and Moraitis

Theodora is a character that has to gather strength and at the same time is socially withdrawn. While this limits her ability to interact "politely" with men, her unusual character is also what attracts them and sets her apart. As a young woman she encounters foreigners and passers by who offer her glimpses of life beyond Meroë, but later she meets men that she might prospectively marry or that she must engage with more formally. The earliest incidence is when Theodora is twelve and she converses with The Man who was Given his Dinner, an old friend of her father's, evidently now a drifter. His arrival coincides with her being 'struck by lightning' and what becomes a metaphor for her having a unique or spiritual understanding of the world – which the man senses in her, "no girl that was thrown down by lightning […] and then got up again, is going to be swallowed easily by rivers of fire' (AS 44). She wishes to go with him but the limits of her gender are made clear:

> 'I would come if I could', said Theodora.
> 'Yes', said the man. 'You would'.
> 'Don't be silly', said Fanny, 'you're a girl' (AS 44).

She has an affinity or a kind of mutual understanding with these mysterious men. And although she often manages to dominate them in intelligence, she realises and resents that the men have access to a world larger than the one afforded to a woman, and this weighs on her, "'I would come', her voice was so heavy she could hardly lift it" (AS 44). Likewise, Theodora meets the Syrian peddler, who one day she follows as he leaves. As she follows him White writes, "she had increased" (AS 26). This embodied expression suggests that her world-view is expanding and the reader visualises her growth in spirit: "she walked outside a distinct world" (AS 26). However, the encounter is brief and she must watch the Syrian go. Theodora remains confined to the 'distinct world', only to glimpse at possibilities of travelling and feel the desire to travel and explore, "her knees trembled" (AS 26). As a way of empowering herself when she is older, Theodora's relationships with men seem to provoke something in her that encourages her to relinquish conventionality and form a new kind of self-confidence. As though mimicking Theodora's state of mind, the men she becomes close to in a somewhat romantic sense move from the more traditional to the more obscure. This further implies that the men in her life are symbolic of the complexity of her own identity. White gives his female protagonist license to inform and be informed by men, but she is not necessarily bound to them. Her relationships with men become opportunities for her to test her strength and to match or overwhelm their influence. Theodora works hard to balance her desire for affinity but also her need to detach and withdraw, not just because of social anxieties but also to preserve her sense of being different. In order for Theodora to gain strength she must reject the confines of her sex, her awkwardness, and her social expectations. Theodora's tension-filled encounters with men where she battles these constraints are evident in White's use of gender subversion, dissolution of boundaries, emotional effects on the atmosphere, and radical personification.

Frank Parrott

Frank Parrott, we are told in the opening chapter, marries Fanny Goodman. Before this, Frank meets the Goodman sisters when they are much younger and at that time Theodora's descriptions of his physicality are quite visceral. She notices his "Adam's apple moved up and down" (AS 59), and the light from a window blazing through and gilding the nape of his neck, she explains, "was already gold. He sat ahead, a reddish gold" (AS 58). There is an attraction to him but it is fragmented as a collection of distinctive bodily features. Theodora from this point onwards spends her time with Frank testing whether this potent image she has focused on is matched by a vain personality. This instinct stems from her affinity with more masculine and adventurous characters. Theodora's (note the maleness of her name – Theo) presence alongside Frank resonates as undeniably mannish, "She walked among the tussocks with the long strides that made them say as Theo Goodman was some bloke in skirts" (AS 71). Wolfe describes Theodora here as, "an 'adam woman', as John Fowles defines it several times in *The Aristos* (1964), fusing female gentleness and male reason". This masculinity and phallic symbolism could be linked to Theodora's movements and use of the rifle, and her visions of hawthorn flowers and roselight to something that can burn, obscuring her femininity. But this interpretation disregards the possibility that those strengths and sensibilities represent the feminine. She may display masculine features in her figure and mannerisms – but she is a woman. White does not intend to eliminate her femininity, but rather he subverts the masculine and empowers the feminine by challenging gender conventions. By ascribing her the title of an "Adam-woman" Wolfe aligns himself with sexist stereotype – fusing two sexist tropes together does not even things out. There is no such thing as an "adam-woman" in this text, there is only Theodora and as White points out, "she is flawed, like he is flawed" (White 1998).

When the sisters return from boarding school, a little older and less naive, Frank and Theo go out shooting. Fanny, jealously, dramatises their sport as barbaric. She degrades it because she is excluded from their mutual enjoyment. Yet, Fanny's face is seen to flush from the cold and is described by White as a blooming match to Frank's red features, thus White ties them together as a more likely and picturesque twosome. Theodora's relationship with Frank is less superficial. Frank engages in a flirtation with Theodora by way of competitive interest: "'I'll take you on one day', he said. 'I'll bring a gun. I'll put you through your paces'". It's a flirtatious challenge but one that involves a struggle for power and dominance. We learn quickly that it is Frank who will be put through his paces. Theodora outdoes him in more ways than a clean shot - she knowingly shocks Frank to prove what she suspects is the case: that his temperament is unadventurous. Or at most that he is unwilling to step outside the status quo. Her interest in him is interrupted by her sense that he is ridiculous, "he stared down out of his mystified blue eyes, which reminded her, she laughed, of a young bull" (AS 72).

When they begin their sport, Frank misses his target, but Theodora is successful. Her shot affects the atmosphere and when it reaches the rabbit has an instantaneous, obvious effect on Frank, "His face was redder than from cold" (AS 74). Theodora senses his arousal at her abrupt skill, "the silence trembled, ticked, ran. It had begun again" (AS 74). For all of Frank's flirtations with the sisters, and his ability to indirectly shake Theodora's pride, Theodora singlehandedly, in one clean shot, brings the scene back into her control. Her emotions are steadied as she takes comfort in her skill and in her now clearer view of Frank's wavering disposition. Furthermore, she makes the decision to let Frank outdo her. She attempts for a time to let him shoot more rabbits and aims off target,

> She walked, and thought: He is like a big balloon that I hold at the end of a string, tightly when I shot the rabbit, but then he soared, as I let him out, giving him the string, the sky. Because the rest of the afternoon she had aimed a little to the right. She had wanted to. She had wanted to feel his child's pleasure soar, and say this is mine (AS 74).

This image illustrates Theodora's propensity to correct her feelings. Importantly, Theodora learns that all relationships are a struggle for power. The use of the balloon metaphor emphasises Frank's childish sensitivity and implies only a delicate control. The flightiness of the balloon suggests that Theodora's control over it is inevitably elusive. This temporary control is at once a comfort and a burden, "Theodora heard Frank's breathing. She did not altogether like her power. So she listened to his breathing dominate the silence, and this was better" (AS 74).

The presence of silence in the space is a technique often used by White. It is used to enhance Theodora's emotional turbulence. As earlier mentioned, after Theo's shot rang out, "the silence trembled". That moment provided a fraction of time to reflect on and engage with the emotional consequences of the shot, "For a moment time had been put off its course" (AS 74). That consequence so discovered was ultimately a shift in power. The power of her understanding unsettles her. As an antidote to her sense of control, she intuitively bombards that same silence with Frank's breathing, Frank's presence. That she may at times be able to manage her actions, and at other times be overtaken by them, increases the stress in this situation. What is at stake, another opportunity to become close to someone, is now squandered by Theodora's natural strength of character and her awkwardness and difficulty with it.

Theodora attempts to be liberated from that sense of inadequacy by embracing it. She releases her nervous sensations into the air and the violent act of shooting the hawk, personified as a version of herself, is interspersed with this passionate release and expresses the idea of going beyond the limitations of one's self. When a little hawk flies above them Theodora sees herself in its spirit. She asks Frank not to shoot at it, "Because she remembered the red eye, and for a moment she quivered, and the whole hillside, in some other upheaval of mythical origin. She knew the white air, closer than a sheath, and the whole cold world was a red eye" (AS 75). There is a familiarity to the hawk's movements - Theodora's mood and her senses are now entwined with the hawk's flight. The air's 'whiteness' suggests openness and clarity. Theodora is coming out of her confinement of awkwardness. Her shudder at the "white air" is the same response she had with Frank after shooting the rabbit, but on a much grander scale. Now that shudder reverberates across the "whole cold world", a world in possession of the red eye too, as if engaging with her and looking back at her. The hawk's red eye suggests a cunning madness, skillful yet predatory. As mentioned, there is often an underlying element of violence to Theodora's behaviour. Her actions with the rifle in this scene, along with what we know her to be thinking, are no exception to that violent characteristic. The "red eye" belongs to the hawk, the landscape and Theodora. Suddenly, Theodora's sole concern is the emotional atmosphere. She senses herself within the space. As such, she takes possession of the red eye. Theodora becomes the little hawk. "Theodora began to laugh. She knew she had lost control. This, she said, is the red eye. And her vision tore at the air […] She was as sure as the bones of a hawk in flight" (AS 75). Frank and Fanny grow small and distant as this scene progresses. The reader is brought closer to Theodora's experience. It is a momentary, fanatical release from the awkwardness earlier felt, culminating in Theodora's deliberate killing of the hawk, "Now she took her gun. She took aim, and it was like aiming at her own red eye. She could feel the blood-beat the other side of the membrane. And she fired. And it fell. It was an old broken umbrella tumbling off a shoulder" (AS 75). The language is quick and meditative. Theodora does not only kill the hawk, she fires at her self – the idea being that she imaginatively kills herself. She feels her own blood pulse. The violent image of "blood-beat" emulates the impact of the shot. She eliminates all of these accumulated sensations, "She felt exhausted, but there was no longer any pain. She was as negative as air" (AS 75). The term 'negative' is a dichotomous one. It implies that she feels calmly fulfilled yet simultaneously destructive and "broken" – released in a way that allows her to embrace a different version of herself.

During those times when Frank engages with Theodora, his interest in her gratifies her ailing self-worth. "Frank made her feel experienced, but when he cantered off, her smile dropped. She was not quite sure" (AS 72). However, when Frank Parrott is awkwardly pursuing her affections, this is matched and overwhelmed by her dramatic reaction. Theodora's ability to kill her old self, not to remain bound within a given role, is shocking to him. She challenges him to reciprocate, or at least understand, her thoughtfulness and unusual behaviour. But we learn that ultimately Frank's banal inclinations are unsatisfying to her character. Her character is intent on being understood on a much more sensual, powerful level; for which Frank is no match.

Theodora's emotional release as a result of her encounters with Frank continue in a later scene at a ball. On the one hand Fanny is floating and exuding a "bright glistening" and on the other Theodora is 'seething'. Frank approaches Theodora feeling strong and flushed from drink: "His eye was a fiery china" (AS 81). Sensing an opportunity to unburden her self, she accepts his offer, and they dance. The dance is fierce and rambunctious, "the music took them and flung them", "the proud striped skirt of Theodora streamed with fire" (AS 81). This metaphor of fire is used as a symbol of passion. Theodora usually exists in the shadows or is situated in darkness, placed there by social pressures and avoidance. But within her, the world that her readers experience, there is colour and wit and vibrancy. Frank's invitation to dance "burns" her. Theodora wants to feel something, to be involved openly with another human being and to express her desires in a tangible way.

Cruelly, when she attempts to act on these relationships, it becomes awkward and strange. Frank is beguiled by Theodora's strangeness. It is important to recognise here the combination of defensiveness and need in relationships. They come together in this moment – a fiery contrast to Fanny's cool dance of sociability, "Inside the dictatorial stream they were pressed into a dependence on each other that was important" (AS 81). From this moment they are placed in a bubble; their experience is separate to the rest of the room. Theodora exerts herself so fully she is described as physically depleted, "Her face was thin with music, down to the bone" (AS 81). Or rather, she is penetrated by the emotion of the scene. The music is injected into her very bone. The effect is one of great proportions, "She was both released from her own body and imprisoned in the molten gold of Frank Parrott" (AS 81). Here she is at once released and imprisoned, similar to before when her body is described as both exhausted and rejuvenated. There is an immense physical distortion portrayed in the dance. Theodora's "imprisonment" into the molten gold of Frank Parrot suggests they are melted together. Her body is said to bend to the music. These radical distortions of body are representative of the intense release of feeling built up in this novel. Theodora is figuratively breaking out of her self, of her social limitations. After being significantly ignored and rejected, and reduced to lingering in the shadows of the ballroom, she erupts into a fiery performer. After this scene at the dance, Theodora is described with a newfound sense of self. It is more dignified: "She closed her eyes, let it become her smile, and in this airy disintegration there was some peace" (AS 107). This particular emotional intelligence is Theodora's greatest strength, and also severest downfall. Lacking opportunities to share her feelings, lacking kindred spirits, Theodora is forced to explore her longing for affection, her passion, in the endless recesses of her mind. Though not before she seeks understanding from two more, two very different, gentlemen.

Huntly Clarkson

Huntly Clarkson is introduced to readers as Mrs. Goodman's solicitor, presumably hired after the death of her husband. Huntly is visiting one afternoon as the room discusses a gruesome murder that has captured the imagination of the community. It is the case of Jack Frost, a local baker who slit the throats of his wife and daughters. Theodora's take on the crime sparks Huntly's attentions toward her. She is disturbed, and discusses it with some seriousness. "It is very personal. I find it difficult. Quite honestly. Difficult to discuss. I have thought about it. And it is still so close. Like something one has done oneself" (AS 109). Theodora recognises Jack Frost's violence within herself – a killing of what one holds dear. Perhaps the ease and finality of the act frightens her. Perhaps the violent act in a domestic setting is all too desirable. Later in the text she imagines herself murdering her Mother. This conversation anticipates that scene.

"'I like your view Miss Goodman,' Mr. Clarkson said. 'It is my view reversed'" (AS 110). This image of supposed harmony, used by Huntly here with the intention of drawing them closer together, is actually more an image of opposition. There is no entanglement. This calm parallel actually suggests a space between them. The space appears to be attractive to Theodora. A safe distance between them is a bearable prospect if she must enter into a relationship. Theodora is always wary of that which might overwhelm,

> His voice compelled her to make the balcony her universe, outside which the sound of trees swam, words in the room, and the ripple of a dove. It would be very easy she felt, to allow the kindness, the affluence, the smoky voice of Mr. Clarkson to engulf. But because of this she resisted (AS 110).

While she is reasonably attracted to Huntly, the feeling brings up familiar anxieties for Theodora. She avoids the closeness she longs for because it makes her feel awkward. Her avoidance is played out by "taking refuge in her ugliness" (AS 110). She protects new feelings by drudging up old, hateful ones, "now she summoned it up from all the reflections that had ever faced her in the glass" (AS 110). Such a dramatic device of resistance illustrates Theodora's emotional torment. Her inadequacies produce further social faux pas. She often enters into a vicious cycle of awkwardness. One social interaction can have severe effects on her mental state. Each suggestion of companionship ricochets across her mind producing a spectrum of worry and revolt. Fittingly, an image of multiple reflections of her "ugliness" in the glass mirrors her understanding of her self as strikingly fierce. Not alone, but accompanied by multiple versions of her self. Thus she enters into a duplicitous relationship with Huntly Clarkson. Theodora is platonically loyal to him, all the while reveling in her developing sense of self. This is merely a necessary solution to 'spinsterhood' – her mental state remains non-conformist.

Theodora recognises that this would not be a true engagement of minds, but rather his procuring her as another possession, a final piece of furniture for his fine home. It is that which makes her realise the distance between them leaves her in solitude, "to sit alone in the drawing-room surrounded by the bare, diamond women" (AS 114). She comes very close to being given an opportunity of marriage. His fleeting proposal to her, that he hopes she will come often, is not uninvited. Yet in the moment when after leaning in to confide in her such an offer, she blunders a quick and modest response of inadequacy, and "she was sad, because she could feel that he had sat back" (AS 115). This minimal movement echoes the distance from her Father and his propensity, like all of the men she meets, to keep intimacies brief. This familiar feeling disappoints Theodora to such an extent that she is willing to adhere to the simplicity of this pending relationship, and she does so with ease by removing herself from *really* giving herself to the partnership. Knowing how to play this role would be easier because she was working in a space to which "she never belonged" (AS 115). This is a point in the text where it seems possible Theodora may submit herself to an ordinary life and accept a life of convention, a marriage of convenience. Time stretches as this "persists for some years" (AS 116), and routine and complacency grows. "She had entered a stretch of years in which she chose flatness" (AS 116). The prose begins to read like a dull conversation. There is boredom, simplicity and ordinariness enveloping the tone of politeness. All attentions paid by either party are reciprocated but with an understood complacency. Their relationship develops out of reason and organisation. They are both outsiders and resolute in their isolation. But Huntly seems to have a privacy that is determinedly lonely. Theodora's privacy is willful also, but she encourages openness in that privacy. In that space of contemplation she is looking for understanding, and in a sense, company. Huntly, however, is unwilling to follow her there: "love and Theodora Goodman were, besides, grotesque, unless you were prepared to explore subtler variations of emotion than he personally would care for (AS 117)".

Moraïtis

Moraïtis is compellingly introduced as "dark, opaque and physical" (AS 119), the antithesis of Huntly. He is to give a concert that Theodora offhandedly claims she will not attend and refers to the "flatness" of her life. Moraïtis' arrival in this analogy almost looks like an oasis appearing in the desert. Huntly's inability to understand Theodora, and this feeling of hate, leaves the reader with a rather pathetic picture of him. Theodora on the other hand maintains a dignified understanding of him throughout, and punctuates their imminent separation: "The whole of Huntly Clarkson's life lay there on the table, crystallized, in front of Theodora Goodman, and she knew at such moments that there was nothing more to know" (AS 120). It is a harsh fact, but timely for Moraïtis' arrival. He announces he is from Greece: "primitive country", and seats himself next to Theodora. Their flirtatious conversation ensues:

> 'It is all furniture,' he said. 'I cannot live in such a room. I require naked rooms.'
> 'Bare', said Theodora Goodman.
> 'Bare?' said the Greek. 'Naked is the word for women.'
> 'Naked can be the word,' said Theodora.
> 'Bare,' smiled Moraïtis, for a fresh discovery. 'Greece, you see, is a bare country. It is all bones.'
> 'I too come from a country of bones.'
> 'That is good,' said Moraïtis solemnly. 'It is easier to see' (AS 121).

The idea of such a room must be of interest to Theodora, to be in a place that is bare, with another man, with only the two of them to move in that space, no furniture to hide behind or blend into. It illustrates an openness that Theodora has always longed for. He responds in turn, 'Naked is the word for women.' They speak cryptically and though he corrects her speech for the feminine pronunciation, he settles on the word 'bare' for them both, disregarding gender, as he too comes from a 'country of bones'. This is an acknowledgment of physicality and a baring of souls. 'Naked rooms' becomes a metaphor for truthfulness. Moraïtis brings out the long suppressed primitive sensibilities of Theodora. They have an unspoken reciprocity and a natural bond. Their connection is instinctual. Passages relating to him have the tone of arousal, awareness and sensuality. He talks to her with inquisitiveness and speaks to her sensual knowledge. He often assumes her understanding and knowledge of "things".

A direct connection to her Father and the relationship she has with Frank, Huntly, and Moraïtis is delivered in the following moment:

> Huntly's table was smoldering with red roses, the roselight that Theodora remembered now, of Meroë. She swam through the sea of roses towards that other Ithaca. On that side there were the pines, and on this side Moraïtis. His hand begged for mercy, fingering a crumb. And Theodora granted it. They did not speak much (AS 119).

There is a timeline to Theodora's feelings. We first note that the roses are indeed a constant trigger for her; a symbol of her more primitive passion and desire, in this case they are "smoldering", illustrating abundance but also a heat, harking back to her fiery dancing scene with Frank Parrott. She also recalls Meroë and the exotic land it resembles, Ithaca, another reference point in Theodora's train of thought - one thing makes her think of another and she is left with layers of reflection. The multiple memories heighten her awareness of self. We are drawn outwards across lands and time through her recollection and afterwards returned to the minutest of actions: the fingering of a crumb. This patterned thought process exemplifies the scale of Theodora's emotion. Importantly, on the side with the pines she refers to, sits Huntly. He is across the table, physically in keeping with their regular distance between each other. But referencing him in relation to the pines also signals his emotional distance from her, like that of her Father. Perhaps Huntly is not so enigmatic, but his vacant countenance is unchanging. Theodora is more drawn to Moraïtis' preoccupied gesture than any table conversation. He absentmindedly observes: "'The roses…' turning to her to offer his discovery". She is so drawn in as to respond by divulging her own preoccupations in that moment, "We lived once in an old yellowstone house,' she said. 'Old for here that is. And one side was a thicket of roses. A tangle. I tell myself I can remember roses reflected on the ceiling, in the early morning, when I was a child. Do you think this can be fact, or just absurd?'" (AS 119). She speaks with rare confidence. Her tone is personable and energetic and what she speaks of is private and strange. They appear to share a mutual sensuality. It is a different reciprocity to the one she shares earlier with Huntly. Moraïtis and Theodora seem to understand each other instinctively, "In the eyes of Moraïtis there were many familiar objects, he held things with humility, his glass, or knife" (AS 120). It is no accident that the objects she notices Moraïtis handling have been tools of great significance in her youth. One the source of reflection and distortion, the other an emblem of violence. That Moraïtis should be handling them so gracefully is greatly appealing to Theodora. She is mesmorised, and imagines him with this most particular respect accordingly: "He stood in the reflected roselight" (AS 120).

Moraitis' entry into the narrative prompts Huntly's removal. Moraïtis represents what Theodora is most attracted to: she prefers the "air", and his openness. Not only does this refer to literal open spaces, but the compatibility with the extended spaces of her mind and her ability to think on a grand scale. Huntly previously confesses: "she closed doors, and he was left standing on his handsome, mahogany interior, which was external, fatally external, outside Theodora Goodman's closed door" (AS 122), because he understood that she resides internally, and in this moment, White reminds us of that. We have the privilege of entry into her thoughts, so whilst it is reminiscent of her father's tendency to linger in his thoughts, Theodora's are explored and glorified for our pleasure, extending the limits of the internal.

Theodora imagines Moraïtis practises his cello in a bare room. With only two mirrors either side of him, facing one another, "No she wondered about him, in the wilderness of preliminary music, where he stood, perhaps in a small, brown, bare room with two gilt mirrors of an unfashionable century" (AS 124). As previously explored, her thoughts tend to take on multiple reflections at once, delving into deeper memories and creating layers, "Through the rain of distant music, in a comb of corridors, Moraïtis stood in the perspective of the brown room, which tried to contain him, but which failed, defeating its own purpose in reflections of reflections, endlessly" (AS 124). The rain of music is "distant" because it journeys through the corridors of reflection. The room is a space that he uses to establish isolation. However, the space is magnified because of the mirrors and that purpose of isolation is defeated by multitudes of his image, reflected back at one another. That Theodora should situate him in such a space is telling of her expectations of this man. She imagines Moraïtis is as private as her self and is no less profound as a result, "Each of these solemn acts was repeated by the mirror, an isolated, and magnified, without detracting from its privacy" (AS 124). She sees in him a man of profound reflection - not beholden to his musings but rather liberated by them. For him this multiplicity is released musically.

This scene leads to an imaginative connection between Moraïtis and Theodora. Moraïtis steps on to the stage for his concert and although his manner is preparatory, Theodora imagines he has walked on "in the isolation which he had brought with him from the mirrors" (AS 124).

> You could see that his isolation fitted him closely, aptly, like an armor which would protect him in some moments that were too delicate to expose. Theodora watched. He saw and did not see. Now she was closer (AS 125).

Theodora has invented Moraïtis as her own image. The armor she imagines him to feel is the security of self-possesion. Theodora strives for this kind of connection and expansion, and in the form of Moraïtis and his brave performance she may get it: "she was herself the first few harsh notes that he struck out of his instrument against the tuning violins". This concept implies that Moraïtis is "playing" Theodora and this is a performance of sexual encounter. Certainly, this is how Theodora envisions it. From this point their experiences, artificial or real, are merged, "Now the music that he played was full of touching, simple shapes, but because of their simplicity and their purity they bordered on the dark and tragic, and were threatened with destruction by the violins"(AS 125). The music becomes an object. The notes are animated and transformed into versions of the self previously recognised. They grow dark, and moody, and become vulnerable to the imminent climax, "She was closer", "She was close". It is unclear where her emotions are guiding her but there are motifs of sensuality and the body. This scene feels like an expulsion – a rejection of social convention and an embrace of closeness to another person. Theodora knows something is coming for her, something that will remove her from her self and emotionally transcend her.

The climactic sense is achieved through allusions to body, to a physical climax. For one brief period, she has overcome her distances with her self and another person,

> She could read the music under his flesh. She was close. He could breathe into her mouth. He filled her mouth with long aching silences, between the deeper notes that reached down deep into her body. She felt the heavy eyelids on her eyes. The bones of her hands, folded like discreet fans on her dress, were no indication of exaltation or distress, as the music fought and struggled under a low roof, the air thick with cold ash, and sleep, and desolation (AS 125).

This episode appears to be happening unbeknown to the outside world - the experience is described as felt within. Moraïtis and Theodora meet most profoundly via this language of the body. The setting provides a theatrical space through which to act out such a dramatic release of feelings. Theodora's soul is enlivened here, "Theodora was removed. She had the strength of absence, Mrs. Goodman saw. This made her very strong" (AS 126). However, she now has come dangerously close to total abandonment of reality, thus preserving the distance she has wanted to overcome. What is devastating is that when she feels connected to someone, it is confined to her imagination.

Throughout part one of *The Aunt's Story* we are aware of the tone of anticipation. That something is in the air, in the landscape, in the visions, the animation and distortions:

"She had waited sometimes for something to happen". White uses subtlety to ensure readers understand that everything Theodora has been exploring is only vaguely apparent. It provides us with a sense of feeling and experience, rather than an exact replication of the experience itself and this evokes distance. The result is a series of moments and episodes in which Theodora *almost* breaks free of her isolation and finds a connection with something, or someone. This leaves the reader with a significant and profound understanding of her character. This episodic construction of Theodora is testament to her fragmentation – her propensity to live for moments of intensity. They are the grounds and making of her feelings. She is free then to explore those memories in the spaces she creates. It is a way of looking at the world, it is her vision. Her revelation in these moments shows that she has understood this and is content with it. These moments of reverie are at once her release and her homecoming, "her contentment filled the morning" (AS 127). Her vision is now released to the air. She has a determination to be led by it. Interactions that follow her encounter with Moraitis have less sting. We realise Theo has escaped the brutality of her peers in some way, "But Theodora was happy. The glare half closed her eyes. She wandered half alone in the tune her sun-thinned lips hummed, in the smell of the crowd, and the bellowing of bulls. There are times when the crowd and the sun make the individual solitude stronger and less assailable than bronze" (AS 133). As stated, Theodora is going through a change here. She is embracing the strength of her strangeness. Her propensities to linger half in reality half in imagination is made clearer, as she "half closed her eyes", demonstrating her internal vision. She is contented by a solitude that is now impenetrable, and more durable, than bronze.

For every exhilarating feeling experienced by Theodora, there is often the absence of another person to share it with, "It is not necessary to see things, said Moraïtis, if you know. It is like this, she said. And yet, for the pure abstract pleasure of knowing, there was a price paid" (AS 122/3). The price she is paying is loneliness and isolation. Theodora has isolated her self more completely than she intended. Now alone, she is forced to conjure up characters from her imagination. Variations of her multiple selves and projections of people she has met in part one of her story, will meet her in the Jardin Exotique. Their fate, and her own, will be entirely designed by her episodic memories.

Part Two: Jardin Exotique

This section of the thesis examines the style of White's expression in the space of the Jardin Exotique. I will determine the nature of Theodora's experience as her physical and psychological confinements blend. White plays out her memories via a cast of characters in the form of hotel guests; they become a metaphor for Theodora's multiple identities. This continuous and imaginative dramatisation opens up an unrestricted expressive state for Theodora, all of which is played out in the transitional space of the garden and the hotel. This section of the novel represents Theodora's movement *between* what is limited and limitlessness.

Theodora Goodman travels abroad after the death of her mother. She intends to explore her newfound freedom. She swiftly departs for Europe. However, her time at a hotel in Paris helps her to discover that her most important journey will be psychological. Because her younger years encouraged her to withdraw and made her heavily reliant on the confines of her mind, the majority of her time is spent at the Hotel du Midi. Theodora situates herself in the hotel garden, and her experience there takes place almost entirely within her imagination. She uses this imaginary experience to grapple with her former unresolved relationships. This experiment gives Theodora strength psychologically and, despite depictions of madness and suppression, actually forms the basis of a kind of liberation.

The setting of the garden and the hotel is not confined in the usual sense; it is a place of transition. Theodora's memories are distorted and her thoughts are depicted in a style that is expressionistic. Whilst confined to her mind Theodora's psyche develops a malleable quality, and allows her to move beyond convention. She meets a cast of theatrical characters and is able to challenge the problematic relationships of her past. Ironically, Theodora utilises illusion in order to confront her reality.

The epigraph to Part Two, a quote from Henry Miller, gives us clues not only about Theodora's altering state of mind, but also how we might be able to understand it: "All things, as we walk, splitting with us into a myriad iridescent fragments. The great fragmentation of maturity" (Miller 1969, p9). Part Two illustrates Theodora's *transition* into otherness. It takes place in the *Jardin Exotique.* As the middle section of the novel it serves as the in-between stage and is operates as the most unrestricted space of the novel whilst also being the most confined. White once referred to his experiences early in life as a "synthesis of living sensuality" (1998 p27). In this transitory context, character and sensation are the major aspects of his synthesis. White notes: "I chose fiction, or more likely it was chosen for me, as the means of introducing to a disbelieving audience the cast of contradictory characters of which I am composed" (1998, p20). This middle section explores White's notion of multiplicity and internality in great detail, illuminating for us the contradictory limits and limitlessness of the internal landscape.

Theodora's unusual psychological experience is due to her transitory state of in-betweenness. Coming to terms with her newfound freedom requires space and that space represents a possibility for new clarity. While she literally travels across borders, she inevitably deals with the figurative space – the uninhibited recesses of her mind. This exploration is undertaken in the form of journeying down passages and hallways of a hotel; being consumed by sensations offered up in an exotic garden; and meeting curious characters who are the patrons of various rooms. In one way, she is producing affect: "Affect can be understood as a gradient of bodily capacity […] that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility" (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, p2). All of these aspects provide metaphors for a journey of self-discovery. Assumed via the labyrinthine quality of the setting, which enables the fragmentation of Theodora's psyche, the compartmentalisation of her emotional history, and the discovery of multiple selves. "Often enough Theodora wondered whether it was time for her to go […] she waited for some act that was yet to be performed" (White 2008, p269). Theodora's task is to deal with her emotions in this controlled, expressive state, so that she may be able to move beyond the preoccupations of her past.

A Cast of Characters

Several characters are introduced in part two of *The Aunt's Story*. The curious aspect of their presence is whether they are real or imaginary. Are we seeing multiple people or the multiple identities of Theodora Goodman? Both scenarios are useful to Theodora's expression of emotion. They are useful as performers of her emotional sensibility. In order to make sense of her past and prepare for her future, she must have it re-enacted in her present. Having others to communicate with assists her understanding of the world, and seeing her self fragmented separates her emotions and gives clues to their origins. "Even though she had not yet seen them, Theodora could feel that the hotel was full of people, and she waited to touch their hands" (AS 160), Theodora's expectation suggests that she has a sensory intelligence that she trusts. Her emotional state remains at odds with illusion and reality, yet in that confusion she creates the ability to be in the moment. This is important because much emphasis is placed on momentary experience. Episodes, certainly significant interactions with people, have been the most valuable to her. And she greedily replays and redevelops them, in this performative state of mind.

We meet numerous characters: *Les demoiselles* Bloch, elderly twins who question the boundaries of their duplicated selves (AS 168); Wetherby, a poet-cum-remittance man, and the decadent Liesolotte, deserted by a husband who is perhaps a German count, both of whom live at each others mercy (Burrows, 1970, p89). Mrs. Rapallo, "an American adventuress […] of great ugliness, and great cunning" (AS 176).

> Her pomp was the pomp of cathedrals and of circuses. She was put together painfully, rashly, ritually, crimson over purple. Her eye glittered, but her breath was grey. Under her great hat, on which a bird had settled years before, spreading its meteoric tail in a landscape of pansies, mignonette, butterflies, and shells, her face shrieked with the inspired clowns (AS 177).

We are introduced to Madame Rapallo as someone who had "settled in ages ago". Her character must be appealing to Theodora, it forecasts her own eventual expedition to America and depicts it as a thrilling tale of survival. Mrs. Rapallo also projects Theodora's dramatic and theatrical propensities. As she is an older woman, strikingly unattractive and strong, she provides a theatrical version of Theodora. She illustrates the possibility of survival. The Mademoiselles Bloch describe her in turn "*C'est une femme douce, intelligente, spirituelle"* (This is a sweet woman, intelligent, spiritual). And furthermore: *"Et qui souffre* (and who suffers), she is most cruelly put upon" (AS 176). The gossipy opinions are quite sensationalised, but help provide a picture of Mrs. Rapallo as passionate, whose feelings are embellished.

Her descriptions read like costume and character directions in a script. The "pomp, pomp" is exclamatory. It bounds out in the splendor it describes. And to be as imposing as cathedrals, but as charismatic and eccentric as circuses is a marvelous spectacle. Of the greatest impact are her facial features, crimson and purple as though they are fit to bursting. Age is felt here as a painful, rash-like pressure. But just as the first two sentences have juxtaposed her features, so too does the third. "Her eye glittered, but her breath was grey". Invoking the innocence and youth portrayed by Katina, and her inevitable maturity in the murkiness of grey, "'Are we not all impostors?' she said. 'To a lesser or greater degree? General, were you never afraid?'" (AS 177). She is addressing another patron of the hotel, Alyosha Sergei Sokolnikov, an exiled Russian General who later appears to join Theodora in a state of otherworldliness. Mrs. Rapallo is exuberant and theatrical and seems to anticipate Theodora's most fearful emotions. Her acknowledgement of a shared artifice highlights a sense of performance. Mrs. Rapallo may be representing an aged Theodora.

Mrs. Rapallo represents maturity. She carries a nautilus with her like a trophy. This metaphoric object symbolises time and layers; a nautilus is shaped and formed over time. Therefore, it also spurs readers and Theodora into the past to question what has been the making of her. This raises further questions about the fragility of multiplicity. A layering of self as integral to the whole self must be examined. White works towards, through many motifs, the idea of multiplicity and fragmentation. "She was afraid that a piece of Mrs. Rapallo might break. The motion of her limbs was audible" (AS 211). And later, "The motion of Mrs. Rapallo herself, and the stiff music of her flowered hat, cast a slur on substance" (AS 216). Theodora begins to "doubt" the existence and survival of Mrs. Rapallo, and in turn her own survival. She fears a state of nothingness. She hopes not to disappear and lack substance, but to embrace all emotions and be educated by them; not to lose substance but to embrace abundance. By recognising her emotions she may yet procure a sense of control. Theodora wants to see chaos as order. Emotions are making her a creature of multiplicity, a woman leading a life that is fluid.

Another guest at the hotel, young Katina Pavlou, is abandoned by her parents and accompanied by an English maid. Katina is looking for life experience. She runs into the garden on the flurries of the breeze and reminds Theodora of a dove, "she thought of the one she held in her hands, both frail and throbbing with impulsion, waiting to burst skywards on release" (AS 161). Theodora's own impulses are referred to here. She is recalling her desire for freedom. In this case, she equates it with youth, though her own childhood was significantly restricted in its freedom and curiosity. Like the hands restraining the bird from flight, her eccentricity was often cruelly criticised or misunderstood. Theodora's interaction with the girl is similar, but separated: "Theodora Goodman had become a mirror, held to the girls experience. Their eyes were interchangeable, like two distant, unrelated lives mingling for a moment in sleep" (AS 162). On the one hand, this girl enters the scene in order to interact with Theodora and provide welcome company Theodora has been looking for. But also to allow Theodora to relate, reflect on and recognise her past; beginning with youth, with her childhood. Is Katina a young and imaginative Theodora? Is she her flighty, frivolous sister, Fanny? Is she a grown up Lou? "'I would like you,' said Katina, 'to be a kind of aunt'"(AS 163). A case could be made for all as Katina performs through the episodic narrative. The common thread to Katina's existence is her illustration of female innocence. "'Why odd?' Katina said. 'And why am I always a little girl'" (AS 163).

Katina Pavlou enters the narrative a girl, and leaves it a woman. She represents, most fundamentally I would argue, Theodora's escape from tangible, domestic circumstances into uncertainty: "Katina lifted her hands and the music fell, sure, and pure, and painfully transparent. So that any possible disaster of age and experience must drown in music. Disasters, the music implied, are reserved for observers, the drowning drown. Caught in this iciness of music, Theodora felt the breath stop in her throat. She went inside the little wintergarden and closed the door" (AS 274). Theodora's experience matches Katina's up to a point. But it is clear that Theodora's psychological journey will continue, and Katina Pavlou's emotional education has only taken her so far. Theodora rather nostalgically leaves her in a contented ignorance, childlike in description, maintaining an element of innocence Theodora once had.

The demoiselles Bloch represent duality and an increasing multiplicity. "It was a leisurely but melancholy ping-pong that the demoiselles Bloch had begun to play" (AS 167). They act out playful oppositions. But their existence is increasingly tempestuous. Their bodies are distorted grotesquely; their conversation is heard in hallways as though their tongues are rolling along the ground. Their relationship as twins is exaggerated: their thoughts and expressions intertwine like the wool with which they knit " Their consolation lay in worrying wool and cotton into deeper tangles. String reticules, safety-pinned about the level of the navel, spilled trailers of crochetwork or tatting. Under their flat hats cotton repeated itself in thick skeins, wound, and wound, and wound" (2008, p168). Not dissimilar to Theodora's experience, the twins express bodies in distress and the sensations of recurrence and multiplicity.

Multiplicity Performed

When the various characters come together in any scene an overwhelming display of sensation and multiplicity is produced. The characters and the space intertwine, thus suggesting multiple aspects of one mind: "so that there was no break in the continuity of being. The landscape was a state of interminable being, hope and despair devouring and disgorging endlessly, and the faces, whether Katina Pavlou, or Sokolnikov, or Mrs. Rapallo, or Wetherby, only slightly different aspects of the same state" (AS 207).

Alyosha Sergei Sokolnikov, is the ludicrous exiled Russian general whose influence is thoughtful but borders on the ridiculous. The General, unlike the failures of Frank, Huntly and even her Father, is openly willing to explore with Theodora the spaces of uncertainty. Theodora, because of her own hesitations or because of theirs, has never experienced a relationship with someone beyond the tolerable. He confirms his existence as part of the narrative of Theodora's imagination. Essentially he is joining her in this 'other' realm. Their connection is amplified: "This oneness made the moment of collision far more desperate, when Sokolnikov, gripping the rail, heaving like the sea, shouted, 'Look!'" (AS 210). Before we know what he has seen, we recognise that he is at once, like Theodora, gripping the hand rail, or holding on to the tangible, whilst heaving like the sea, maintaining a fluidity. Theodora, too, is capturing his vision: "Theodora peered out of their common emotion"(AS 210). How appropriate then that what he should be seeing is a bird-like Mrs. Rapallo, who is also experiencing the infinite atmosphere of the air. "They began to see, commanding the distance, a flashing, dashing, crimson cape" (AS 210). They watch Mrs. Rapallo and see in her image a bird in flight. Theodora likens Mrs. Rapallo's movements in the distance to that of a great bird.

> The same great nesting bird which had presided over lunch now flew through the evening, ruffling the pansies and the mignonette with its enormous wings. With beautiful glissando the crimson was advancing, flurrying, slashing, flirting with the wind. It moved outside the rigid Mrs. Rapallo. The cloak was leading a life of its own. Sometimes it toppled, not so much from weakness as from pleasure. To test the strength of the wind, to toy, to flatter (AS 211).

The rhythm of the movement emulates the turbulence the image inspires. The effect is overwhelming. So much so that they are drawn together, engrossed, mesmerised by this act of relinquishment to the air "They were all caught up, the three of them, in Mrs. Rapallo's cape" (AS 211). Theodora is submitting to the sensory abundance. When necessary, as in this moment, the characters play the part of multiplying her emotion instead of reducing it. Each character assists in a scene of euphoria by surrendering to its drama, composed by Theodora. How long it lasts is uncertain, but the lure of flight and freedom experienced in moments of emotional intensity is certainly emphasised.

An Unrestricted Expressive State

In his essay '"Jardin Exotique": The central phase of *The Aunt's Story*' J.F. Burrows evaluates character in part two as a "cumulative illustration of the flexibility of White's fugal mode" (1970, p92). This is significant because the "fugue" description can be misconstrued, not least because it implies a kind of madness. I argue that White takes his expression of this mode much further. As Burrows rightly says, it is flexible. A fugal mode connotes a dissociative state. Theodora however is never disconnected from her reality. She is in control of her imagination by trusting her emotions and the sensations in her environment. They are a guide to those elements of her personality that require examination and consideration. Theodora's dissociation is in her ability to separate parts of her self and to compartmentalise her emotions in order to deal with them more closely. She prefers this mode because it allows for momentous and episodic scenes to illuminate thought. In doing so she moves through her real experience into a more textured, more nuanced understanding of self. The self made multifaceted. Theodora embeds and imbues her reality with reflection and projection. Her reflections are embodied by real experiences and real surroundings. The projections that ensue include amalgamations of existing sensations and characters from her past. Understanding White's middle section as implementing a fugal mode is useful, but it is important to make the distinction between a disconnection from reality and a disconnect or separatism of the self. Theodora is experiencing the latter. The characters of the demoiselles Bloch and other dualities and multiplicities in the disjointed narrative all allude to that experience.

Many critics imply that while White does give madness and modernity a "positive value" (MacDonnell, 1994, p205), this text is ultimately a narrative of solipsism. Brian Kiernan suggests that the reader can "only accept or reject the novel"(1980, p32) based on Theodora's egocentric journey: "*The Aunt's Story* ends in solipsism" (1980, p32). Kiernan argues that if we were to "accept" her perception of life as inauthentic, her transcendence of that inauthenticity may amount to little more than a refusal of human connections (1980, p32). I would argue that Theodora's narrative is expressing an internal journey in *relation* to her outside world. Her ability to be affected and produce affects in her external world illustrates her connectedness: her sensual connection to her environment through a developed emotional intelligence.

The sensations she is attuned to are felt on a deeper level. As David Tacey argues "disintegration is, however, part of the process that leads to real life-disintegration, that is, of the false ego-bound self" (1978, p36). I intend to take that argument even further and suggest that in the openness and endlessness of her internal space, Theodora is moving beyond the self into otherness. It is not that she is rejecting or misunderstanding all that is outside her "self", but that she no longer exists as a "self". Theodora has fragmented any cohesive sense of self. She exists as multiple identities; she is composed, like her narrative, of multiple sensations. As explored by Gregg and Seigworth in *The Affect Theory Reader*: "Cast forward by its open-ended in-between-ness, affect is integral to a body's perpetual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations- until ultimately such firm distinction cease to matter" (2010, p3). Theodora's existence is reliant on this tension. She lives for moments of intensity and encounter.

Transitional Spaces: Hotels and Gardens

One of the ways in which affect is achieved in the *Jardin Exotique* is via the setting – and the way in which it enhances space and atmosphere, and therefore accommodates a place of multiple sensations. Roland Barthes notes: "hyperconsciousness of the affective minimum, of the microscopic fragment of emotion […] implies an extreme changeability of affective moments, a rapid modification, into shimmer" (as cited in Gregg and Seigworth, 2010 p10). This "shimmer" is a useful description for the sensory atmosphere of the garden. White ensures that place and body become dependent on one another. That a person's mood can affect the atmosphere and vice versa. Lehnert and Siewert, in their text *Spaces of Desire - Spaces of Transition*, argue that places can be superseded by more or less imaginary spaces, which are dependent on the – often ephemeral – use people make of them. They may for example use a sitting room as a theatre of a private drama

> or, on the contrary, a magical celebration. This transformation does not necessarily take place by the change of the material structure, but rather by a re-decoration, a change of perception or, more generally, in the re-organization of the emotional use-value of these spaces (2011, p8).

I suggest that Theodora utilises the labyrinthine qualities of the hotel and connects with the atmosphere of the garden, in order to theatricalise other versions of her self. As Theodora waits in the foyer of the Hôtel du Midi, she senses the garden's existence. She imagines it just out of sight, and smiles at the thought of it, "Somewhere at the back, unsuspected, without the assistance of the management's brochure, fantastic forms were aping the gestures of tree and flower. Theodora listened to the silence, to hear it sawn at by the teeth of the *jardin exotique*" (AS 154). The reader is alerted to otherworldliness. The garden is personified. It is described as not simply a garden, but an imitation of one. It is fantastical, not actual. Or at least that is Theodora's sense of it. Without having entered it, Theodora senses the garden's presence. She accesses this garden on another level. Theodora operates via that which is un-heard. Theodora can "listen to silences". If she is in tune with this alternate sound, and then imagines an animated garden figuratively infiltrating that silence, she is developing illusions of an acute kind.

This garden is more than a garden, it begins to evolve. Like the "walking" of the opening quote, a progression is alluded to: Theodora's journey into a definitive 'otherness'. In all of its naturalism, there is something uncanny. Theodora, whilst familiarising herself with it, is actually drawn in by it. This is perhaps because it is so tempting for Theodora to escape within it. She is captivated by its allure. But she cultivates it that way. It is a space imagined and designed to seduce her.

This garden is transformative. Its power lies in its ability to animate and manipulate. The atmosphere entices Theodora and she is able to blend into it. Her characteristics are actually mimicked by the garden and vice versa. "In the *jardin exotique*, in spite of its impervious forms, of sword, and bulb, and the scarlet sucking mouths, time continued to disintegrate into a painful, personal music, of which the themes were intertwined" (AS 154). The garden has the same angular distortion as Theodora's emotions - when it is described via the analogy of bodily disfigurement, the exertion and distress is emphasised. Theodora's presence involves a focus on the body. Emphasising the natural, Theodora is attuned to the existence of teeth, armpits, hair and other physicalities. There is a focus on the distortions of the body and body imagery, emblematic of the features of expressionism. To show the body in distress and disfigurement is to portray a disturbed soul. It also signifies primal emotion, emotions that affect our primitive consciousness. Now in the garden, it's gnawing teeth and her sensuality are exposed and most importantly, made compatible, "Theodora put up her hand to disentangle the big velvety moth whose feet had caught in her hair" (AS 204). Her emotions have developed as intertwined with sensation and body. There are numerous illusory qualities emerging in part II, and their interplay adds to the ambiance.

> Walking slowly, in her large and unfashionable hat, she began to be afraid she had returned to where she had begun, the paths of the garden were the same labyrinth, the cactus limbs the same aching stone. Only in the *jardin exotique*, because silence had been intensified, and extraneous objects considerably reduced, thoughts would fall more loudly, and the soul, left with little to hide behind, must forsake its queer opaque manner of life and come out into the open (AS 159).

Significantly, the line that follows reads: "If, of course, the soul ventured in". This is crucial, because it implies that in order for the garden to exhibit its power, Theodora must imagine herself into it. Her infiltration, embrace and indulgence of the garden's transformative possibilities enable its influence. The garden and Theodora become interchangeable.

The Hôtel du Midi represents a transitory space. Theodora's stay there is temporary, enhancing the fluidity of her existence. White is particularly interested in the labyrinthine qualities of the hotel. It holds hallways, compartments, walls, mirrors, and windows. "Paradigmatic for the mélange of space and emotion in modern texts are spaces of transition, sometimes bound to the happiness of freedom, sometimes to indifference, but often to a deeply-grounded existential uncertainty, anxiety or solitude" (Lehnert and Siewert 2011, p8). Theodora is contained and restricted by the hotel. However, as the story progresses we notice that the structure of the hotel is becoming dilapidated. It is in the early stages of disintegration.

What stands between Theodora and the other side of these walls, outside the windows, the reflections in the mirror, is about to dissolve; "walls yawned" (AS 162), "Sleep stretched before the thin grey passages of the Hôtel du Midi, or rounded them into grottoes, of which the walls lapped elastically. Skin is after all no protection from communicating bedrooms" (AS 285). Theodora's emotional exploration merges with the hotel's transitory environment and labyrinthine qualities. As the walls of the hotel assume elasticity, Theodora's own skin feels insufficient for protecting her from the others, or possibly her self, "the act of darkness demolished personality" (AS 225), and so she experiences cynicism and sinister moods in the hotel. Her emotions are embodied in this place: "in the Hôtel du Midi the night slowly solidified" (AS 222).

While the hotel walls doze, so too do the patrons occupying the various rooms, "people were apparently reviving themselves, shaking off dreams, sprinkling their faces with water, breaking wind, and putting back their teeth" (AS 192). This is an unromantic picture of the patrons and their private habits. The image is humanising. The sensations are striking in their simplicity and honesty. The reader feels not intrusive, but close to the people in these quarters. Their behaviours are recognisable yet underwhelming. And have a natural quality like that of the garden. The fact that Theodora senses them in the passages and hallways of the hotel strengthens the notion that the hotel and garden are a metaphor for the recesses of her mind. If so, then the characters within are characters of her own making.

In the final moments of part II, as she boards a train to an unknown place, Theodora says: "I may even return to Abyssinia,' (AS 294). The readers are left with a contradictory term. Abyssinia recalls for Theo memories of Meröe. But Abyssinia's place in that memory is another memory: that of her father's. He relates that there is another Meröe, in Abyssinia. Her flirtation with the idea of "returning" there is significant. That she always felt she belonged to this otherness, this other version. And in fact, rather than returning her to the *idea* of Abyssinia, she would be travelling much further away from the true memory. For her understanding of Abyssinia is wholly connected to her upbringing in the Australian Meröe and her fleeting conversations about another land with her Father. Abyssinia is an appropriate place to imagine returning to, however, as it does evoke the notion of an abyss. Conjuring up images of an unending burnt terrain, of great space and depth. Theodora is looking to discover an infinite space. As her point of reference is another reference, the multiplicity of such a recollection is boundless. Unlike the objectification of the memory of her mother, this memory involving her father is more ambiguous, like his character. And this uncertainty would appeal to Theodora much more in terms of a search for identity and modes of existence.

> The forms of the *jardin exotique* remained stiff and still, though on one edge, where they had pressed against the side of the Hôtel du Midi, they were black and withered. Their zinc had run into a fresh hatefulness. 'But I shall go,' Theodora said, indifferent to any pricking pressure, any dictatorship of the *jardin exotique* (AS 294).

Finally, she has taken control of the primal emotions that seemed set to overwhelm her. Her journey continues with a new strength - not of escapism, but now having dealt with her emotions in this expressive, transitory state, she may be able to move beyond the preoccupations of her past. That being said, she must now come out into the open and confront her reality. What will await her when she comes out of this confinement and has to face the world again?

Part Three: Holstius

This final section examines *The Aunt's Story's* denouement. The aim is to determine the change in Theodora's disposition and how White expresses her newfound understanding and the possible liberation and contentment such knowledge leads to. The third part of the novel, 'Holstius', opens onto the cornfields of America. Despite facing the open spaces of the fields, Theodora inevitably moves back towards the domestic and the internal. She heads towards a small house and imagines its furnishings and her future. She also meets the peculiar character, Holstius. Her conversation with Holstius (his identity is uncertain) allows for a reconciliation of reality and illusion.

It is unsurprising that Theodora should retreat back to the familiarity of the domestic. What is surprising is how she imagines and alters a conventional domestic scene and what comfort this provides. It is too simple to assert that Theodora is reduced to madness. Theodora's "madness" suggests liberation from what would almost certainly have been oppressive and restrictive circumstances. Women are often reduced to this fate in literature but Theodora's journey is different because it has been one that has taught her to live an alternative existence. She does return to conventional society but in her case this results in her confinement to a madhouse. Therefore, reality and illusion for Theodora simply amount to two different kinds of confinement. Illusion is her only option for liberation in this novel, and White illustrates that to attempt such an existence is a sublime, but devastating feat. Theodora is to end her journey in a bare-boned house, liberated but entirely alone.

Isolation and Confinement

At the beginning of Part Three, Theodora has been sitting on a train, heading towards a vaguely suggested Abyssinia. Abyssinia is a place remembered by her as an 'other' to her childhood home Meroë and made distinctly enticing by her Father's stories of Abyssinia's 'black, volcanic hills'. Her feelings at this time are resolved towards otherness. She longs for the ambiguous with the constant intention to glimpse something that would signify her liberation from confinement. "Theodora heard the difference between doing and being" (AS 298). Her imagination takes full flight when *combined* with the influence of her environment.

> All through the middle of America there was a trumpeting of corn. It's full, yellow, tremendous notes pressed close to the swelling sky. There were whole acres of time in which the yellow corn blared as if for a judgement. It had taken up and swallowed all other themes, whether belting iron, or subtler, insinuating steel, or the frail human reed. Inside the movement of corn the train complained. The train complained of the frustration of distance, that resists, that resists. Distance trumpeted with corn (AS 297).

This paragraph evokes feelings of anxiety and alienation. Kierkegaard considers that "anxiety has no concrete object, and cannot be isolated to a certain situation. It is nevertheless perceived as an all-embracing, existential feeling" (Lehnert and Siewert, 2011 p80). Theodora's anxiety comes from her feeling somewhat at odds with her newfound freedom. "The idea of freedom usually seen as a positive value […] is a great challenge because it confronts mankind with nothingness" (2011 p80). This applies to both a literal and figurative freedom, "if the object is nothingness, then it is difficult to conceive or describe this emotion – this impossibility of conceiving or describing a nonetheless omnipresent feeling of fear and agitation or inquietude" (2011 p80). Theodora's anxiety develops in her a keener understanding of reality. These omnipresent feelings are detectable in the landscape. Her agitation is transformed and becomes the openness reverberating across the cornfields. The distance is established as unending. On that kind of terrain, emotion can be amplified. The overwhelming nature of distance and time "swallowed up all other themes". The freedom and expressivity of this grand space is formidable, it has the ability to influence, to "resist". Theodora is intoxicated by the excessiveness, and her intoxication is recognisable inwardly. We know this because her personal feelings are reflected in the surrounding, "trumpeting", abundant cornfields.

And she is now the product of an internal world. "In spite of outer appearances, Theodora Goodman suggested that she had retreated into her own distance and did not intend to come out" (AS 297).

"Immensity is within ourselves" (1994 p184), Gaston Bachelard writes in his text *The Poetics of Space*, a comment on interiority that is useful for the analysis of Theodora. It is something she has become acutely aware of in this final part of the novel. Bachelard notes, "in analyzing images of immensity, we should realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination" (1994 p184). He continues: "This being the case, in this meditation, we are not 'cast into the world', since we open the world, as it were, by transcending the world seen as it is, or as it was, before we started daydreaming. We become aware of grandeur. We then return to the natural activity of our magnifying being" (1994 p184). It is fitting that when Theodora feels at her most prolific, the scene opens out onto an abundant cornfield somewhere in America. Theodora's habitual 'yellowness' – a common insult directed to her by her Mother for her sallow appearance – is transmogrified into a brilliant landscape, where time is indeterminate and the distance is impressively vast. This setting recognises the mutual relationship between Theodora's internal world and that of her outside world.

Theodora has recognised a similar freedom within herself. But here, situated in the cornfields, looking at her 'practical' handbag, she is suddenly forced to consider herself externally, not inwardly. She considers various items within her bag: "amongst the startling objects that people find in such receptacles" (AS 307). She sounds bewildered by such practicality. The items are sensory because they make noise; they conjure up images of travel; they produce taste and smell: there is a "sticky lozenge", "eau de cologne" and the stubs of train tickets. They are an extension of Theodora who in this moment becomes an object herself. And then in an act of "frivolity" she tears up the train tickets, "there was also, she saw, the strips and sheaves of tickets, railroad and steamship, which Theodora Goodman had bought in New York for the purpose of prolonging herself through many fresh phases of what was accepted as Theodora Goodman" (AS 307). The tickets represent the means for prolonging herself through these different phases. By this I mean, Theodora appears to have given up the idea of an essential existence. By tearing them up she is effectively tearing up her self, scattering any notion of this kind of actuality. She is now accepting her self as disintegrated; as not one

Theodora Goodman, but many. She has already traveled through "fresh phases", but now this means moving beyond the limits of experiencing those phases via an ordinary existence. She commits herself to fragmentation here. This is suggested too because she destroys her link to her old mode of transportation, to train travel. This is a point of no return. When the paper scatters it produces the ability to upset the creatures of the undergrowth, and so again we are drawn back into the landscape through objects, "even the undergrowth, she reflected, rejects the acts of honesty. But she personally was gladder" (AS 308). This transition is worth our attention as it describes the collision of illusion and reality in direct relation to objectivity. Henri Lefebvre in his book *The Production of Space* writes: "Here and there, in every society, absolute space assumes meanings addressed not to the intellect but to the body, meanings conveyed by threats, by sanctions, by a continual putting-to-the-test of the emotions. This space is 'lived' rather than conceived, and it is a representational space rather than a representation of space; no sooner is it conceptualized than its significance wanes and vanishes" (Lefebvre, 1991 p235). Theodora considers objects and her self as an object, and then animates and distorts the objective into the subjective. She uses the animation of object to enliven her other, more sensory existence.

Feminine symbols become sublime: an unconventional "play at houses"

Theodora finds her illusions are colliding with reality. Fittingly, she is often calmed by the certainty and rightness of furniture. What she can appreciate is that there is a permanency to furniture. This solidity is needed in Part Three when she is exploring the bare house on the hill, "she was ashamed of the inadequacy of the intermediate furniture [...] With some love she rearranged a chair and table which at least were the essential of chair and table" (AS 322). Her shame in finding basic furniture pieces in this halfway house is that they have actually been reduced to their object in a house that is not lived in. As she arranges them 'with some love', she brings them back to their essentialness and is able once again to take comfort in that certainty. It is via that certainty that Theodora feels at ease to contemplate the rightness of things and the surprising interactions she is having with them.

As in previous chapters, furniture and domestic settings are the major catalyst for such considerations of the object or the objective. Earlier in this thesis I contended that Theodora escapes her domesticity and is able to move into the sublime. This is where that transition becomes most apparent - in episodes where objects are questioned, embedded with feeling, and animated by that emotion. She is able to consider her world in a way that hybridizes the subjective and the objective, "sometimes, against the full golden theme of corn and the whiter pizzicato of the telephone wires there was a counterpoint of houses" (AS 302). Theodora works as a transmitter, sensitive to all the varying messages and ultimately becomes more surprised by her physical self. As she walks on after the cornfields she ponders "she could smell the expanding odour of her own body, which was no longer the sour, mean smell of the human body in enclosed spaces, but the unashamed flesh on which dust and sun have lain" (AS 307). She is attuned to the relationship between houses and the living. She makes the connection, "there were the single notes of houses, that gathered into gravely structural phases [...] All the square faces of the wooden houses, as they came, overflowed with solemnity, that was a solemnity of living, a passage of days" (AS 302). Theodora is alert to both the gravity of the house, and the role it plays in lives that are far less wooden and square. White's sentence makes the houses not situated, but more like musical notes. They become an image of momentum, of continuity and time passing. So the gravity Theodora recognises in their image is transformed into a consideration of the gravity of life. The magnitude of 'living' for her is endless, made up of an endless "passage of days".

As Theodora meanders through an unspecified town, she projects resilience in her search for resolve: "There were now the two coiled themes. There was the flowing corn song, and the deliberate accompaniment of houses, which did not impede, however structural, because it was part of the same integrity of purpose and of being" (AS 302). The musical analogy is a symbol for synthesis and a trigger into alterity, as she similarly discovered in her encounter with Moraitis. But most significantly, White suggests that Theodora's imaginative talents originate from her time spent at home, "great dreamers profess intimacy with the world, they learned this intimacy, however, meditating on the house" (Bachelard, 1994 p66). The literal, structural home is a part of her understanding of self. Memories of 'roselight' and 'pine trees' and 'white air' harbour emotional memories that continually affect Theodora. "Theodora could search her own purpose, her own contentment. I am going home, she said. It had a lovely abstraction to which she tried to fit the act" (AS 302). 'Going home' in the typical sense is what she now considers abstract. Her "home" is defined by sensation and affect and inner space. She flirts with the idea of playing house, but that *play* is the contrivance; the unrealistic existence summed up in furniture and cotton quilts. The home is steadying but only momentarily, before she drifts off into another realm of being. "In the house above the disintegrating world, light and silence ate into the hard, resisting barriers of reason, hinting at some ultimate moment of clear vision" (AS 302). She is in emotional flux. Objectivity has been reversed, ideas and considerations of the object are now a part of Theodora. In this way, the objects in her surroundings are not barriers and they do not restrict her. Instead they affect her and are able to absorb affect. In order to illustrate this, to show this relationship, White juxtaposes space with objects, and at the center of it all is the stoic body of Theodora.

Theodora's clothes are particularly conspicuous in Part Three. It is similarly a collection of things from a past life. She was harassed about her clothes as a young woman by her Mother, and considered deliberately eccentric: "the daughter's face was shadow under her large and timeless hat. Her clothes were quiescent and formalized as stone" (AS 111). Her garments of a dark dress and large hat symbolise stoicism and humility – but they are also a signifier of retreat, withdrawal and internality. The depiction of shadow, colourlessness and stillness is a cover for her vibrant imagination and provides the perfect refuge from which to observe her surroundings in solitude.

Theodora's sensual intelligence is private and unnoticed by the majority. She sees the world differently and as the epigraph implies, this may be considered madness. But it is under the cover of the hat that Theodora can maintain and bear her unusual existence. She is told it is better to do so, to keep "it" under her hat. "So Theodora Goodman took her hat and put it on her head, as it was suggested she should do. Her face was long and yellow under the great black hat. The hat sat straight, but the doubtful rose trembled and glittered, leading a life of it's own" (AS 336). Interestingly, this final passage, alludes not to *Theodora* leading a life of her own, but the rose - the final line is attributed to "the doubtful rose", the sensory object of desire, passion and experience. It is the sensory that is directing existence now. "Theodora's state of wholeness is symbolised at the end of the novel by the black rose upon her hat, the rose being a mandalic symbol of the union of opposites. It is often the case with White that as an individual approaches the complete integration of soul and consciousness a uniting symbol will spontaneously arise from the soul to express their oneness" (Tacey, 1978 p39). The rose is "doubtful" only in a natural understanding that nothing is finite. Theodora is present, though confined, under her hat "her face was long and yellow". She is in a state of contentment: aware of the unknown – for what is "known" is only ever alluded to and always ambiguous. As Holstius suggests "if we know better, we must keep it under our hats" (AS 333).

This final reference to practicality is used to alert the reader to the connection between logic and sensation. 'Doubt' is important because the seed of doubt presses you to explore further and to doubt the absolute reason of things. A handbag is no longer a useful carryall but a collection of triggers to deeper emotions. A hat can produce disguises and harbour secrets. The rose perched atop the hat is a symbol of passion and a badge of otherness. That the rose should tremble and glitter adds to the production and image of sensation. The character escapes through the shimmers of sensation, this affect suggests a liberated Theodora Goodman.

Lou: Aunt and niece collide by intuition and circumstance

As Theodora remembers a letter she has written to her sister Fanny Parrott, and tries to "remember some population of her own" (AS 298), White shifts the narrative back to the Parrott household. Lou Parrott as a result of this letter is also thinking of Theodora. They meet across time. Their connection is one of impermanence and mutual character. Lou has the same attraction to openness as Theodora, and searches for a place in her surroundings, "she walked through the stiff landscape, carrying her cold and awkward hands" (AS 302). Lou's synchronized action is emblematic of Theodora's projected emotions. There are a few reasons why this is significant at this part of the story. Reference to her niece reinstates Theodora's role as 'the Aunt'. In part one of the novel when we meet Lou, Theodora speaks of her love for her niece "It was Lou's, whose eyes could read the silence, and whose thin, yellow face was sometimes quick as conscience and as clear as mirrors" (AS 5). She recognises in Lou what she sees in her self. "She was like some dark secret place in one's own body" (AS 5). It is an extraordinary link to make. Not simply a connection of like-mindedness or familial similarity, but a bodily match. Lou embodies Theodora's most secret desires. Lou's sensibilities are not just the equivalent of Theodora's, instead here she is described as being a 'place', as though this person is in effect a fragment of Theodora's soul. This is not unlike the projections we see in Part Two: characters that mirror Theodora.

What we have learnt about Theodora throughout, and in particular, what we sense she is feeling on the train, has encouraged this acknowledgement of Lou. Theo feels anxious about her journey, about where it might take her. In this case, it will be an existential journey that makes her reflect on her past, where her character as the 'great institution' of The Aunt is synonymous with madness and spinsterhood. Lou's conversation with her parents shows both a kinship with Theo's sensibilities and a hint at the domestic, lackluster expectations of Theo's past. "'Mother', said Lou, 'Why is Aunt Theo mad?'"(AS 301). Even when she asks this her thoughts have drifted to a world outside of her own homely setting "Outside the window the world had not yet thawed. Lou waited for the aching shapes of winter to dissolve into a more familiar fence and tree. Cutting toast, her hands were still miserable from Brahms"(AS 301). There are some recognisable motifs here, her pinpointing homely structures, fences and trees, as though they mean something definitive. Whereas the misty atmosphere outside lends itself to a more moody, ambiguous feeling, uninhibitedly. The frost – aptly juxtaposed to the frosty tension in the kitchen – is so palpable it makes those once familiar shapes of the landscape "ache". Lou is apparently attuned to this and she is aware that it is something shapely, something recognisable in her "cardboard Aunt, Aunt Theodora Goodman, who was both kindness and darkness" (AS 302).

The impression is that Lou is experiencing the same anxiety and inquietude as Theodora at this moment, "she was afraid and sad, because there was some great intolerable pressure from which it is not possible to escape" (AS 302). Lou senses her Aunt's emotion across time and space. The connection intensified when Lou "touched the sundial, on which the time had remained frozen" (AS 302). This suggests that the nature of their connection is both simultaneous, and also of some other time. Time is uncertain, and the implication is that Theodora is keeping to a parallel but alternate time, an other existence. This movement beyond an 'intolerable pressure' is further established because in this section, both Theodora and Lou "look back over their shoulders" and move ahead or forward. Lou is situated at the sundial when she "looked back over her shoulder, and ran" (AS 302). Moments later, Theodora "looked back once to see […] before she took the road that opened" (AS 306). Both actions are suggestive of moving towards the uninhibited.

The House on the Hill

An air of desertion determines Theodora's movement across America. Sauntering through this town, Theodora comes across the home of The Johnsons. This is an interesting reversal of the regular passers-by she saw as a young girl at Meroë. Simon During notes that in White's novels: "travellers and passersby can break open [restricted] identities. Sometimes such people without houses are figured as prophetic and liberated" (1996, p60). Importantly, those figures are always independent men. When Theodora passes by the Johnson's home she is seen not as leading a nomadic lifestyle, but as mad. Theodora's liberation exists only in an obscure and imagined alterity, and one that requires her to be situated in a house, or to return to a house. In part one, The Man who was Given his Dinner warns her, "put [life] in a house and it stops, it stands still" (AS 44). But in her case "houses" are transformative spaces, not limiting ones. Theodora moves what is domestic into something sublime. In this final part of the novel, this is seen first in the home of The Johnsons – which During reminds us: as a family house it congeals life, but also jumbles identity (1996, p61).

Theodora does not abide real time, as is evident when the marble clock in the Johnson's living room perturbs her: "Why […] is this world which is so tangible in appearance so difficult to hold? Because she herself […] could not answer for the substance of the clock" (AS 318). This serves as the beginning of an intimate interaction with Zack. Zack is the young child of the Johnson family, who condescend to relieve Theodora from what they consider to be the escapade of a woman who has taken leave of her senses. To the ignorance of his parents however, Zack reciprocates Theodora's sensibilities. "Zack came and looked at her. Now he was very close" (AS 319). As with Lou, this suggests more than the boy being physically close. It is an allusion to closeness of thought. The intimacy and reciprocity affects their bodies, "she was close to his fringed eyes, which had approached, till his forehead touched hers, and she could feel the soft questioning of the lashes of his eyes" (AS 319). Like all moments of reciprocity and mutuality in this novel, the intensity builds and is resisted until fully embraced. Like the vast and profuse corn fields glimpsed at through the glass window of her train carriage, Theodora can see and know the enticing expansiveness, be thrilled by it and still recognise alienation. She warns, "Oh Zack,' she said, 'you must not make it difficult'"(AS 319). For now, they are deeply connected, "because he had rubbed his cheek against her cheek. Their blood flowed together. Her desperate words, ordinarily dry, had grown quite suddenly fleshy and ripe. Their locked hands lay in solid silence"(AS 319). It is significant that they are so instinctively drawn to one another. The connection has the ability to control their blood flow and to unify them in body. Even her voice becomes "fleshy and ripe". Most importantly the fleeting moment alludes to a grand experience. Their mutual need is reiterated in their common blood-beat, a physical measure of time in relation to an internal time shift – or time being indeterminate – and finally an ability to solidify silence. As "he hung his dark head", Zack makes the expected break in this experience. Theodora's relationship with a kindred spirit ends in distance as though it is inevitable. She removes herself from the house, away from a place where, "she might not be able to make the necessary answers" (AS 319). She has relished those moments of intensity. Her appreciation is noted in her continuing attempts to live by and for those moments. Now especially, there are suggestions that it is an existence that she may want to live fully. Zack, a younger person only experiencing this for the first time, does not yet appreciate the significance.

Disintegration and impermanence are most evident when, removing herself from the care of The Johnsons, she discovers and occupies the house on the hill. This is a "blank house" (AS 320). Perhaps the house, like the Hôtel du Midi, represents a bridge, a space in-between. In may be a metaphor for her place in the world. It emulates the many fluctuations in her journey, "she had been infused with a warmth of love that was most thinly separated from expectations of sorrow" (AS 322). The house represents the inner-life. And also, as it is blank, it represents a fresh phase, and new existence, "take into account our need for retreat and expansion, for simplicity and magnificence. For here we are experience a rhythmanalysis of the function of inhabiting […] However spacious, it must be a cottage, a dove-cote, a nest, a chrysalis" (Bachelard, 1994 p65). In this final episode we experience the internal and external extremes of Theodora's character, "her feet led deliberately. She went towards the house. It was a thin house. With elongated windows, like a lantern" (AS 320). The vision of the house is distorted. The house is considered as stretched and pulled. As such it maintains a tension. The tension is within the house but also between itself as object and Theodora's relationship to it. Bachelard comments on the recluse in domestic spaces, "And what an image of concentrated being we are given with this house that "clings" to it's inhabitant and becomes the cell of a body with its walls close together. The refuge shrinks in size. And with its protective qualities increased, it grows outwardly stronger. From having been a refuge, it has become a redoubt. The thatched cottage becomes a fortified castle for the recluse, who must learn to conquer fear within its walls" (1994 p46). As is the case for Bachelard's recluse, the house becomes a refuge for Theodora. The house on the hill is equated with a lantern, containing and providing brightness. For Theodora it is a light she is guided by.

"But the windows had also the blank look of the windows of deserted houses. Because there is nothing inside, they do not reflect. The glass coats up with dust" (AS 320). Theodora uses this house in order to imbue the space with sensation and memory. The house alludes to a domestic setting that made so much sense to everyone in her life as a child, but slowly confounded Theodora. Theodora's composed reflections of domesticity are in the vein of what Bachelard describes as dissolved past: "Bit by bit the house that was lost in the mists of time will appear out of the shadow. We do nothing to reorganize it; with intimacy it recovers its entity, in the mellowness and imprecision of the inner life. It is as though something fluid had collected our memories and we ourselves were dissolved in this fluid of the past" (1994 p57).

Whilst the main room of the house provides a solidity and the glass is dusty and does not reflect, the upper level provides fluidity and looks out onto the "disintegrating world", "resisting barriers of reason, hinting at some ultimate moment of clear vision" (AS 322). Consider here Bachelard's discussion on phenomenology: "Phenomenology of the imagination cannot be content with a reduction which would make the image a subordinate means of expression: it demands, on the contrary, that images be lived directly, that they be taken as sudden events in life. When the image is new, the world is new" (1994, 47). For Theodora, the entry into the abandoned house is an opportunity to live out her alternate reality. Her vision is adapted from the natural order of things, and transcends into a multiplicity of meaning:

> She walked up the narrow, railed stairs to the upper part. There was the same space of emptiness, but the larger windows gave more light, the windows that she threw open now, and there the valleys flowed. In this light the valleys did flow (AS 321).

Holstius

Theodora lights a fire that will invite the figure of a man into the room. It is the figure of Holstius. The fire is lit from some essential objects in this practical house and from her practical handbag: sticks and matches, "she made the little tongue of fire that would soon consume a great deal of doubt" (AS 322). Even as she manages this space with an organised, domestic intention, elements of sensuality infiltrate that intent. The fire is tongued. It has the ability to consume, to devour Theodora's doubts and anxieties about her existence. And as such, Holstius appears, or is conjured by that ignited mood. The fire symbolises light, knowledge and destruction.

> Fire is the destroyer of the house but is also found within as an aid to its functioning as a place of social and personal organization, and serves, in the fireplace (Latin *focus),* as the center of this organization; it is of the outside but central to the house. The narrative landscape of the house and the outsider may also include a third house, a mid-way point and symbolic synthesis of the house of the hero and the house of the outsider, what Virginia Woolf in *The Waves* calls "the house which contains all" (Campbell, 2012 p3).

In the very hearth of this home, Theodora produces a fire, which then produces the projection of Holstius. Fire has been used before in this way, in particular I am thinking of the demise of Mrs. Rapallo in Part Two. Mrs. Rapallo's willful incineration asserted a contented knowledge of a non-existence: an existence elsewhere. Here in Part Three again the fire warms Theodora, lights up her conflict between illusion and reality, "She sat meekly on her heels beside the fire, which had grown, it had begun to complicate" (White, 2008 p322). It is this heat, this sensation that produces Holstius. He is necessary for her to further her understanding of her existence, "the little fire possessed the room of the house. It recreated the faces of Theodora Goodman and the man. She sensed her own, but she saw the face of the man, whose skin was ruddy fire" (AS 323). There are clues to his conjuring. The most obvious is that he is a projected part of Theodora Goodman. As she "senses" her own face she can see his. This suggests he is a reflection of her self. We know this because the fire recreates both of their faces. The image the firelight projects onto their faces connect and distorts them. The firelight "recreates" them. They are caught up in the flickers of light the fire projects. Furthermore, Holstius takes on some of the qualities of the fire, as though he is made up fire and sticks, "My name is Holstius,' he said, watching the fiery particles of his pipe, which he had lit with a stick" (AS 323). And thus he can now exist and communicate as both apart from her and a part of her. They are connected by her confusion and the fire that this ignites.

It is not that we simply move through emotions but that we can see them so fine-tuned, so fragmented, and almost slowed down for our benefit. We can recognise each emotion as it shifts and blends from one to the next. This actually creates a living sensuality that captures Theodora's state of mind. She is beginning to reconcile her multiple selves by actually drawing them together and seeing their fractal-like nature.

The curious projection of Holstius in the final scenes of the novel is no doubt an amalgamation of Theodora's past male companions. He emulates the quiet wisdom of her Father, the worldliness of the Syrian peddler, and the desirable knowledge of The Man Who Was Given His Dinner and the magnetism of Moriatis. Holstius represents her desire to comprehend her current state of emotional conflict. His presence makes her re-live the combatant feelings of closeness and detachment she has had with men all her life, "he was both detached and close. Because, although he spoke in abstractions these answered the depths of her being. And what made these sensations of love and sorrow more poignant, actual, wonderful, was that she could have touched the body of Holstius" (AS 324). David Tacey comes closest to this way of thinking about White's work in his essay '"It's Happening Inside": The Individual and Changing Consciousness in White's Fiction': "What we see as reality – the phenomenal world of things and everything that we can see or touch – White sees as partial, only a fragment of what is" (1978, p34). What Tacey is considering is that initial sensations, touch and vision for example, are only the beginning, only one half of the affect. Even more deeply layered than this: the "depths of her being" are actually in communication with a being existent in her mind. Theodora feels she "could have touched the body of Holstius". A projection of multiple characters forms in the shape of Holstius: he is a figure forged from her memories or experiences. After which she recalls the death of her father, the disappearing figures from the *jardin exotique*, and then expects and fears the decay of Holstius. She fears the loss of even momentary companionship. She desires closeness, and yet expects loss to follow and finds the conflict "unbearable". Holstius explains, "you are torn in two" (AS 324). Alluding to her consistent battle between closeness and detachment, Holstius explains that for Theodora expecting one means to expect the other. "I expect you to accept the two irreconcilable halves" (AS 325).

> 'You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow,' Holstius said. 'Or flesh and marble, or illusion and reality, or life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman, you

> must accept. And you have already found that one constantly deludes the other into taking fresh shapes, so that there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality. Each of your several lives is evidence of this' (AS 325).

What Holstius describes is closely linked to theories of sensation and affect, where our existence is fragmented. Each sensation ensures a further sensation and then takes "fresh shapes". Tacey argues, "It is not always the case […] that this inner-crisis leads to disintegration and death – more often the reverse is true: it is a creative phenomenon leading to transformation and life" (Tacey, 1978, p.36). This alludes to White's living sensuality, a Being-in-the-World, "At one and the same time I *become* in the sensation and something happens *through* the sensation, one through the other, or in the other" (Maldiney as cited in Deleuze, 2003, p35). This is suggestive of an existence of otherness. An assured existence in an 'other' state, a sensory state.

For me, the final passages of this novel are devastating but necessary. To live the life that as a woman she would be bound to live confines her sensibilities. It must be the case that she exists on another level. 'The spinster, the Aunt' is too serious and stifling and limiting a title to live by. She has outgrown such titles. She escapes as best she can – the only way she has learned how – like the "doubtful rose, that trembled and glittered, leading a life of its own" (AS 336).

Chapter Two: Laura Trevelyan

In *Voss* (1959)*,* White uses gender, circumstance, relationships, space, and narrative to develop the unconventional female character, Laura Trevelyan. *Voss* tells the story of German explorer Johann Ulrich Voss and his expedition into the Australian desert. Before Voss departs he meets his benefactor's niece, Laura Trevelyan, and the two form an unusual alliance. Their relationship is one of dynamic and imaginary proportions, affording them a way to communicate across the desert. Laura being unable to physically join Voss on his expedition attempts to join him imaginatively on what he sees as his journey to self-discovery.

Part One: Gender

The protagonists in White's *Voss* (1959) abandon conventional gender distinctions. White merges the identities of Laura Trevelyan and Johann Ulrich Voss so that they become integral to one another. They represent a kind of identity synthesis.

White explains his theories of gender in his autobiography *Flaws in the Glass* (1981)*:* "as I see it, the little that is subtle in the Australian character comes from the masculine principle in its women, the feminine in its men. Hence the reason Australian women generally appear stronger than their men. Alas, the feminine element in the men is not strong enough to make them more interesting" (1981, p155). White is highlighting his experiences of gender misrepresentation. Importantly, White's expressionistic style in *Voss* and all of his novels challenges typical expectations of gender having been, as he says, inspired by the peculiar nature of Australian women. For example, *Voss'* Laura Trevelyan is described as having a "long-shaped" face, and while she sits in a room warmed from the sun she "dab[s] her upper lip with a handkerchief" (V 11). This description of her character is a somewhat inelegant one and includes uncertain behaviours that become typical of Laura. White continues: "whether she was beautiful it was not at first possible to tell, although she should, and could have been". This remark informs readers that while there is a common understanding of what is typically beautiful, Laura appears in contrast to it and might even purposefully be defying any attempts to achieve it.

In Western cultures, gender has traditionally been viewed as dichotomous, consisting of two distinct categories: male/female, a binary that views the male as superior to female. In this way, male and female, or the traits of masculinity and femininity, have often been defined in opposition and considered mutually exclusive (Martin 2003, p23). As Kate Millett explains in her influential text *Sexual Politics* (1972), "so deeply embedded is patriarchy that the character structure it creates in both sexes is perhaps even more habit of mind and a way of life than a political system" (1972, p63). Men and women typically perform to the social conventions that are the result of this traditional binary. "The masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative; the feminine, by systematic opposition to such traits has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional" (Abrams, 2005, p94). Millett determines that in a patriarchal society, men and women were forced to defer to the ascribed characteristics of masculine and feminine. She closely criticises authors such as D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller as "counterrevolutionary" and describes their literature as having helped build and reinforce sexist social structures. She writes, "there is no way out of such a dilemma but to rebel and be broken, stigmatized, and cured. Until the radical spirit revives to free us, we remain imprisoned" (Millett, 1972, p233). Importantly, it is possible this radical spirit has been successfully portrayed in White's novel *Voss* through the character of Laura Trevelyan, and that she is liberated from the social confines of her gender.

For White, women "generally appear stronger" because depictions of strength in a woman is considered remarkable. As feminine traits are often considered inferior, traits of femininity in men are either repressed or ignored. White suggests by contrast that those who display traits traditionally attributed to the opposite gender will achieve subtle distinction in their character. When women assert masculine principles, they eradicate their more common timidity and passivity. White is suggesting that women have been more willing than men to embrace traits of the opposite gender, and are fundamentally more adventurous in spirit. This is most probably because in order to experience more, women have *had* to show strength and defiance, "I have known far more admirable women than admirable men. Those who have read my novels attentively, not just glanced through one or two more controversial at the time when they were conversational fodder for dinner parties, must surely have seen this. Of course my women are *flawed* because they are also human beings, as am I, which is why I'm writing this book" (White, 1981, p252).

I will be deconstructing White's theories of gender in relation to Laura Trevelyan. I will explore how and why she might be considered one of his 'admirable women', by focusing on the influence in his texts of the feminine. Laura's character harbours many identities and she has both masculine and feminine traits. Feminist critics have argued against stereotypical representations of femininity in literature. As Mary Eagleton explains in her influential text *Feminist Literary Criticism:* "*Feminist Critique* includes the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omission of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history"(Eagleton, 1986, p128). I would argue that the women in White's novels either parody stereotypical representations, or, as is the case for the character of Laura Trevelyan, subvert the stereotype altogether by presenting a much more complex illustration of femininity. White favours the feminine, in both character and narrative. This is because the quality of plurality in femininity is what he is interested in.

White's novel, set in 1845, is quite modern in its development. Laura's narrative and character thrust the reader into more unusual modes of experience. As the seemingly secondary character, her multifaceted makeup expands her influence on the story. Laura embodies feminine principles as a more fluid, more compromising character than Voss. Importantly, her imaginative nature does not espouse masculine superiority and control. Laura's dynamic identity is a rejection of singularity. She is conscious of the power her relationships with others afford in terms of breadth of experience. A powerful element of Laura's character is her embodiment of variability.

Laura's dynamic identity is developed in two ways. The first is that she distinguishes herself from her cousin, Belle Bonner, with whom she has been raised. Belle is the aptly named young beauty whose greatest pursuit is to be admired and to be married. Laura's future prospects are less certain, "Belle ravished, like any sudden spring flower, but Laura would require her own climate in which to open". The second development is that Laura aligns herself with Voss, with whom she senses a kindred spirit, "Drifting in the nihilistic darkness with agreeable resignation, the young woman bumped against some hard body and immediately recovered her own" (V 92). This second endeavour is not undertaken lightly and is tormenting for her. Both Laura and Voss struggle to connect with one another. Their repartee is often doubtful, violent and tense. Laura is drawn to aspects of his character that match her own desires, such as his yearning for physical and metaphysical experiences. Voss becomes a symbol of alternate possibilities, as she does for him. They learn that those desired experiences could only be fully realised by their connection to one another. Laura and Voss' relationship is an exploration of the masculine elements in women and the feminine elements in men.

Challenging masculine superiority and opportunity, the earlier chapters of White's novel include many significant conversations between the young men and women of the social set. Before Voss departs on his journey, The Bonners decide to have a dinner party in his honour. Mr. and Mrs. Bonner are Laura's uncle and aunt and her guardians. Mr. Bonner has invested in Voss' expedition to explore the Australian desert. At the dinner party, various men in attendance play out attacks on Laura's character. A particularly useful example is Tom Radclyffe. Tom Radclyffe is the love interest and suitor of her cousin, Belle. Laura intimidates Tom and this goes a long way in distinguishing her from Belle's softer and more compliant disposition. Tom is also a parody of the masculine stereotype, succeeding in distinguishing him from Voss's more unusual nature: "[Tom Radclyffe] blazing with scarlet, and whose substantial good fortune was the best reason for his self-confidence, bursts out of the awkward dream and took reality by the hand" (V 86). His masculinity is steeped in fortune, charm and veracity. It is important that Laura challenges him on this front, and even manages to mock his propensity for pragmatism, "I would be curious to read little Laura's thoughts" (V 88), Tom asks, patronisingly. Laura explains precisely everything she had been thinking of just then, mocking his exactitude with her robust and literal reply. However, she also reveals unusual observations generally not shared in polite conversation. She peppers her response with artistic and thoughtful curiosities, following her stream of thought despite its changeability. She explains she was not afraid of the bones she discovered with her friend Lucy, as Lucy was: "it is the thought of death that frightens me. Not its bones" (V 88). The remark suggests that her thoughts are rational, if obscure. Of particular importance regarding this comment of 'bones' is that it signifies her fascination with the interior.

The tension between Tom and Laura in this scene is nothing compared with the tension of her own thoughts: "If I take you at your word you may regret it, she replied, because I have been thinking of nothing in particular, which is to say: almost everything" (V 88). Laura's 'rationale' is constantly at odds; she is continuously battling with herself and how she should act. In a way this makes her far more rational than Tom. The expected behaviour of Laura towards her guests according to custom should be congenial and amenable, but Laura challenges this. The way she *thinks* is a challenge to Tom Radclyffe and to social convention.

Also during her speech she mentions she was thinking of the poem read by Voss "which she did understand in a sense, if not the sense of words" (V 89). 'Words and their meaning' becomes a common metaphor for Laura's way of thinking in the novel. It harks back to Laura's way of thinking at a picnic days earlier. Words to Laura, we learn, fall like weights around her, she collects them disordered and scattered:

> So far departed from that rational level to which she had determined to adhere, her own thoughts were grown obscure, even natural. She did not care. It was lovely. She would have liked to sit upon a rock and listen to words, not of any man, but detached, mysterious, poetic words that she alone would interpret through some sense inherited from sleep. Herself disembodied. Air joining air experiences a voluptuousness no less intense because imperceptible (V 68).

At the dinner party, Radclyffe declares: "Dear me, if these educated ladies are not the deuce" (V 89). His comment is flippant and disregarding because he is uncomfortable with her intelligence. White takes the opportunity here to comment on gender roles, he notes that Laura's "ideas disturbed his manliness" (V 89). Knowing Laura has succeeded in agitating him, Tom stifles or avoids any further attempts.

Next to Tom Radclyffe, Voss is also a staunchly masculine character. Throughout the novel Voss' "masculinity" is scrutinised. At first, Voss does express the more common opinions about men and women: "Voss' prejudice in restricting women to domestic life is no less distressing […] he sees women as 'encumbrances' that threaten to destroy the hard sufficiency of the masculine self' (Edgecombe 1989, p142). When Voss considers Laura at the same dinner party, he wonders: "Was she being sincere, or just womanly?" (V 90). The implication of such a comment is that prior to considering the sincerity of her intelligence, Voss imagines it to be a trick or a façade which he understands is common of young woman: “Her head, he noticed, was glittering in its setting of candlelight, whether with the hysteria of a young girl, or that sensibility at which she hinted, and which he rather despised unless he could learn its secrets” (V 90). This at least reveals Voss’ desire to understand Laura’s obscure thoughts, rather than dismiss them, but it is important to note his initial desire to understand her is because he feels intimidated: “He was truly interested, now that it did seem to affect him in some way not yet accounted for” (V 93). His interest increases as they become more attached to one another. Voss is aware that their attachment is of a peculiar nature, one that has not been determined. His efforts to understand her at this stage however are limited by his assumptions of how women live their lives. Thoughts of female-hysteria and bewilderment cloud his judgment, “I try to visualise your life in this house,’ said Voss, facing the honeycomb of windows, in some of which dark figures burrowed for a moment before drowning in the honey-coloured light. ‘Do you count the linen’?” (V 92). White includes here picture of the bee-like women Voss is considering. The dark figures represent homogenous domestic women. They are silhouettes only, and indistinguishable from one another. Not covered in ‘honey-coloured light’, but ‘*drowning*’ in it. The image shows women trapped in their hive-like environment. Laura guessing at this contemplation replies: “Is it so difficult then, for a man, to imagine the lives of poor domesticated women? How very extraordinary! Or is it that you are an extraordinary man? […] I think that I can enter into the minds of most men, said the young woman, softly. At times, an advantage we insect-women enjoy is that we have endless opportunity to indulge the imagination as we go backwards and forwards in the hive” (V 92). Ironically, Laura is quick to point out Voss’ assumptions and apply them to her character more positively. She uses her position as an advantage. From her viewpoint, she possesses the ability to ‘know’ or ‘imagine’ the lives of men quite fully. Where Voss has imagined Laura’s mind as ‘glittering’ and full of ‘secrets’, Laura supposes she can understand Voss more easily. She also imagines she can enter the minds of most men – White is illustrating the kind of woman he admires, one who exhibits masculine principles and outshines the more feminine principles of her male-counterpart. This is a significant talent, and one that becomes more realised as her relationship with Voss grows stronger. It also suggests that Laura is more aware than Voss of the possibilities afforded by their connection.

Laura and Voss' interaction grows more intense and dynamic as they move further into the garden. Their conversation becomes increasingly curious: "It was an obscure reply, of a piece with the spongy darkness that surrounded them"(V 95). They keenly acquaint themselves with one another's nature. The garden mimics the friction between the two, as well as the attraction. The garden's heat, darkness, and dense atmosphere add to the pressure of their communication as they begin to reveal themselves to one another, "The thick night was growing luminous. At least it was possible almost to see, while remaining almost hidden" (V 93). Laura and Voss are able to express themselves more freely, but the result is awkward and fumbling. They are both trying to draw one another out without exposing their own weaknesses of pride and isolation. They have made an unusual and unprecedented alliance in the garden. The extent of that alliance unsettles them.

> He shook her off, and the whole situation of an hysterical young woman. He was wiping his lips, which had begun to twitch, though in anger, certainly, not from weakness. He breathed deeply. He drank from the great arid skies of fluctuating stars. The woman beside him had begun to suggest the presence of something soft and defenseless.
> Indeed Laura Trevelyan did not feel she would attempt anything further, whatever might be revealed to her (V 96).

Voss reverts back to his earlier and safer opinion of Laura, reinstating his masculinity and her femininity. And Laura forces herself to desist despite what she has discovered in the garden. In this space, and because of this budding relationship, social convention begins to dissipate. Their personas are less certain and therefore they have the capacity to transform. For Laura and Voss the prospect of this relationship is desirable yet terrifying.

In addition to his subversive portrayal of gender roles, White demonstrates through his expression the dissolution of boundaries operating in Laura and Voss' relationship: "White to some extent exemplifies the self-importance typical of many male twentieth-century writers. But in his case this position was always qualified by the positive emphasis placed upon a 'feminised' dispersal of identity" (Davidson, 2010, p10). Davidson's 'feminised dispersal of identity' is referring to White's preference for more empathetic identities. The feminine element refers to qualities of plurality. The point Davidson makes is that White is implementing both masculine and feminine characteristics in his writing, as well as through his characters. But, it is the aspect of plurality that White highlights in his narrative. He argues that individuality and solitude and isolation are dangerous. The masculine principle of pride is a limiting emotion. It is only when the characters embrace their relationships, when they come into contact with their counterparts and 'others' that they become fully formed. By 'fully formed' I mean they become aware of their own more diverse and complicated character. They require recognition of other parts of their identity. This is often established through a connection with characters that come to represent parts of themselves. Laura understands this. She is open to meeting others. She sees the world in fragments, and thus herself in fragments. Laura understands the limits of self-reflection:

> There was in consequence no necessity to duplicate her own image, unless in glass, as now, in the blurry mirror, of the big, darkish room. Yet, in spite of this admirable self-sufficiency, she might have elected to share her experience with some similar mind, if such a mind had offered (V 12).

When I discuss the confinement of the female subject in White's work, I am also referring to the limited analysis of the female characters by critics. As Mary Eagleton argues: "One option within feminism to combat the seeming weakness which inheres women's split subjectivity has been to reassert an economy of control, to deny the constant effect of unconscious processes in utterance and practice, and to pose an unproblematic rationalism for women themselves, a feminist psyche in control of femininity" (1986, p181). The type of behaviour Eagleton describes is like that of Laura's character at her most powerful and influential, as she becomes her own agent of the change in her circumstances. Many critics are baffled by Laura's character. Geoffrey Dutton suggests that the major flaw of the novel is Laura. He focuses on structure and sees Laura's situation as disruptive. He bemoans "the awkward and ill-controlled emphasis thrown on certain aspects of Laura's behaviour" (1961 p39). As I have discussed, it is precisely these aspects of Laura's character that highlight the imaginative and unrestricted quality of White's narrative. Laura, along with Voss, is commencing a journey of self-discovery. A key element to that journey is her connection with Voss. Their connection to each other expands and diversifies traditional concepts of character. The story of Voss does not endure without Laura.

Brian Kiernan says of Laura: "She is both a figure of authority in her interpretation of Voss because of her own spiritual quest, and a sad spinster with a hole in her glove who falls to worrying about her lozenges at the novel's end" (1980 p63). Laura's "spiritual quest" is not explored in his chapter on Voss, and so this reference is borderline sarcastic, particularly when it follows with the demotion of her character to "sad spinster". Simon During argues that "White's women are more secular, less spiritual than his men, in a little piece of ideology that fits the way in which the marketing of home-making was more directed at women than at men" (1996 p48). I am inclined to think that it is most often the male critics who are misreading, misinterpreting the role of the women in White's novels. Laura's secularity does not prevent her from leading a spiritual existence. Laura is a character of immense spirituality.

The 'abject' in White's female character is usually a product of domestic confinement and oppression. Laura is systematically reduced to her role as an unmarried woman and an outsider: "White's account of his authorial persona, apparently less phallocentric than that of many of his contemporaries, is qualified by his tendency to align female characters with abjection"(Davidson, 2010, p9). This is evident when following the liberating trajectory of Laura's narrative: "Perhaps true knowledge only comes from of death by torture in the country of the mind" (V 475). According to Kristeva, the abject serves to defy social order and boundaries by being excluded for difference, "The abject will be that which upsets or unsettles conformity and establishes intermixture, and disorder" (1982, p99). Many of White's female characters produce violent and unpredictable emotions. The female characters particularly suffer from their desires because the likelihood of them fulfilling desires of adventure, companionship and passion are very slim. Most often their male counterparts expect nothing extraordinary from them, but an female who identifies with the abject has the power to upset the dominant order that suppresses them. The distress of the female character in White's novels functions as the means by which they can change their situation. It is a precursor to their possible experiences of limitlessness and openness. The female character awaits an opportunity to express herself more freely as a direct result of fraught or intense relationships. By engaging with others, after longing to do so, the female character can experience all aspects of her character. Her world is expanded, extended outward and becomes multifaceted.

In the biography, Marr cites White's description of Laura as Voss's "anima" (White as cited in Marr, 1991 p301). In Jungian psychology an anima is described as the inner part or the feminine part of a man's personality. If we were to honour this, it would seemingly confine her role. But as the novel begins and ends with Laura, I believe White's description of Laura as anima must be further explored. The dichotomous nature of identity is a social construct. It is limiting because the feminine side is considered secondary and other to the masculine. If the idea were that the two sides of gender balance each other out, it would follow that the female would inevitably bend toward masculine power/privilege. I suggest that White recognised this anomaly and has tried to destabilise gender binaries. And it is possible that his attempts have gone as far as to produce a feminine hierarchy. Laura subverts social forms of power. She does this by forming an unconventional relationship with Voss, in which the social conventions cease to matter. And in the realm of her imagination, her emotions and desires become the most important aspect of her power and influence. White argues that the more intelligent character is already grappling with the social expectations of their gender. White gives attention to and explores the female character that would be limited to the sidelines/periphery. In the case of Voss and Laura, it is not simply that she is his anima, but that she is part of the whole story. Voss is an element of Laura's psyche too. They are synergetic.

Part Two: Laura Trevelyan

This section will provide an overview of Laura's social status and trajectory in the narrative. I will explore her literal and figurative confinement. Laura is at once confined by the domestic duty of a young woman, and by the limiting experiences such duty imposes – forcing her to retreat to her private thoughts. As a result, Laura separates herself from others and thus becomes proud, suspicious, and defensive. I will analyse what Laura's tendency to withdraw suggests. Namely, that her keen loneliness and latent desires for companionship and adventure reveals a readiness to be drawn out of her bitter isolation.

> I am uncomfortably aware of the very little I have seen and experienced in general, and of our country in particular, […] but the little I have seen is less, I like to feel, than what I know. Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes from death by torture in the country of the mind (V 275).

This passage signifies Laura's internal state of flux. It comes at the end of the novel, when Laura is reflecting on the events of the expedition, in particular Voss' disappearance. Laura's description of being 'uncomfortably' aware actually has positive connotations. Her dissatisfaction allows her to constantly seek change. Laura accepts the impermanency of being-in-the-world. Because physically and realistically her circumstances are unlikely to change, Laura's journey to gain knowledge by other means reveals dimensions to her character. The question is whether she can overcome the emotional cost of her retreat to integrity.

Laura is disinclined to 'settle', she is permanently 'unsettled' - not literally, but psychologically. As she goes on to state "but the little I have seen is [...] less than what I know" (V 275). Laura is grasping at some greater knowledge. We know this because her statement includes her admission that this is what she likes to "feel". This is a very important addition because it is Laura's ability to "feel" her understanding of the world that legitimates her place within it; for she cannot literally explore the world: "Knowledge was never a matter of geography" (V 275). She expands on this idea by continuing with the geographic metaphor: she feels that knowledge is the "reverse", that it: "overflows all maps that exist". This further suggests that 'knowledge' cannot be mapped. To Laura, knowledge is transformative and always changing. She revels in the uncertain.

When Laura refers to 'death by torture', she is referring to Voss' death. But she is also signifying their parallel experience. They share in the understanding that torture can be the wretchedness of being confined to one's mind. The 'country of the mind' is what Laura has explored. Laura has seen the realities of her world reflected in her internal self. Discovering this has been her expedition. Voss too has had this metaphysical experience. The fatal division between the two is that Voss is literally tortured to death and is never able to fully resolve his discovery that to be isolated is a kind of death in itself. Voss had the ability to travel where Laura could not. I would argue that Laura prevails beyond Voss' achievements and beyond his attempts at self-discovery. Laura's learned philosophy endures where Voss' could not, and she matures as a powerful figure.

*

> Her face must surely be greasy, and her jaw so controlled that she would have assumed the long, stubborn look, which frequently displeased her in mirrors. It was her most characteristic expression, she had begun to expect, after long and fruitless search for a better, without realising that beauty is something others must surprise. As she sat upon her horse, knowledge of her superficiality and ugliness was crushing her (V 118).

Aspects of Laura's character are determined by feminine expectation. The way in which White describes these, however, reveals that beyond superficial traits Laura's true desires lie dormant: "She had been kept very carefully, put away like some object of which the precious nature is taken for granted"(V 80). Laura is tormented by solitude. Her environment, or her relationships trigger her oftentimes-violent emotions. Because these emotions have been suppressed by social convention, they have become less controlled. For example Laura is beautiful, but it is 'unreliable beauty': "she had clear skin, distinction, if unreliable beauty. Her clothes were soothing, rather moody, exactly suited to her person […] She was the literate member of the family, even frighteningly so, it seemed to the others, and more by instinct than from concentrated study" (1959 p80). She is kept idle and ornamental but her 'precious nature' is taken for granted and undervalued. She has 'instinctual' intelligence. What is Laura's precious nature and instinct? The extent of Laura's intelligence has not yet been revealed; it is only hinted at. The point is that something adventurous in Laura's spirit has been concealed. This is what readers must discover along with her desire to discover it herself. Laura, we are told, does not realise that 'beauty' is something others must surprise. Suggesting that her character will not be fully realised without the observance of someone else. Laura must be looked at in a new light.

Nick Mansfield asserts: "subjectivity is primarily an experience" (2000, p6). Mary Eagleton before him explained that she "would rather see subjectivity as always in process and contradiction, even female subjectivity, structured, divided, and denigrated through the matrices of sexual difference" (1986, p181). There are clues to Laura's subjectivity in White's expression. For example, as the Bonners sit down to eat peaches for breakfast one morning, they begin to discuss Voss' expedition. When Belle makes silly remarks her hands, we are told: "dripped inelegantly with the juice of early peaches" (V 174), suggesting a ripe innocence and naivety. By contrast, Laura's breakfast plate reveals "downy skins of peaches, almost bloody in that light" (V 174). Laura has avoided mentioning her correspondence with Voss (imaginative communication aside, they do write letters to each other) and her gluttonous consumption of the fruit suggests she has privately been highly satisfied by it, viciously so. White pursues this image further by following Laura's sensuous revelry as she wanders outside: "by the scent of ripe peaches, throbbing in long leaves, and falling; they were too heavy, too ripe. Feet treading through the wiry grass were trampling flesh, it seems, but exquisitely complaisant, perfumed with peach" (V 174). In her withdrawal, Laura is nourished by her imagination. She is subverting the forces that repress her. As in this instance, Laura's main focus is to uncover and explore that which she has had to conceal, "she would seldom have come out of herself for choice, for she was happiest shut with her own thoughts, and such was the texture of her marble, few people ever guessed at these" (V 9). There are, however, limits to self-absorption. Laura has acknowledged this. White opens this novel by jolting Laura out of her private reverie. We begin the novel interrupting Laura. She is the one to be drawn out.

Earlier passages in the novel begin by illustrating Laura's experience of psychological absorption, reflection, and projection. Like the room in which she sits, there are limitations to these experiences:

> The room in which she sat was rather large, darkened by the furniture, of which the masses of mellow wood tended to daunt intruding light, although here and there, the surface of a striped mirror, or beaded stool, or some object in cut glass bred triumphantly with the lustier of those beams which entered through half-closed shutters (V 11).

While the internal space is an infinite space, it still has limitations for Laura. Laura is aware that her literal circumstances will not change. Likewise her defensive and stubborn personality will remain unchallenged without the combativeness of a likeminded individual, who can offer the pressure of an antagonist. "The keenest torment or exhilaration was, in fact, the most private" (V 11), Laura attempts to maintain the comforts of her private reverie, but there is a sense that she longs to be discovered. In the knowledge that her private thoughts are tormenting and exhilarating, the possibility of sharing those thoughts with another is a source of great tension and desire. Anticipating her later formed philosophy that true knowledge perhaps comes from 'death by torture in the country of the mind', such torment is a valuable emotion. It represents a moment of keen feeling and honesty. It is something remarkable occurring in an otherwise orchestrated and uneventful day. Laura learns, however, that intensity of that extent can only be stimulated by something outside of her.

In the sitting room in which she sits in the opening scene, Laura has grown tired of endless inward reflection. She describes having read the many books available to her, and studied prodigiously various mathematical problems. But in a bored and uninspired lament, she reveals:

> There was in consequence no necessity to duplicate her own image, unless in glass, as now, in the blurry mirror, of the big, darkish room. Yet in spite of this admirable self-sufficiency, she might have elected to share her experience with some similar mind, if such a mind had offered. But there was no evidence of intellectual kinship in any of her small circle (V 12).

Laura accepts her pride and self-sufficiency. She is aware of the consequential limitations and that it limits her search for a potential partner as much as her circumstances. But it is the mirror's reflection that reveals more. The mirror is blurry. As such, her reflection must be also. This signifies distortion and uncertainty. Although the undefined reflection suits Laura's idea of herself, it also shows an undefined other

> The quest for knowledge, self-clarifying as it is, is also self-satisfying, in however illusory a way. Her mind, we are told, 'seemed complete', and it severs her from the marriage quest we see obsessing her cousin and other colonial acquaintances. The apparent incompleteness of the solitary being that requires the suppletive presence of a partner, and a consequent guarantee of succession, is something that Laura here renounces as being inapplicable at least to herself; and the whole reproductive urge of marriage becomes quaintly subverted and trivialised as the literal reproductiveness of mirrors, which in any in case, […] blur and darken her outline instead of irradiating and defining it" (Edgecombe, 1989, p7).

Laura has imagined forming a meaningful relationship as ridiculous. Such a relationship can only be considered if one can match her seriousness and intensity. The undefined reflection in the mirror may be a mockery of marriage. But it may also signify the imminent presence of a likeminded individual. "She did believe most palpably in wood, with the reflections in it, and in clear daylight, and in water"(V 11). Edgecombe considers a mirror's literal reproduction. He explains that mirrors create replicas. Laura "believes" in the natural elements of wood and water because they suggest clarity and reflection. They speak to visibility. Laura perhaps feels overlooked. It is not enough for her to continue contemplating herself – she needs the influence and recognition of others. Laura plays out the complementary actions of absorption and reflection. She thinks of the elements of wood with reflections because it is a material that has absorbed light. Clear daylight and water offer the opposite ability: to share and reflect and enhance light. It is the interaction she craves. Constant absorption is not desirable if one is not able to come out again, or to see oneself through the eyes of another:

> Trevelyan was her name, he remembered. Laura, the niece. The gay day of wind and sharp sunlight had pierced through the surface of her somber green. It had begun to glow. She was forever flickering, and escaping from a cage of black twigs, but unconscious of any transformation that might have taken place. This ignorance of her riches gave to her face a tenderness that it did not normally possess. Many tender waves did, besides, leap round the rocky promontory along which they were stumbling. There was now distinctly the sound of sea. As they trod out from the trees and were blinded, Laura Trevelyan was smiling (V 65).

Voss notices Laura. His observance of her has the effect of illumination. It is in the beginning, when she is alone "absorbed in the depths of the mirror and her own predicament"(V 12), that Voss is announced.

Part Three: Relationships

White's *Voss* demonstrates that relationships have the power to establish a new and protected social setting. The dynamics of a relationship based on mutuality and reciprocity enables one's emotional experiences to multiply and expand. Similarly, a fraught relationship can provide the tension and violent emotion needed to push someone out of their comfort zone. Struggle, combativeness, and doubt are integral to Laura and Voss' relationship, aspects that allow them to learn about one another emotionally. I will outline how such a profound connection is established in Laura and Voss' relationship, and what this kind of connection affords: looking at the preliminary meeting at the Bonner's household; the Pringle's picnic; and later at the dinner party before Voss' departure.

Analysing Patrick White's work, Veronica Brady states: "Love has little to do with the personal relationships which exist in the novels. On the contrary, far from being a refuge, these relationships, dependent as they are on the bodily and social interaction, only multiply the possibility of suffering" (2010, p238). Brady's use of the term 'refuge' makes a distinction with ordinary companionship offered in relationships. Relationships in White's novels do provide a kind of protection from social conformity - because the key relationships in White's work are unconventional. As Brady points out, relationships serve to 'multiply' the suffering. Relationships in White's texts multiply the possibility of *all* feeling. Suffering in particular is integral to White's expression and the way characters communicate. Their relationships are based on empathy. From this tormenting 'bodily and social interaction' is an empathetic expansion. All of the characters participate in a psychological drama. Laura and Voss' relationship is based on this kind of torturous interaction. They are grappling with the same social inhibitions. Beyond this, Laura and Voss' interaction is about something larger than their personal distress – it is about the distinct awkwardness of a relationship being established in conditions that are *not* clearly governed by social convention.

By looking at the novel from the perspective of Laura Trevelyan, by focusing on her character, we are able to recognise the expressionist and feminist elements of White's text: these being a subversion of gender stereotype and a narrative which implements expressionistic techniques: fragmentation, dissolution, and heightened emotion. The aspects of White's writing that I am attempting to highlight by looking at the character of Laura prove that his style could be considered both feminist and modernist: "a deliberate and radical break from traditional forms" (Abrams 2008, p175), but even more so – expressionistic. The feminist and expressionistic aspects of his writing are important to one another. The feminist aspect requires that Laura is more than a secondary female character: "because he [Voss] is only with her briefly, and is obsessed not with her but her effect on him, we are not to take her on a lover's trust. Instead we see her responding to life around her, critical of its weaknesses and strengths (Argyle 1967, p41). The modernist and expressionistic aspect requires that the novel deal with unusual modes of experience. Alan Lawson explores this in his essay 'Meaning and Experience: A Review Essay on some recurrent problems in Patrick White Criticism'. Lawson argues that White's novels "are written in two opposed modes. On the one hand they attempt to reflect White's conviction that life is lived in flux or in Frank Le Mesurier's words in 'a state of perpetual becoming'. On the other hand, they clearly embody the belief […] that perhaps the most important things only happen in a flash. Their structures are episodic and fragmented" (1959, p292). I would argue that the modes Lawson refers to are not opposing at all, but are essential to White's depiction of his female protagonists. Laura experiences the world around her in episodes and fragments because her restricted access to the world around affords her only moments of intensity. But Laura is able to recall such episodes to expand her sense of the world and experience a life of fluidity. An episodic and fragmented understanding of the world leads to her 'state of perpetual becoming'. In the case of this novel, she is able to imaginatively communicate with Voss across the desert based solely on their crucial initial meetings. Everything Laura observes assists her ability to imaginatively overcome her restrictive circumstances. Laura's responses to the world around become more vivid when Voss and Laura have established their relationship: "He is enabled, or obliged, to maintain contact because he provides another main character in Laura Trevelyan, who is not only as articulate and subtle as Voss, but whose relationship with him establishes the quality of his fulfillment as well as her own" (Argyle 1967, p41).

The Meeting:

In the opening scene of the novel, after we have met Laura, Voss arrives unexpectedly. He is there to meet Mr. Bonner, a benefactor of his expedition. Voss' surprise at finding himself alone with Laura, and learning that Mr. Bonner is not at home, sets the uneasy tone of the scene and their relationship. As Laura and Voss become acquainted, dialectic is established between pride and humility. Laura and Voss both betray evidence of their pride and humility. Because each in their own way has distanced themselves from others, these emotions have become difficult to control. They are unable to display a moderate emotional alternative, and in their efforts to try they fumble and exude awkwardness. Both recognise and loathe this behaviour in the other. Because of this battle between them, a strange kind of relationship develops. Wherein they begin to understand each other. This understanding will become crucial to the path of self-discovery for both.

Voss "mumbles" and rubs the pocket of his jacket with one hand. These are gestures of self-consciousness. Laura notes his blundering, thick accent with a sense of superiority, though her own insecurities are also slowly revealed in this scene. She speaks in a flat, tasking tone with the same amount of effort she might have given to her embroidery. He remains petulant and angry, which incidentally is the same way that his physicalities are described: coarse and rough, even his beard. This communication continues to great effect until White notes with emphasis on this excruciating performance "they were now what is called *comfortable*" (V 14). The awkward scene has enveloped Voss and Laura. Voss and Laura establish an affinity in their mutual awkwardness. Their interaction indicates similar inhibitions: "Sometimes, stranded with strangers, the composed young women's lovely throat would contract" (V 12). So overcome at the intolerable prospect of having to maintain a polite charade, Voss abruptly and inelegantly offers to leave "I will come later. In perhaps one hour," said the thick voice of the thin man, who was distressed by the furniture" (V 13).

This preliminary meeting at the Bonner's household illustrates Laura and Voss' similarity in temperament. Laura and Voss are forced into an introduction where the conditions are socially contrived. The awkwardness that they feel in such a setting allows for greater insight into their character. Their tendency to behave clumsily or inelegantly reveals that both are uncomfortable in the scene. And both are trying to make out one another's character and are surprised at what they discover.

> "It is a pity that you huddle," said the German. "Your country is of great subtlety". With rough persistence he accused her of what she herself suspected. At times she could hear her own voice. She was also afraid of the country, which, for lack of any other, she supposed was hers.
> "Oh, I know I'm ignorant," Laura Trevelyan laughed. "Women are, and men invariably make it clear to them." She was giving him an opportunity (V 13).

Laura sees in Voss the very characteristics she loathes in herself but also finds that he is better served to avoid them. He is planning an expedition that will take him away from such a stifling setting; to explore the country that Laura can only "suppose" is hers. Laura's confrontational response to a man's habitual comments on women and their circumstances confirms her resentment of female limitation. Likewise, her acknowledgement of his impropriety, and her offering him further opportunity to mock her, rouses *his* distress, "But the German did not take it" (V 13). On observing the room after some wine has eased their anxiety, Voss thinks to himself:

> Here much was unnecessary. Such beautiful women were in no way necessary to him, he considered, watching her neck. He saw his own room, himself lying on the iron bed. Sometimes he would be visited by a sense of almost intolerable beauty, but never did such experience crystallise in objective visions. Nor did he regret it, as he lay beneath his pale eyelids, reserved for a peculiar destiny. He was sufficient in himself (V 17).

Voss takes comfort in reverting back to his proud and insular manner. To avoid being taken-in by Laura – though we must assume he already has been affected by her, as he "watches her neck" – he imagines himself not in this room, but returned to the comfort of his own. William Walsh explains: "Voss feels the menace of others and their capacity to be destructive of his self because the self for him is identified with will" (V 10). The room he describes refers to a real space, but also to an imagined refuge of self-sufficiency where he rejects objective visions and is protected by his independence. Just as we have seen Laura rely on this private escape before his arrival. Now, she resents it in him: "Oh dear, she was tired of this enclosed man", "And Voss was a bit of a scarecrow. He stood there woodenly at the hips, Laura Trevelyan noticed. She personally could not assist. She had withdrawn. But nobody can help, she already knew (V 19).

Despite their retreat, the attempt at "civility" rattles them. In their attempts to behave normally, they ultimately falter and in doing so reveal much more about their abnormality: "She resented the attitude she had begun to assume, and liked to think it has been forced upon her. He is to blame, she said, he is one of the superior ones, even though pitiable, those trousers he has trodden on" (V 17). They grudgingly begin to form an alliance – one that will be far more important for her. Their conversational faux pas and ineptitudes, and their dissatisfaction with the setting enables them a kind of partnership. In this partnership and throughout their conversation, new dynamics are created by the feelings of awkwardness and tension which set a fundamental precedence.

The Pringle's Picnic:

Allowing an opportunity for the continuation of this growing connection between Laura and Voss, the Bonner's gossipy neighbour, Mrs. Pringle, and her daughter, Una, invite the family to a picnic. Such social occasions delight the Bonners, particularly Belle – the essence of civility. However, as we have already learned of Laura's temperament, the idea of attending bothers her: "Laura Trevelyan regretted all picnics" (V 59). In this scene Laura and Voss are excluded. They are excluded by their unwillingness and inherent inability to subscribe to empty, polite behaviour. The scene highlights their failure to fit in with this kind of social decorum. Walsh argues: "The characteristic effect of Voss on Laura's relationship with him is to strip them of any filmy social gauze and to put them at once on the most intense and serious level" (V 26). This exclusion actually enforces a kind of barrier between them and others that makes their connection to one another more essential. By eluding the others, Laura and Voss are drawn closer together - they make one another stronger.

Earlier at the picnic, Laura, Una, and Voss are separated from the others. When the conversation turns to men, "Una and Laura began to extricate themselves" (V 71). Una and Laura's obvious disparity is as marked as the similarity Laura discovers in her conversations with Voss, "But for the fact that they were both girls, they would have been in every way dissimilar". Laura endures this discussion of marriage. She is not interested in Una's recommendations of Mr. McAllister, a supposed fine prospect, and a "corner-stone" as Voss puts it. Laura relays that she "would not want marriage with a stone" (V 73). Voss responds: "You would prefer sand?' […] 'You will regret it when it has all blown"(V 73). Simon During describes this moment in *Voss* as symbolic of Voss' preoccupations and his urge to wrestle order from existence (1996, p89). But During neglects to analyse White's use of the symbols of sand and stone used here metaphorically in a conversation about marriage and Laura's opinions. During says the symbols offer up an obvious opposition and easy questions: "is Laura associated more with rock or with sand?" – and claims this is impossible to answer (1996, p89). However, when read in light of Laura's feelings of resentment about the confining expectation of marrying well: "The forms of burnt rock and scraggy pine were sharpening unbearably. Her shoulders felt narrow", Laura's understanding of "stone" is linked to inflexibility, rigidity and convention. Laura is frustrated and envious of what Voss is able to contemplate as a future is which he has more control and which is more independent: "the disappearing sand that spurted up from Voss' feet did fascinate' (V 73). Voss and Laura are speaking on the same level; they are exploring the same analogy – but from very different perspectives. During remarks, "the opposition between 'sand' (formless) and 'stone (form) is plotted: it becomes Voss' quest" (1996, p89). I would argue however that it has as much to do with Laura's quest for adventure and freedom as it does Voss'.

In this midst of this discussion, Laura momentarily reverts to internal reverie. Although Voss understands Laura's notion of not wanting marriage with a "stone", he mocks her with the elusive alternative of 'sand'. Her response is bitter: "She was the third to laugh, and it seems with such freedom that she was no longer attached to anyone" (V 73). Just as Laura gets close to being understood, she is embarrassingly *mis*understood. Her defense mechanism is to withdraw:

> Laura could not determine the exact reason for her own sadness. She was consumed by the intense longing of the waves…Though what she did want, Laura did not know, only that she did. She was pursued by a most lamentable, because so unreasonable, discontent (V 73).

Laura's discontent is ambiguous. Its main effect is that it causes uncomfortable ripples amongst members of the picnic. Una, unable to cope with Laura's reserve, attempts to reduce her: "you take it upon yourself to despise what is praiseworthy in order to appear different,' protested the nettled Una, 'I have noticed this before in people who are clever' (V 72). There are clues in Laura's contemplation as to the nature of her frustration,

> Under some vague impulse of dissatisfaction and melancholy, Laura voices her longing for a vision of manhood that will transcend the limitations of her colonial society. She accordingly literalises the stony element in her "corner-stone" to evoke something unresponsive and stolid. […] It is the fluidity of water, not the intractability of mineral substance that is obsessing Laura here. Sand provides a sort of median between these two absolutes, combing the evanescence of the waves with the durability of rock (Edgecombe 1989, p27).

Beyond Edgecombe's interpretation, Laura's thoughts also explore access. When Voss laughs at her and throws the sand so that it "stung their faces", he came closer to what had been bothering her. Her longing is not so much for Voss as it is for what he represents. Laura wants to have access to the world. One she knows she will not have. She cannot walk the sandy desert with the explorers. It is a reminder that she will not feel the sand being blown, and that she will not experience the freedom of that sensation.

Una moves away to attend to the picnic, "This left Voss and Laura to follow. It was not exactly clear what they should do, only that they were suddenly faced with a great gap to fill, of space and time. Peculiarly enough, neither of them was appalled by the prospect, as both might have been earlier that afternoon. Words, silences, and sea air had worked on the subtly, until they had undergone a change" (V 74). The symbols of the stone, the water, and the air are now being attributed to them. Laura and Voss are subject to the elements. Their relationship affords them both a transformative experience - just as Laura had desired in her earlier reverie, "Walking with their heads agreeably bowed beneath the sunlight, they listened to each other's presence, and became aware that they were possibly more alike than any other two at the Pringle's picnic" (V 74).

Laura begins to take full advantage of their relationship. She feels the potential of their attachment. The statement she makes as their conversation continues regarding his expedition is as much for her own concern as his. "This expedition of yours is pure will […] you are not going to allow your will to destroy you" (V 75). She is speaking for them both; they are in it together now. And the possibilities for such a relationship are growing. "The expression of the two late arrivals suggested that they shared some guilty secret of personality. Only, nobody noticed" (V 78).

The Bonner's Garden:

The empathetic extent of their relationship is unearthed later in the garden at the Bonner's dinner party. The intimacy between Laura and Voss grows more pronounced. Voss' departure is imminent. Laura and Voss now sense one another's presence in a room. Both seek to escape the pressures of such a setting and find each other on the balcony, leading off into a dark garden. Their intensified meeting in the garden prompts the two protagonists to become more significantly allied: "That it would take place, they both knew now" (V 94). "It" will be an implicit acknowledgement of their connection. White ensures that the sensory nature of their relationship and connection culminates in a place of heightened stimulation; the garden matches their intensity.

Voss questions Laura on her claim that she has the ability to "enter into the minds of most men" (V 93). He asks of her: "and in my instance, what does your imagination find?"(V 93). This is a question of enormous potential. Not only does Voss invite Laura's attempts to "enter into his mind", but in doing so he also acknowledges the power of her empathetic imagination. Voss seeks and desires Laura's unique opinion of him. Beyond obscure replies and conversational diplomacies Laura and Voss have finally reached a moment of truth. Laura explains that she fears Voss' ego, "Everyone is offended by the truth, and you will not be an exception" (V 94). What Voss perhaps does not anticipate is Laura's compassionate reply to the question of his character. Laura has already greatly considered him. Laura has *empathised* with Voss. She responds to him and speaks as though relaying something she has memorised. Laura is already intimately acquainted with Voss in her own mind:

> Consequently, when she did speak, the sense of inevitability that they shared made her sound as if she were reading from a notebook, only this one was in her head, in which her memorandum had been written, in invisible ink, that the night had breathed upon; and as she read, or spoke, it became obvious to both that she had begun to compile her record from the first moment of their becoming acquainted (V 94).

Their connection is made real in Laura's long-anticipated reply. Feeling brave in making her speech, Laura continues her climactic response. Everything Laura says about Voss' character can also be directed to herself. His faults are her faults. Voss has the same character flaws to overcome as Laura, "You are so vast and ugly," Laura Trevelyan was repeating the words, "I can imagine some desert, with rocks, rocks of prejudice and, yes, even hatred" (V 94). This address for Laura is an out of body experience. She is almost performing what she has rehearsed. She is divulging revelations that she has known and understood in herself. Speaking of these observations aloud to Voss has the effect of making them more relevant. Laura imaginatively transforms him into a desert landscape that she may explore. Discovering him has enabled her to more fully discover herself. Voss' personality, like a great desert landscape, is consistent with the isolating emotions that they both need to admit and overcome.

"You are so isolated. That is why you are fascinated by the prospect of desert places, in which you will find your own situation taken for granted, or more than that, exalted" (V 94). The ambiguity and openness of 'desert places' opens them up to new realms of experience. There, the only options are to feel insignificant or to feel pulled out and into the space – to be gloriously relevant. This is a constant metaphor for the nature of their relationship. The theme of absorption and reflection, contraction and expansion is continued. But the evidence of that tension here is in the dynamics of their interaction and their conversation involves the same strain and pressure:

> You sometimes scatter words or bits of poetry to people, who soon realise the extent of their illusion. Everything is for your self. Human emotions, when you have them, are quite flattering. But most flattering, I think, when you experience it, is the hatred, or even the mere irritation of weaker characters (V 94).

Asserting herself as *not* one of the "weaker characters", Laura's responds to Voss: "I am fascinated by you," laughed Laura Trevelyan, with such candour that her admission did not seem immodest. "*You* are *my* desert!" (V 94). If he is her desert, then surely in the same way she is also his. Her statement that he is so isolated is undermined now by the fact that *they* are in isolation. They have moved into a new space, but done so together. Such is the extent of her zeal and spiritedness, Laura asserts herself as the stronger character. Laura is the stronger character throughout the whole scene. She is the one with the answers. Voss may be taking the journey but Laura emerges as more adventurous in spirit. She has had to be satisfied with an imagined journey into the desert. That their relationship affords her this opportunity makes Laura's persistence all the more daring, "We see Laura evading the restraints of society in an effort to experience Voss' monumental journey within her own cramped sphere" (Edgecombe 1989, p28).

Laura and Voss have found themselves in the middle of a dark garden looking out onto an imagined vast desert landscape. This expedition has now become important for them both. They will learn from each other and benefit from each other. Because they have come together so fully, their experiences henceforth will occur in an expanded and newly imagined space. It is now entirely plausible that Laura will travel where Voss will travel. His journey will also be her journey. Their survival and success in self-discovery is dependent on the power of this connection.

Part Four: Space

The operation of specific spaces in *Voss* illustrates the relationship between literal and figurative confinement. Connotations of confinement might be domestic and environmental restrictions, and both the limitations and limitlessness of interiority. For the female characters, relationships and certain spaces operate as avenues to freedom and experience. Continuing her theories about women in domestic spaces, Rita Felski argues: "female confinement is, of course, symbolic as well as literal. Imprisoned in male houses, women are also locked inside the forbidding edifice of masculine culture" (2003, p67). The domestic space Laura occupies reflects her confinement. This is in contrast to the surrounding external spaces like the ocean or the desert. More complex spaces like verandahs, balconies, and gardens become spaces of transition, where Laura might imaginatively escape her confinement.

In the same way that relationships in White's text inspire a kind of push-pull technique, an exploration of emotional reflections, contractions and expansion, so too does the environment that the characters occupy and imagine. I refer to White's use of domestic spaces; how the sea, the garden and the desert juxtapose domestic spaces. Laura's relationship with Voss enhances her experience of space. Figurative contraction and expansion of space and atmosphere reflects the tension and torture of the fraught relationship between the protagonists. It also represents their desire to remove themselves from a limiting and restrictive situation. The technique illustrates internal struggles by projecting them into and exploring them through the external environment. We can also see the reverse effect played out in relationships, where external occurrences can influence a character internally. As Gaston Bachelard explains in *The Poetics of Space*: "In this dynamic rivalry between house and universe, we are far removed from any reference from simple geometrical forms. A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (1994, p47).

Before Voss' departure, Laura and Voss interact in some of these contradictory spaces. They spend time together in the drawing room at the Bonner's dinner party, and later in the garden. It is worth noting the difference in atmosphere between the drawing room and the garden, and the effect both spaces have on the pair: "Two big lamps had transformed the drawing room into a perfect, luminous egg, which soon contained all the guests. These were waiting to be hatched by some communication with one another. Or would it not occur? The eyes appeared hopeful […] the lids themselves enclosed egg-shapes with uncommunicative veins" (V 91). Both spaces are stifling, but the heat and extravagant scents of the garden are preferable to the density and dullness of the drawing room: "By that hour, before the tea things were brought in, the lamplight, which in the beginning had been a solid, engrossed yellow, was suffused with the palpitating rose colours. The petals that had fallen on mahogany were reflected upward. The big, no longer perfect roses were bursting with scent and sticky stamens. And it was rather warm" (V 91). The darkness and sensuousness of the garden offers something different to the reflected lights of the drawing room. The garden produces a sensory quality of warmth and heat. This can create great tension and violence, but it is an emotion worth feeling because it means something is happening that requires friction and contact. This juxtaposes the thick texture of the egg-like drawing room: round and impenetrable.

Between exiting the drawing room and entering the garden, Laura and Voss bump into each other on the terrace. Like the verandah on which Laura and her cousin Belle will later stand to watch the *Osprey* sail, the terrace is also a space from which to look out. In this instance, however, Laura and Voss will be venturing out into the garden together. And the result is extraordinarily sensuous. Laura "had begun to tear a cluster of the white camellias from that biggest bush. In passing she had snapped the hot flowers, which were now poor lumps of things. She was tearing them across, as if they had not been flesh, but some passive stuff, like blotting-paper" (V 95). Their connection is violent and cataclysmic in a positive, passionate sense: "In the passion of their relationship, she had encountered his wrist. She held his bones. All their gestures had ugliness, convulsiveness in common. They stood with their legs apart inside their innocent clothes, the better to grip the reeling earth"(V 96). White reveals that this space allows them to be bold:

"Walking in the darkness is full of dangers" (V 96). Like the revelations Laura and Voss will experience later from exploring the recesses of their minds, Laura observes: "It is not really dark. When you are accustomed to it" (V 96).

White has Laura's character both merge with the space around her and enter a new space. As Henri Lefebvre points out in *The Production of Space:* "Considered in itself – 'absolutely' – absolute space is located nowhere. It has no place because it embodies *all* places, and has a strictly symbolic existence. This is what makes it similar to the fictitious/real space of language, and of that mental space, magically (imaginarily) cut off from the spatial realm, where the consciousness of the 'subject' – of 'self-consciousness' – takes form" (1991, p236). Laura and Voss experience the space around them in the same way. The awkwardness and tension between Laura and Voss allows for a new realm of unmediated communication. This is enhanced further by the heightened sensuousness of the garden. The darkness that penetrates the garden is now presented as a metaphor for their consciousness. It allows for a more natural expression of their desires. "We were unwise', he said, "to flounder in each other's private beings" (V 97). Laura is amused by his clumsy expression, but ironically, he aptly describes the psychological nature of their relationship. However, where Voss' journey will take him forward and beyond the limitations of the garden setting – the forms of consciousness – Laura remains. She is once more pulled back to her 'careful upbringing', called back to the drawing room by her Aunt: 'Laur-a! Where are you?' (V 97).

This reminder of duty brings us to the character of Rose Portion, aptly named for her minimal access to the world around her, whose narrative takes place alongside and secondary to Laura's. Rose's pregnancy brings shame to the Bonner household. At various stages of her pregnancy, the Bonners, in their attempt to keep the situation private, not only confine Rose to the house, but attempt to conceal her within it. She is moved from one room to another. However, unlike the way in which Laura embellishes a room in order to escape it, Rose is fatalistic. She consents to being hidden. After she decides to help Rose in raising her child, Laura moves Rose to the attic, the best room, and takes her on guided walks in the garden. During this time Rose remains agreeable. Using Rose, it is Laura who feels the desire to move out into the open.

White illustrates the nature of confinement by exploring the character's association with the public and the private. In particular, the ways in which Laura has been struggling with this. When Mr. Bonner criticises Laura for forgetting her 'easy' upbringing. Laura responds: "When one is unhappy, one does forget, ' […] 'Threats and injustices overshadow all the comfortable advantages" (V 241). The threat and injustice she is referring to is the condition of privacy. Privacy might refer to a state in which one is not observed or disturbed by others (OED, 2004). But it can also refer to the condition in which privacy is forced upon you, and the effect this has on an individual. "Beyond the window-pane, trees were fluctuating, the brown world was heaving. Even in the nice room, despite the protest of horsehair and pampas grass, the dust was settling on reflections and in the grain of taffeta, or ran with the perspiration, or the tears, on ladies faces" (V 240). The dust is settling on their own faces, as though they are ornamental dolls. This is an illustration of restlessness, whereby the women sit dormant as the world beyond the window-pane is heaving and moving. These women wither in their conditions. They do not thrive. Forced to bear the stillness and stagnation of her existence Laura imagines a new life for herself, out of the confined circumstances in which she has been raised. 'Public' refers to the non-private, that which involves the people as a whole. Or more specifically to be 'in public': in view of other people; when others are present (OED, 2004). The women, particularly Rose Portion, are restricted to certain spaces, certain rooms. As a result Rose's desires are confined as well. They often go unspoken and thus remain vague and are instead subject to Laura's motives. Rose is described at the beginning of the novel: "Something made this woman monotonous. Her big breasts moved dully as she spoke, or she would stand, and the weight of her silences impressed itself on strangers" (V 9). Rose is kept in rooms. Hidden away. However, when Laura moves her to the "best room" as she gets closer to childbirth, her situation is made public, no longer private.

Laura's intention is to disrupt the private by exposing herself to the public (this will make the last section of the novel, where Laura is seen holding court in the middle of the ballroom, important). To do so she forces upon herself an act of humility. This will be the adoption of Rose' child. The adoption will be a public act of humility, but a private act of connection between herself and Voss, as she imagines the child is a product of their relationship, "She was quite pregnant with some idea waiting to be born" (V 238). There is a constraint on this idea because it is an idea restricted to her imagination –

quite possibly she imagines that Rose and Voss are in a sense her surrogates. However, Laura's idea succeeds in upsetting the stillness of the household: "For Mr. Bonner, who hated disturbance, awful prospects were opening in his own house. He listened to the sound of dresses. Complexions were accusing him. He was surrounded by women" (V 238). Laura is having a tangible impact on the space. Even the women's physiognomy distresses Mr. Bonner. Now he is the one to be surrounded, confounded, and confined. A fully inhabited feminine space has now transformed into something powerful and expansive. Her family is skeptical of her decision, and restricts it to their version of the imagination – delusion. And in some ways it is. But Laura's intention is fundamentally a positive one. She intends to change her life by accepting a new one. "Do you not understand the importance of this life which we are going to bring into our house? Regardless of its origin. It's a life. It is my life, your life, anybody's life. It is life. I am so happy for it" (V 240).

Virginia Woolf, in her essay 'A Room of One's Own', explores the nature of space in regards to the feminine. As she explains, women have occupied domestic spaces for so long and each room has absorbed the emotion of the household. Responses and descriptions of these spaces, Woolf notes, must be expressed in a new and imaginative way in order to fully capture the impact of that space:

> One goes into the room – but the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch, and the whole flights of words would need to wing their way illegitimately into existence before a woman could say what happens when she goes into a room. The room differs so completely; they are calm or thunderous; open onto the sea; or, on the contrary, give on to a prison yard; are hung with washing; or alive with opals and silks; are hard as horsehair or soft as feathers – one only has to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity to fly in one's face. How should it be otherwise? For women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force (Woolf 1977, p83).

Recognising this force, White describes the room in which Laura is seated in the opening scene of the novel. The furniture "darkened" the room, and "intruding" light is daunted by the masses of wood. The minimal light that does enter the room ricochets and breeds through the interior, across reflective objects in the space like mirrors and glass. This is as opposed to Voss' experience with light as he later rides out of Jildra station: "It was the light that prevailed, and distance, which, after all, was a massing of light, and the mobs of cockatoos, which exploded, and broke into flashes of clattering, shrieking, white and sulphur light. Trees, too, were but illusory substance, for they would quickly turn to shadow, which is another shape of the ever-protean light" (V 184). Voss' experience of light deals with the exterior. His reflections are more variable and more expansive. The light is reflected outward, even caught up with birds in flight. Each aspect of Laura's light reflects her confinement at this time. The way in which White expresses Laura's presence in the sitting room is to signify her experience of confinement. Like Woolf explains, for women, "the room differs so completely". White is attempting to capture Laura's reaction to restrictive spaces at all turns.

For example, when Voss says to the skeptical men and women around him at the picnic party, in response to their questions about his expedition into the Australian desert, "'Have you walked upon the bottom of the sea? […] 'I have not […] except in dreams of course. That is why I am fascinated by the prospect before me. Even if the future of great areas of sand is a purely metaphysical one"' (V 67) Laura Trevelyan is listening, "Laura was at that moment tracing with her toe the long, ribbony track of some sea-worm, as if it had been important". She later notices, "the hem of her skirt had become quite irregular, she saw, with black scallops of heavy water" (V 68). Voss can philosophise about uncharted territory in this way because he has the possibility of venturing out and discovering the desert. Some months later, Voss is "seated on his horse and intent on inner matters, he would stare imperiously over the heads of men, possessing the whole country with his eyes" (V 165). For Laura, this can *only ever be* an imaginative journey. Where he talks of great areas of sand, she merely traces her toe along the ground. She corresponds to his dreams of walking along the bottom of the sea by tracing a sea worm, and feeling the weight of water on her skirt. She can only put her toe into the vast ocean in front of her.

The hem of Laura's skirt becomes another symbol of her restriction to domestic life. She is weighed down, tethered by her own dress to her fate as a woman. She is never able to achieve Voss' physical freedom, and this is signified by the way her dress touches the very particles of the earth that Voss is free to explore. Voss' fellow explorer, Palfreyman, comments on the beauty of Laura's riding whip. This is of great regret to Laura, as she knows she will never be able to really use the fine object: "'In the beginning it pleased me because it was something unusual, and foreign. I liked to think I might visit foreign places' […] All the while her black mare was pawing up the dust, some of which, she noticed from a distance, was settling on the hem of her skirt" (V 114).

The same notion occurs to Laura as she watches the *Osprey* set sail from her balcony; the ship is to take the explorers to Newcastle where they will begin their expedition across the continent. "Yes, they have got away,' said Laura, in a clear, glad, flat voice". From her position on the balcony, Laura observes an ocean that promises something vastly different to that of her expression: "The wind was moving *Osprey* out towards the Heads. The blue water, now ruffled up, was full of little white waves. *Osprey* continued in her pride of superior strength. She was not yet shaken" (V 129). Her observation of the ship is experienced from the vantage point of the balcony. Yet despite this, Laura has projected herself, imaginatively, emotionally, onto the boat. She is identifying with the freedom of the ship. Her position on the balcony places her infuriatingly between her home life, and the life of the explorers aboard the ship. As she steps out onto the balcony, holding its tether: "her skirt, which was of pale colour and infinite coolness, streamed behind her" (V 129). She is at once tethered to the household and yet begins to sense her fluidity, as demonstrated by the skirt's 'streaming'. Laura is accompanied by her cousin Belle and Rose Portion, "The three women watched the ship" (V 129), writes White, their position all in a row emulated by the starkness of the sentence that sits on a line of its own. All three women appear to be observing what they cannot grasp. The experience is just out of reach. From this space, the effect of their exclusion is all consuming,

> Wind and sea were tossing the ship. Gusts of that same wind, now fresh, now warm, troubled the garden, and carried the scents of pine and jasmine into the long balcony. The two young women could not have told whether they were quickened or drugged, until a kind of feverish melancholy began to take possession of them. Their bodies shivered in their thin gowns; their minds were exposed to the keenest barbs of thought; and the whole scene that their vision embraced became distinct and dancing, beautiful and sad (V 130).

After which Laura becomes quietly exasperated. There is an imaginative release from confinement here as she identifies with the ship. She resents all of the moments she shared with Voss, now finding them painful and unbearable in their minuteness, despite their intensity. This distresses her so much she bites her own lip and makes it bleed. All the while, her cousin, Belle, remaining on the balcony and sensing the foreboding atmosphere says to Laura: "Laura, what has come over us? What is happening? […] Tell me Laura, what is it?" (V 131). "I cannot,' Laura cried, 'when there is nothing to tell'" (V 131). Like the balcony on which they stand, the scene captures the immensity of the surroundings and the women's tentative and small place within it. Laura has "nothing to tell" because what she has sensed on the balcony cannot be fully articulated. It was a provisional experience only. Experiences she has come to desire for their intensity but despise for their short duration and limitations.

White consistently expresses Laura's desire to remove herself from restrictive situations. This refers to her removal from uncomfortable circumstances, spatial constrictions, and private withdrawals. We learn of her loneliness and a desire for companionship. We learn that she longs to be understood, and seen. White wants to explore the differences between Laura's situation, and Voss', and then bring them together to create a kind of synthesis that will open out into a more complex existence. This existence extends out into the desert:

> Or she closed her eyes, and they rode northward together between the small hills, some green and soft, with the feathers of young corn ruffled on their sides, others hard and blue as sapphires. As the two visionaries rode, their teeth were shining and flashing, for their faces anonymous with love, were turned, naturally, towards each other, and they did, from time to time, catch such irrelevantly personal glimpses. What they were saying had not yet been translated out of the air, the rustling of corn, and the resilient cries of birds (1959, p175).

White consistently begins his sentences with a conjunction. In the scene above he begins with the word 'Or', and it is indirectly related to what has come before. Prior to this vision she is experiencing perfumes of peach amongst the trellises and it transports her. It is connected to her ability to remove herself imaginatively. What 'Or' signifies is an alternative. White embellishes and brings to life Laura's alternative by allowing us to linger there with her. White then brings Voss into the scene. White illustrates that Laura was *purposefully* imagining an alternative. Laura and Voss are described as "two visionaries". We are alerted to what they can see and what they can imagine. This imagination is infected with a sense of madness, as well as doom, as their teeth violently "shine" and "flash". But what they are imagining, and what the violence indicates remains unclear, "not yet translated out of the air". At this point, what we recognise is that in this imaginative space, their connection is on the move, unconfined, and mobile, hence the conjunctions which preserve the sense of continuity and complication. Their connection is merging with sounds of the surrounding air. The beat of the sentences emulates the riding of their horses: the unison of Laura and Voss. The conjunctions are also preserving the idea that Laura is able to effectively imagine an alternative life. She is able to figuratively remove herself from the confinement of her circumstances.

Much later in the text, at the culmination of Laura and Voss' communication across the desert, Laura contracts a fever. This occurs at the same time Voss is nearing his own death. Her sickroom is a space of high intensity and anguish. These emotions are not only experienced by Laura, but also by those who attempt to comfort her. G.A. Wilkes observes, "The box of pears allowed to rot in the sickroom, so that Laura may share Voss' experience of putrescence, makes the parallel [between Laura and Voss] too forced […] this over-insistence is apt to weaken the novel where it should be strong" (Wilkes 1970, p134). So often critics miss an opportunity to explore an episode from Laura's perspective. Wilkes does not take into account that the rotting pears demonstrate more than the connection between Voss and Laura. The image also speaks to Laura's experience of being confined to one space, where objects in that space are animated in accordance with *her* agony. Things in the space grow wretched and distorted, as Mr. Bonner remarks upon entering his niece's room: "which gave him the impression of being littered with fragile secrets, so that he was forced to walk delicately, his every step an apology, and his thick, fleshy body looked quite grotesque" (V 378). The room itself spreads a kind of fever; the house is a carrier of the inhabitants' distress. Mr. Bonner carries his niece the box of pears up the "spongy stairs". Even the pears inside their box, their own room, begin to ruin: "the ripe fruit for all its perfection, was jumping and jostling as if it had been cheap and woody" (V 377).

As they are for Woolf, rooms in White's text are a metaphor for the mind. Both Laura and Voss are particularly fond of retreating to their thoughts. When Voss felt uncomfortable, he also imagined himself returned to "his own room". His desire to explore the desert is indeed a desire motivated by his propensity to isolate and expand himself. He represents for Laura access to a country she feels "is not hers" physically and socially – it becomes hers imaginatively. The 'desert', as they see it, is as vast as the expanses of one's mind.

Part Five: Parallel Lives

After Voss' death, Laura's survival marks her movement beyond Voss' journey. While Laura's life is effectively unchanged, she is able to reinforce and substantiate the spiritual understanding she has gained of the world. Laura has embraced the other side of herself that she discovered through her relationship with Voss. She prevails beyond Voss' failed physical undertaking. Laura succeeds at becoming the diverse character she desired to be and matures as a powerful figure.

Laura asserts the idea of ascendency: "When man is truly humbled, when he has learnt that he is not God, then he is nearest to becoming so. In the end, he may ascend" (V 411). "The statement is […] Laura's, and the point may be that Voss' history has demonstrated it to her" (Wilkes 1973, p140). It is more than demonstrated *to* her, it is demonstrated *by* her. Laura is not passive. She writhes against her own conflict between pride and humility and suffers too - necessarily so. As the abject female she experiences anguish and lives through it. Additionally, she continues as a kind of orator and living testament to her discoveries. Her life has been and remains an expression of the balance between pride and humility, and the importance of relationships. Additionally, the presentation of Laura at the end of the novel as a complex and oracular figure ensures that her position in the text is more elusive than absolute.

Understanding her limitations, Laura engages where she can in a series of personally anguishing experiences that are paralleled by her relationship with Voss. She writes to him: "My dear Ulrich, I am not nearly so proud as to claim to be humble, although I do attempt, continually, to humble myself. Do you also? I understand you are entitled, as a man, to a greater share of pride, but would like to see you humbled. Otherwise I am afraid for you. […] Let us understand this, and serve *together*" (V 256). Pride and humility are the two emotions that Laura and Voss must reconcile. This request of Laura's suggests, that only *together* are they able to find that balance. Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* argued that we needed a sexual revolution; that abolishing ideas of male supremacy would require an integration of the separate sexual subcultures, an assimilation by both sides of previously segregated human experience (Millett, 1972, p62). Patrick White illustrates the kind of assimilation Millett describes through Laura and Voss' experience. It is a story about what they have experienced together, imaginatively or otherwise. Beyond that, he presents Laura as exercising a greater amount of agency over her emotions than Voss. It is she who more significantly represents this combination of them both.

Wilkes writes of Voss' journey: 'Voss' attainment of humility is nevertheless not so compelling dramatically as his resistance of it had been. When therefore Laura Trevelyan in an interval in her fever, announces: "When man is truly humbled, when he has learnt that he is not God, then he is nearest to becoming so. In the end, he may ascend" (V 411), this is something that the novel has hardly demonstrated' (1973, p140). Wilkes makes this point because ascendency is something Voss has hardly demonstrated but that does not mean it has not been demonstrated elsewhere in the novel. As Brady points out: "Voss and members of the expedition are not to achieve their goal by defiance but by relying on the invisible filaments (hinted at) that link people with one another and the rest of creation" (Brady, 1979, p182). Laura and Voss' attainment of humility lies in their relationship with one another. That being said, what their newfound humility affords them is quite different for each. Brady previously suggests: "*Voss* does not end projectively. The frontiers are closed; what demands attention is what is objectively given […] The journey Voss and Laura make returns, completing itself and them. At the end, she belongs to society and his spirit belongs to the land more fully than at the beginning" (V 176). I would argue that the frontiers are *not* closed and that the novel *does* end projectively. The novel's trajectory is more reliant on Brady's other observation regarding "invisible filaments". These imaginative threads within the narrative are crucial to Laura's ascendancy in the text, "Laura's glistening green laughter was threaded through the days. Heady days. Green was garlanding the windows, the posts of balconies, the knobs of gateways, in celebration" (V 169). The journey Voss and Laura make does not simply return and complete them. Their journeys run parallel but only up to a point. My suggestion is that Laura moves beyond Voss, that the frontiers are not closed, and Laura does not belong to society. Although Laura accepts her situation as a mother to Mercy and as a schoolmistress, everything Laura discovers enables her to move beyond the society in which she lives. Her "green laughter", a response to having received a letter from Voss after his departure, adorns gateways, windows, and balconies because these are consistent spaces of transition. Whilst it may seem as though she remains rooted to society, her imaginative escape continues to give her greater agency than an ordinary domestic situation would indicate. This becomes even more pronounced after Voss's death, as I will examine.

After Voss' Departure:

After Voss' departure there are key points in the narrative that make evident Laura's change from a confined to an unconfined female subject in this novel. O.N. Burgess suggests in his essay: 'Patrick White, his critics, and Laura Trevelyan',

> Whatever White intended, it is Laura who emerges as the truly central character of the novel, one more fully and logically developed than Voss. […] During the expedition her thoughts keep pace with his; her comments from her sick-bed telepathically annotate Voss' experiences; and in the final section of the novel Laura is indisputably the center, while Voss is important, not intrinsically but as part of a system of thinking and feeling and prognostication in Laura's mind (1961, p54).

I would go further in suggesting that Laura is not just annotating Voss' experiences but also imaginatively experiencing them for herself. After Voss' departure the two separate narratives, Laura's and Voss', begin to merge and overlap. Chapters are no longer dedicated to two different locations. And throughout those chapters devoted to Voss' expedition, Laura is consistently present either imaginatively or as projection. While Voss is present for Laura also, it is her journey alongside him that has greater significance because it liberates her from the household. After Voss' death, it might seem as though Laura automatically becomes the center of the novel, but this has always been her role, "We may think what we will of the didacticism that informs the final conversations of the novel. There is no doubt, however, that White, having sufficiently cleared his heroine of any charge of priggishness, takes these conversations seriously and takes Laura seriously" (1961, p56). To concur with Burgess, once Laura is taken seriously, not simply as a side-plot, her role in the novel as heroine and protagonist is convincing**.**

Aside from their initial meetings, the narratives of Laura and Voss have been separated. This continues after Voss' departure, but only for so long. As Laura grapples with experiences of confinement and attempts achieving humility, Voss is experiencing his own mortifications in the desert. Laura appears when Voss displays feelings of affection for his male companions. Laura is a disturbing figure in that she reminds Voss of what he believes to be weaknesses: humility and companionship. She is a symbol of his feminine sensibilities. White is assaulting the masculine sense of individuality. He interrupts Voss' 'solo' journey with the projection of Laura, and surrounds Voss with the companionship of characters like Palfreyman and Le Mesurier.

White has established a relationship between confinement and the imaginary. In this case confinement refers to the restricting conditions of women's lives, and how that confinement encourages introspection. Laura's character presents the struggle between women's limited lives and the only alternative: the limitlessness of the imaginary. But Laura also learns of the limitations of internal space – that it produces a confinement of its own. This continues to be played out within the household she occupies both physically and metaphorically.

> 'Laura is suffering from an unhealthy imagination', says Mrs. Bonner to her niece […] 'Lord, give me patience, "she [Laura] said", 'If truth is not acceptable it becomes the *imagination* in others' (V 241).

In the quote above both speakers use the term 'imagination' negatively. Importantly, Laura mocks the criticisms of her Aunt and Uncle. They have no tolerance for the possibilities of the imaginary. And in this circumstance they cannot endure Laura's imagination. They use the term to politely refer to delusion. Laura is determined and insistent - the imaginary is not a negative term for her, it is a powerful tool that provides possibility. White ensures that Laura can sense the truth through her imagination.

As Laura attempts to accept and welcome Rose's child into her household and into her life, Voss struggles with newfound and unwelcome companionship in the desert. White shows us his experience in contrast to hers to demonstrate that Voss is resistant to certain experiences, he exemplifies the singularity of masculinity. Voss' relationship with his fellow travellers - particularly Judd, Le Mesurier, and Palfreyman – gives insight into his weaknesses. His relationship with them reveals the emotional nature of his demise. Voss envies Judd's natural strength and skills for survival, but believes them to be primitive. Le Mesurier is a poet and thinker whose openness unnerves Voss' fierce privacy. Palfreyman learns to accept the humble existence in the desert in a way that feels Christ-like to Voss. They exist in relation to Voss and disturb his pride. The scenes that take place in the cave after they are forced to take shelter having lost most of their belongings at a dangerous river crossing especially reveal Voss' struggle. What is seemingly an enclosed and humble space becomes a place of public torture for Voss. The men are forced to bare their souls and some are unable to survive the exposure.

Judd, the landowner, has a natural humility. Voss almost always feels superior to his fellow travellers, but he feels particularly threatened by Judd, "He did not object to Judd as a convict, but already suspected him as a man" (V 143). Voss understands Judd as a simple man, with strength and ability necessary for the journey. But as a "man" Voss believes Judd to be incapable of experience the depth of thought he hopes to enjoy. "Judd excused himself, saying: 'I am a simple man'. Which can read: *most complex*, Voss suspected" (V 143). When Judd says this to Voss he means it in the sense that he has learned to live simply, to balance his emotions and survive. Learning of Judd's criminal history and repentance, Voss is unnerved. "I detest humility', he said. 'Is man so ignoble that he must lie in the dust, like worms?'" (V 161). Ironically, in response, Voss' impulse the next day is to write to Laura. Having spent the night at Rhine Towers, watching the children at the house, Voss "was purged since yesterday, possessed even by some of the humility which Palfreyman extolled as a virtue" (V 162). Voss reluctantly begins to experience the effects of humility, and he does so by remembering Laura, "For all her grace and superficial self-possession, her cold mouth and warm eye, her small ears, which he now recalled in extraordinary detail, down to the last transparent curve, it was in the quality of a rather stubborn innocence that her greatest strength lay. She herself was probably unconscious of what he has but now discovered" (V 164). Voss wrongly assumes that Laura has a natural sensibility, but Laura, who is highly conscious, has been struggling with her emotions as well. As 'living simply' is something Voss has not been able to achieve, he continues to suspect Judd, and be jealous of him. He is "most complex" because Voss does not understand him. Judd's private and simple existence is something Voss aspires to. But Voss belittles Judd's life as humble to an untrustworthy extent. Judd explains he has received no education, read no books, but has a "'bush-sense', and he has survived until now. Again, this is an intelligence Voss both resents and desires.

> It was necessary for him to enjoy complete freedom, whereas this weight had begun to threaten him […] But his soul must experience first, as by some spiritual *droit de seigneur*, the excruciating passage into its interior. Nobody here, he suspected, looking round, had explored his own mind to the extent that would enable him to bear such experience. Except perhaps the convict, whose mind he could not read. The convict had been tempered in hell, and, as he had said, survived (1959, p146).

Voss is unnerved. He literally tastes his own bitterness as he nervously "chews his moustache". What is it that has allowed Judd to 'survive'? There is significance to this prophecy, given that Judd will be the sole survivor of this journey. Judd has been made humble. He is the antithesis of Voss, and Voss recognises this. Despite this obvious warning, Voss gathers himself by relying once again on his pride and superiority. What he should have recognised was that Judd's natural humility is what allows him to "bear the experience" (V 146).

Disturbed by the friendly connection between Judd and Palfreyman, Voss suffers from arrogance and superiority: "Then he almost experienced a state of panic for his own isolation". Voss feels panic at his own isolation because it is not as he imagined it would be. The reality is that he has mistaken the true feeling of isolation: that as he feels more isolated, his experience is a tortured one. For all his talk for being able to bear the experience, Voss seems to be unraveling much quicker than the others. This is because he is unable to overcome his pride, because he suffers in public, and because the further they move inward the closer and more exposed they all become. Voss battles with this all the way: "No man is strong who depends upon others. And as he went inside he thought of the contempt he bore Palfreyman" (V 148).

Voss' contempt of Palfreyman continues throughout the expedition: "Palfreyman sowed, and the miraculous seeds germinated, standing up on pale threads, then unfolding. It was very simple and very quick. Several times on the crucial day, the man emerged from the cave to assist in the act, the importance of which was enormous" (V 307). This act of sowing seeds for the group by Palfreyman is performed in direct comparison to Voss' act of cutting the greens and stuffing them in his mouth. Voss could not stand the delicate, nurturing, selfless act of Palfreyman's. He cuts the gentle seedlings and crushes any efforts to survive in a manner that would require gentleness rather than strength. Voss has become obsessed with the parting of the group. He wants to know which individuals will follow him. After eating Palfreyman's greens he questions him about the objects lost in the river, and whether he intends to split off with Judd. He has watched them fend for themselves in profound and important ways, ways that have had meaning beyond the objective. And he questions Palfreyman here on the objects lost so as to draw his attention back to the original, organised expedition. Palfreyman says the lost items are "immaterial", Voss replies "they were the object of your joining the expedition" (V 308). They have become a symbol of why they are there, and Voss has not been able to accept the journey without them so easily. With regards to splitting off into parties, Palfreyman says he is “not of any party”, and then rephrases: “Perhaps I expressed myself badly. Shall we say: I am of all parties?” To which Voss replies, “That is worse, you will be torn in pieces”. “If it is necessary”, Palfreyman replied” (V 308). Palfreyman is embracing others, and the space, and a life of multiplicity. Voss detests this development and warns that the result is a violent rip into pieces, that you lose your wholeness. Their experience is an affront to his masculine singularity. He knows he is grappling under a misapprehension on this journey, that the others have seemingly found a peace and understanding that has only disturbed and ruined him.

Meanwhile, as Laura moves ahead with her plans to adopt Rose’s child back at the Bonner’s household, she imaginatively appears to Voss at his most vulnerable moments. The more willing she becomes in her own endeavours, the more forceful her presence throughout Voss’ expedition. They proceed to punctuate each other’s lives. After Laura receives a letter from Voss in which he has proposed marriage, her enthusiasm intensifies. There appears to be no limit to the extent to which Laura adopts Rose’s child and Laura’s private belief is that the child belongs to her in some way: “She walked through the house protecting her achievement, in her sensuous, full dress of grey watered silk. Of singing silk. Her heart was full. Sitting in the same room with her dull and heavy maid, the mistress did not lose her buoyancy” (V 242). This moment shows the clear connection between Laura’s private thoughts and her surroundings. However, she detaches her maid from her cheerfulness, despite Rose being the catalyst for her joy. The language suggests fluidity in her way of thinking. She is walking “through” the house. And she is protected by her imagination. This is then visible in her dress. She is “buoyant”. Her joy gives her movement. Unlike Voss, Laura’s private and public world is merging and this pleases her. It is a public display of happiness based on a private experience.

The difficulty is when Laura inhabits her imagination vehemently and wholly. Whilst this allows her greater imaginative agency, it limits her ability to acknowledge anything else or to see the situation objectively:

> They would walk in the garden, in the dusk, by mysterious, involved paths that the mistress chose. In the wilder, scrubbier parts of the garden, the skirts of the two women would catch upon the fallen bark and twigs […] Then, in the mysterious garden, obsessed by its harsh scents, she would be closest to her

> unborn child, and to the love of her husband. Darkness and leaves screened the most intimate forms, the most secret thoughts (V 242).

In the garden, Laura is activating the limitlessness of the imaginative space. This is the same garden in which her and Voss experienced similar sensual revelations. In the garden boundaries are dissolved, forms change, and Laura is able to fully relish her imaginary world. Her imagination grows more sinister, more dangerous, and all the more enticing.

This scene, which deals with imagination, also emphasises the body: "In the evening garden their trusting bodies glimmered together, always altering their shape, as the light inspired, then devoured. Or they would sit, and again it could have been the forms of two women, looking at each other, as the one tried to remember the eyes of her husband. If she could have looked deeper, deeper, deep enough" (V 243). Laura continues to imagine Voss beside her, with her. Laura is imagining the conception of the child. She physically feels the baby kick inside of her, the "shape her love had taken". And then claims, she "was returned to her actual body". Laura is beginning to merge her imagined landscape with her actual one. It has become a bodily experience, not an out-of-body experience.

Laura is eventually confronted by reality. Rose's real and public demise exposes Laura's weakness. The child is called Mercy, no doubt because Rose sought a final forgiveness for her indiscretion. It is an ultimate act of humility. And then Rose dies. She is lowered into a coffin, a final enclosure. Laura is seeing clearly the circumstance for the first time: the starkness of Rose's death confirms the restricted life Rose led.

Laura's previous 'buoyancy' is abruptly deflated. She is tormented by the wind and made ridiculous and clumsy now in her skirts. In Rose she has experienced humility but remains plagued by pride. She writes to Voss to relieve herself of this discovery but feels that she has been a fool: "Finally, I believe I have begun to understand this great country which we have been presumptuous enough to call *ours*, and with which I shall be content to grow since the day we buried Rose. For part of me has now gone into it. Do you know that a country does not develop through the prosperity of a few landowners and merchants, but out of the suffering of the humble?" (V 256). Laura acknowledges the idea of short-lived humility and the ever-changing condition of that emotion, "Laura Trevelyan's baby grew. She washed it and powdered it, and wrapped it up tight, but with that humility which lately she had learnt, or rediscovered, for humility is short-lived, and must be born again in anguish" (V 252). The child becomes a symbol of her humility; growing, changing, female, and from the womb of a woman who lived shortly giving birth to her in anguish. Laura is *learning.* And as she does so she thinks of Voss' journey. "Could I forget my own husband? […] As one takes one's own face for granted, so it was, at least she hoped, staring at her reflection in the glass. He is never farther removed" (V 256). It is important that Laura is looking at her own reflection before she imagines Voss. She sees her own face. Voss imagines her face on his journey also, parallel to these moments. Laura is constant.

Laura's sense of her public and private lives is beginning to be reconciled. It is a painful and humiliating experience for her, but she persists. She persists because she can see now that in order to find some peace she needs to balance her internal and external experiences. Voss' experience is somewhat different.

The scenes in the cave allow each male character on the expedition to experience humility at the most basic level: "The simplicity and truthfulness of the symbols was at times terribly apparent, to the extent that each man interpreted them according to his own needs and level" (V 298). Voss vigilantly and painstakingly resists any act of humility: "Every one of them was by now the worse for the privations he had endured, and as soon as mules and horses had been unloaded and unsaddled, then hobbled and turned free, the whole human company was glad to huddle in the shelter of the caves" (V 298). The caves become the opposite of the desert space. They represent confinement. This confinement means Voss has to face his fear of social interaction. The confinement of the space requires him to recognise the limits of his campaign. Whilst his "own room" was a safe haven for his anxiety around people, this space is filled with the people he considers beneath him. Worse still, he realises he is becoming reliant. He has become dependent upon those whom he despises. He felt above them all, and he resents that this situation has leveled them out.

Because they are too close - he is too close to the others – his explorations are no longer private, "The natural sequence of events soothe the superior being in his cave, to the extent that he might have fallen asleep if the gelatinous, half created world had not loomed too close, reminding him of disagreeable things" (V 301). As he journeyed to the center of the desert, he also desired to journey closer to the center of his mind. But this is interrupted by the necessary dependency he sees the others accept. And it limits his ability to hide/avoid his difficulty in the public space. White's use of irony is a way of inflicting further humiliations on his characters.

As I have shown, the narratives of Laura and Voss begin to overlap. As the two grapple with their emotions the imaginative episodes start to appear more frequently. This is significant because while it highlights the power of their connection, it also reveals Laura's agency and Voss' downfall. "Laura's perhaps truly feminine point is that Voss is bound to be defeated and, therefore, there is no virtue in trying so hard" (Burgess, 1961 p55). As they ride together imaginatively during the final stages of the expedition, Laura is a stronghold for Voss that he resents. She accepts her own weaknesses and is adjusting them on this journey where Voss cannot.

> So they rode through hell, that was scented with the *Tannenbaum,* or hair blowing. His mouth was filled with the greenish tips of hair, and a most exquisite bitterness.
> 'You are not in possession of your faculties,' he said to her at last.
> 'What are my faculties?' she asked.
> Then they were drifting together. They were sharing the same hell, in their common flesh, which he had attempted so often to repudiate (V 387).

The expressionistic nature of this passage exemplifies the agony of Voss and the determination of Laura. She is the more insistent and the more constant, "I shall not fail you, said Laura Trevelyan. 'Even if there are times when you wish me to, I shall not fail you'" (V 387). She is referring as much to her own purpose as his, for now it is clear that she too must survive this test of will.

Survival becomes the sole purpose of the travellers as the expedition becomes increasingly condemned to fail. *How* each accepts their fate is the more significant. When Le Mesurier is gripped by fever after the expedition goes awry, the connection he has with Voss becomes apparent. In each other they have recognised a spiritual similarity. During a storm that produces 'green lightning' (a colour associated with possessiveness and also Laura's emotional effect on her environment), Voss admits "he had already sensed, early in their association, that the young man was possessed of a gristly will, or daemon, not unlike his own. Now smiling his approval, the German's lips were tinged with the green lightning" (V 266). Ironically it is their mutual determination and attraction to greatness that ultimately humbles them. Their bond increases and Le Mesurier comes closer to defeat, "Of course, we are both failures,' he said, and it could have been a confession of love" (V 290). Laura is the woman whose 'green laughter' has spread across the landscape, and Voss recognises it as a kind of taunt at his inadequacies. Themes of gender synthesis, and spatial contraction and expansion help the reader understand the complexities of Voss' constant state of conflict. But it is Laura who becomes the more impressive. Her presence is so powerful that Le Mesurier also senses her influence: "For some reason obscure to himself, he began also to recall, as he did frequently in those desert places, the extraordinary young woman that had ridden down to the wharfside" (V 291).

Frank Le Mesurier slits his own throat. In his poetry he described "Humility as his brigalow", in accordance he sits himself against a tree and humbly takes his own life. Before doing so he deliberately questions Voss. Indigenous capturers surround them and their hope for survival is dwindling.

> "What is your plan, then?"
> "I have no plan," replied Voss, "but will trust to God". He spoke wryly […] "I am to blame," said Voss, "if that confession will make some amends".
> He sat humbly holding a little leaf.
> "If you withdraw," Le Mesurier began,
> "I do not withdraw," Voss answered. "I am withdrawn".
> And he crumpled up the dry leaf, Le Mesurier heard (V 404).

Voss' distinction is significant: he is already withdrawn. His confession is that he is a withdrawn human being, unable to connect with anything other than his own will. His pride is too strong to admit defeat. Laura recognised this in Voss from the beginning. She is not withdrawn; she has been drawn out by her relationships.

Voss is affected by his relationships but his resistance to them is much stronger, "Voss, Palfreyman, and Laura continued to walk towards the cave. The selflessness of the other two was a terrible temptation to the German. At times he could have touched their gentle devotion, which has the soft glossy coat of a dog. At other moments, they were folded inside him wing to wing, waiting for him to soar with them. But he would not be tempted" (V 285). 'The German' is so called as a way to distance him from the others, the foreigner. Selflessness is a foreign concept to him, one that he despises because it means dependency, of which he wants no part. He sees giving up and relying on others as a terrible temptation, as a weakness. He likens their devotion to that of a dog, the companionship of which he was so possessive – as we saw in earlier scenes - he killed his own dog rather than see it enjoy the company of others "he would watch most jealously the attempts of other men to win the affection of his dogs" (V 283). White's image of the dog here is used as an expressive motif, instead of considering friendship Voss is describing a disturbed superiority, he implies that friendship would mean they ought to be devoted to him and remain loyal and submissive subjects. He includes Laura in this thought and continues to struggle with the paradox because his opinion of Laura is derogatory: "If Laura did not accept, it was because Laura herself was dog-eyed love" (V 285). Voss shifts between love for her and revulsion, the 'soft glossy coat' is recalled because it represents a protection and dependency he finds unbearable: "At night though his body was sick with the spasms of the dying dog. Until the continuous lovers felt for each other's hand, to hear the rings chatter together. Truly they were married. But I cannot, he said, stirring in his sleep, both kill and have. He was tormented by the soft coat of love. So he at once left it, and walked away. He was his former skeleton, wiry and obsessed" (V 285). That they would be within him, ready to carry him away suggests further still his lack of understanding of what companionship and devotion is. He prefers to liken it to the difference between flesh and bone: "This is the true marriage, I know. We have wrestled with the gristle and the bones before daring to assume the flesh" (V 232). In this way he secures his lonely fate. The protection of another, the reality of another human being frightens him. He remains obsessed with the interior.

Despite his prior private admission of temptation, he demands of himself: "I will not consider the personal appeals of love," he said, "or deviate in any way from my intention to cross this country". If the 'country' has become a metaphor for the mind, this consideration is disastrous because it denies the fundamental requirement for him to make this journey: not to allow his isolation to destroy him. Laura's presence is not enough to save Voss, "So Laura remained powerless in the man's dream" (V 317). She is powerful in her own right but not powerful enough to overcome Voss' pride. As White envisioned, the feminine in the male will always be overwhelmed by masculine pride. The masculine in the feminine on the other hand, the masculine in Laura, becomes a part of a multifaceted greater femininity that prevails precisely because of its adaptable nature. This is not the culturally constructed femininity, but a less restrictive understanding of the gender: that the feminine is the more adventurous spirit.

Voss makes an admission that Laura is more capable than he. White highlights Laura's masculinity in order to illustrate the difference between masculine femininity and feminine masculinity, "She, however, was quite strong and admirable in her thick, man's boots beneath the muddied habit. Her hands were taking his weakness from him, into her own, supple, extraordinarily muscular ones" (V 304). He explores the idea that feelings of humility are intimately connected with gender. He shows the failings of masculinity: that the inherent trait of pride in men is overwhelming. Voss flirts with femininity, it has enormous appeal for him but he can never fully embrace his femininity. Laura however, has been able to embody masculine strength, while maintaining the elements of femininity that afford her a more complex character and spirit. This passage combines the two characters in body and mind and spirit – showing his failings and her strengths. He gets his strength from her. "Yet, her face had retained the expression he remembered it to have worn when she accepted him in spite of his composite nature, and was unmistakably the face of a woman" (V 304). Laura's face is always the dominant reflection. Voss' "composite" nature refers to the notion that he is only conceptually whole but cannot reconcile the many sides of himself. They are very close here, almost the same being. And although it could be read that Laura is Voss' anima, she is also her own being. And the unmistakable face of the woman is hers because she exists as a capable *female*. Laura is a woman with traits of masculinity and femininity who has been able to explore and deploy both. Voss cannot embrace Laura even as his anima, even as a projection, without great difficulty. "Ah Laura, my dear Laura, the man was begging, or protesting"(V 304).

Laura after: A woman of distinction:

As Voss approaches his own death, "he felt that he was ready to meet the supreme emergency with strength and resignation" (V 418). Though he humbly accepts his death, he does die. His death marks his departure from the novel. Voss is beheaded by Jackie, the Aboriginal tracker who had accompanied him on his journey before joining his fellow tribesman in terrorising and murdering the troop of explorers. Voss senses his impending death at the sound of their closing in on him. They have wholly confined him. His 'departure' that I refer to is actually a dissolving into the space. In a sense, he is able to embed himself within Laura's character: "But of greater importance were his own words of love that he was able at last to put into her mouth. So great was her faith, she received these white wafers without surprise" (V 418). Despite his gruesome end, and as the head of the man falls like a melon, the novel asks: "how much was left of the man it no longer represented". The answer: "his dreams fled the air, his blood run out upon the dry earth, which drank it up immediately" (V 419). Only after thinking of Laura are his dreams spread through the landscape. It is important to note that their internal landscapes are contemplated first. This is a sacrifice they experience together: "O God,' cried the girl, at last, tearing it out. 'It is over. It is over.' Laura Trevelyan was now crying. She could not stop. Mrs. Bonner had never heard anything quite so animal, nor so convulsive…" (V 420). Burgess argues: "If there is meant to be a Christ-like action in the novel, it is Laura's willed sacrifice; but she is consistently unpretentious, her sacrificial concern is feminine and domesticated" (1961, p56). Laura was not able to save Voss, and they were never again to come together in reality. But their relationship survives through her. Laura has departed her own life too. She is no longer constrained to the rooms of her home, she has discovered the world: "After lingering with their discoveries, the two figures, unaffected by the interminable nature of the journey, and by their own smallness in the immense landscape, remounted their stout horses and rode on" (V 418).

Laura now understands the world beyond her social environment, "Then Laura met Belle, and they were sisters. At once they erected an umbrella in the middle of the desert" (V 467). The desert has now become a metaphor for the endless possibilities of her existence in this space. A ballroom can now be her desert. Their erection of an imagined umbrella gives them a welcome shelter from others and illustrates their secluded affection for one another – it is the symbol of the protection of Laura's discoveries. It also appears that Laura has a powerful effect on others. She sits in the middle of the room on an oddly placed chair and watches the women "wearing their dresses" (V 467). Laura is the unique one. They call her a "scarecrow". The women are frightened by her because she attempts to help them recognise a greater strength within themselves, and when they can't they sense their own inadequacy: "In her frustration the young person attempted, but failed, to remember the message of the strange woman's eyes, so that it appeared as though she were intended to remain, at least a little longer, the victim of her own inadequacy" (V 467). But it is Mercy who is the true inheritor of Laura's knowledge, "Laura Trevelyan continued to sit in the company of Mercy, who did not care to leave her mother. Bronze or marble could not have taken more inevitable and lasting shapes than the stuff of their relationship" (V 467). This is so different from the fragile and fatalistic descriptions of flesh and bone. Their relationship is given properties of strength and affinity: "The affection she received from one being, together with the detachment from all others, had implanted the daughter a respectful love for the forms of all simple objects, the secrets of which she was trying perpetually to understand" […] The two women were grateful for this humble version of the everlasting attempt" (V 468). It is an honest relationship based on a less superficial understanding of the world around them.

Laura becomes a resident mistress at the Misses Linsley's Academy for Young Ladies – a teacher of young women: 'Only Laura, the eldest, who had accompanied the children, not as a sister, but as a condescending deity, preserved a godlike silence. Beneath her coils of grown-up hair, she made a mystery out of almost everything" (V 460). Laura's mysteriousness is achieved because she has become a woman of knowledge and a woman of the world, and she has managed this without ever having travelled. She has understood the world beyond her limited means, and in this way she has moved beyond the spaces that confined her, "This woman, of the mysterious, the middle age, in her black clothes, was now commanding the room she had practically repudiated" (V 467). Voss repudiated the presence of Laura and the acceptance of failure. Laura now thrives on her experiences of struggle and tortuous relationships. She is no longer dangerously isolated; young women who respect her surround her. She demands a certain elevated status. She remains singular and impressive. She understood what Voss could not, and lived to tell about it:

> I am uncomfortably aware of the very little I have seen and experienced in general, and of our country in particular, […] but the little I have seen is less, I like to feel, than what I know. Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes from death by torture in the country of the mind (V 275).

Laura is the hero of this novel. Burgess argues: "But the whole tenor of the story tells us that, so far as we may call human beings heroic, Laura is such. She remains woman to the end, humanly imperfect in her comforting illusion about Voss" (1961, p57). By my account what Burgess means by her being 'woman to the end' is that she has remained a remarkable female protagonist who has defied any stereotypical representations. It means she is the humble protagonist of a novel appropriately titled after its more egotistical male character. It means she is a survivor. But her final moments in the novel are more than just "comforting illusions". They are the product of an influential and unconventional connection between the two that was energised by her imagination, which as I have argued, is a powerful tool in overcoming the restriction of one's circumstances – her knowledge as it is stated: 'overflows all maps that exist'. And when those who do not understand require practical explanation: "Come, come. If we are not certain of the facts, how is it possible to give the answers?" Laura refers them back to that which has given her knowledge: the unconfined the uncertain, and most importantly the imagined: "The air will tell us," Miss Trevelyan said' (V 478). Laura's relationship with Voss allowed her an opportunity in which to escape her circumstances. But it is Laura who continues to be liberated by the discoveries made through that journey.

Chapter Three: Ellen Roxburgh

Part One: Confinement in the Form of a Masquerade.

> Had the walls but opened at a certain moment, she might have even turned and ran back into the bush, choosing the known perils, and nakedness, rather than the alternative of a shame disguised (FL 392).

In *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), Patrick White explores protagonist Ellen Roxburgh's unease with her identity. Throughout her narrative, Ellen plays multiple female roles. Each role is a representation of confinement. Ellen constantly shows discomfort and awkwardness in these roles. She moves between the role of the farm-girl, the wife, the gentlewoman, the adulteress, the captive, and the widow. Ironically, only in the latter roles is she able to more freely and boldly express herself despite the restrictive and negative connotations the roles prescribe. In his autobiography *Flaws in the Glass,* White fancies that if he was a woman he "might have chosen a whore's life for its greater range in role-playing [...] deluding my male audience of one into thinking I was at his service, then flinging back at him the shreds of his self-importance as he buttoned-up" (1998, p154).

Considering Ellen's more formative roles, P.F. Edelsen explains the contradiction that Ellen feels as her identity as farm-girl and wife is always a "false impression" (1985, 191), and that she actually feels distanced from both her married and her maiden selves (1985, 233). When she breaks with convention (in the extreme during her time as captive) Ellen discovers a more natural and primitive sensibility. Although she suffers from severe guilt upon her return to "civilisation" as the 'widow' or the 'woman in black', Ellen's experience transforms her identity and her future becomes less someone else's design and more her own.

Ellen's passivity presents itself in the form of a female masquerade - in which case, her passivity is reactive. Ellen plays various female roles according to what she believes will please the men in her life. If Ellen is performing womanliness as masquerade (Riviere, 1929, 307), this suggests that there is a less compliant identity behind the mask. Ellen's emergent identity is what I am interested in exploring and it is one that White gives us clues to throughout the novel.

White explores Ellen Roxburgh's passivity by challenging what is "passive" or "inactive". Ellen's passivity concerns her latent or dormant desires that have been concealed by obedience and submission to religious and social codes: "Because she is female, White tells us, she can go only so far on her own. The nature of female socialization has set limits she dare not violate" (Edelsen, 1985, p234). Ellen is constantly ill at ease in her domestic environment. She becomes skilled at recognising and performing what is expected of her in such spaces: namely that as a farmer's daughter and later as gentleman's wife she must be subservient. Suzanne Edgar points out in her reply to Leonie Kramer's review of *A Fringe of Leaves*, 'A Woman's Life and Love', that Ellen's passivity is part of her character and something she is unashamed of. She notes: "Ellen takes on the colouring and the customs of the man she is living with". She considers Ellen's passivity as a kind of protection. I think in a sense this is accurate. Both Edelsen and Edgar's analyses are accepting of Ellen's character and action, but what is missing is an interrogation of what waits to be revealed in Ellen. If Ellen wears masks and plays roles then what is Ellen's true identity – or rather, what is the basic aspect of her identity that has been suppressed by all the masks she wears? In the face of dispossession, subservience and oppression, what should be of interest is the desires lying dormant and how they reveal themselves.

There is an order to how we understand Ellen, and how she comes to understand herself. White reveals Ellen's character by expressive means, via what we have come to recognise as his unique demonstrations of his female protagonist's private/public personality, unusual physicality, and the tense and unusual nature of her relationships and interactions with others. White uses reflection to introduce us to her in the opening chapter as we see her first through the eyes of some of her antitheses: only after judgment from the women in the carriage are we introduced to Ellen from her own perspective. The effect of such an introduction immediately disturbs our first impression of Ellen, forcing readers to ask the same question as the more "civilised" Miss Scrimshaw and Mrs. Merivale ask themselves after they send the Roxburghs off on their journey back to England from Australia: who is Ellen Roxburgh?

The entire first chapter is peppered with these tricks of reflection and synonyms of confinement. As they bump along in the carriage it is agreed that Ellen is a "mystery", Miss Scrimshaw fears she is "unveiling" herself, and both are suspicious of Ellen as a "silent woman". Discussing the impression Mrs. Roxburgh left on them the women concur they have been troubled by her. But Miss Scrimshaw has been buoyed by it, she explains: "I cannot give you an exact account, Mrs. Merivale,' she said, 'of the impression Mrs. Roxburgh made on me. Unless – to put it at it's plainest – she reminded me of a clean sheet of paper which might disclose invisible writing – if breathed upon. Do you understand?" (FL 20). Ellen's mysteriousness unnerves Mrs. Merivale "who had never ever been troubled unless during the journey on a dray into the interior of New South Wales". This instinct about Ellen's character is also a self-reflection, from one woman to another – one Mrs. Merivale would rather suppress. Miss Scrimshaw finishes her thought: "I will tell you one thing,' Miss Scrimshaw vouchsafed, 'Every woman has secret depths with which even she, perhaps, is unacquainted, and which sooner or later must be troubled" (FL 20).

Ellen's physiognomy is purposefully conservative as she attempts to conceal her restlessness in social settings.

> She wore her hair parted straight, and encouraged it to hang in the flat sleek loops prescribed by the fashion of the day. In contrast to the dark complexion deplored by others, the eyes of a grey probably bred from blue, were candid or unrewarding according to the temper of those who inquired into them. This no doubt was what had aroused suspicion in the ladies whose visit was just past; or it could have been the mouth, on which circumstances had forced a masculine firmness without destroying a thread of feminine regret or its charm or colour (FL 27).

"Feminine regret" refers to Ellen's resentment. Like Joan Riviere's discussion of Ernest Jones' case study in her essay 'Womanliness as Masquerade': "these are women who wish for recognition of their masculinity [power, independence] from men and claim to be the equals of men, or in other words, to be men themselves. Their resentment however, was not openly expressed; publicly she acknowledged her condition of womanhood" (1929, p305). Ellen's facial expression has a combination of hardness and softness, masculinity and femininity. Ellen is aware of having to stifle parts of her character – she has not yet had the opportunity to fully appreciate who she is. Her "feminine regret" is threaded throughout the text and this is a motivation for her masked expression. The charm and colour of her mouth evokes what has been concealed by circumstance. Her circumstances have forced a masculine firmness (the result of masculine superiority, patriarchy) across her mouth, but her feminine regret is not destroyed, it is still perceptible.

If we consider closely again the opening scenes: set for departure aboard the ship to England, Ellen 'takes the air'. In striking contrast to the earlier description of her face, the rush of ocean winds changes her mood and her expression. The captain of the ship, another character trying to make her out, notices this: "Possibly Mrs. Roxburgh was only trying to test her courage in a man's world, though the captain suspected there was more to it than that. He would not have known how to express it, but in his still centre, round which many more considerable storms at sea had revolved, he sensed that his passenger had an instinct for mysteries which did not concern her" (FL 46). When the captain considers Ellen in this context, he refers to himself as having the still center, as though the world is revolving around him. Whereas for Ellen, as the world revolves around her it stirs something within her. She must be courageous in a man's world, precisely because it is not a woman's. The captain misses the point: the mysteries seem to belong entirely to Ellen, while the men cannot fathom and "don't know how to express" their own. The point being that there is something significant happening to Ellen and she is beginning to recognise it, she is stirred, moved, and impressed by it. Ellen does not have a still center, and that makes all the difference. The women and the captain have both recognised something mysterious in Ellen, and now Ellen is sensing it herself.

Carolyn Bliss suggests that Ellen chooses to accept her situation and position in society. She writes that "Ellen Roxburgh appears to us as ultimately limited, but in her case, the limits are elected and self-imposed" (1995, p44). Bliss is referring to the complicated nature of Ellen's agency. This suggests that Ellen is perturbed throughout the narrative but continues to decisively mask her feelings of unease. She remains a character of mystery and does appear troubled even if in command of it. Ellen is performing a double-act.

Ellen's masquerade is employed for various reasons. The question is whether she has a choice in employing it or if the use of the masquerade is forced upon her. "Womanliness as masquerade" is a phrase coined by Joan Riviere (1929). It was Riviere's contention that: "women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (1929, p303). Masculinity for Riviere refers to the unconditional authority and power given to men. She discusses a case study by Ernest Jones: 'The Early Development of Female Sexuality'. Jones analyses the behaviour of a professional woman who despite being successful in her field still sought praise for her performance and the indirect reassurance of sexual attention from particular men, most often father-figures, "To speak broadly, analysis of her behaviour after her performance showed that she was attempting to obtain sexual advances from the particular type of men by means of flirting and coquetting with them in a more or less veiled manner" (1929, p305). The inconsistency of this behaviour led Jones to conclude: "she bitterly resented any assumption that she was not equal to them, and (in private) would reject the idea of being subject to their judgement or criticism" (1929, p305). As I have previously stated, Patrick White is critical of and sympathetic to this behaviour in women: "women are certainly more interesting till they set out to prove themselves the equals of their men as intellectuals or bullies, when their femininity and their natural talents wither away" (White, 1981, p130). In *A Fringe of Leaves,* as Ellen's narrative develops, she is finally able to discover and explore her own desires. Initially however, it is male desire Ellen understands and male desire is what forces her to employ a masquerade.

Ellen Roxburgh is a woman who when trying to prove herself often feels thwarted and embarrassed. As a result Ellen chooses not to assert herself in a way that might jeopardise her welfare, but rather in a way that exhibits womanliness as masquerade. When Ellen takes care of her father we learn that despite his drunkenness and inability to care for himself he physically and sexually abuses her and Ellen remains his obedient daughter for fear of further abuse. Confused by this history with her father, Ellen arguably has similarly conflicting feelings to the woman from Jones' case study: "it was a compulsive reversal of her intellectual performance; and the two together formed the 'double-action' of an obsessive act, just as her life as a whole consisted alternately of masculine and feminine activities" (Riviere, 1927, p306). The only way in which Ellen might gain power over her father would be to have him believe he has gotten what he wants by dominance, despite the fact that she gives him only the impression of control: "Pa grew increasingly dependent on herself to conduct the day-to-day routine" (FL 64), and yet still on a trip to a neighboring town "he cursed her for behaving unsociably or for being an imbecile", before becoming drunk, miserable, and on the final occasion, just when Ellen felt “she might retch if she stayed”, falling into a dresser and dying before “she could take him in her arms” (FL 65).

White reminds readers of this behaviour of Ellen’s through her marriage with Austin Roxburgh. As her husband, Austin is arguably a father figure: a figure of control. Ellen assumes womanliness in order to please and appease her husband. When Ellen attempts to act on any desires more intense to entice her husband, she anticipates his reprisal: “She herself had only once responded with a natural ardour, but discovered on her husband’s face an expression of having tasted something bitter, or of looking too deep. So she replaced the mask which evidently she was expected to wear, and because he was an honourable as well as a pitiable man, she would refrain in future from tearing it off” (FL 68). Just as Riviere contends: “womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she were found to possess it” (1929, p306). If Ellen is assuming and wearing a mask of womanliness, then does she possess a genuine femininity? Riviere suggests that there is no difference: “whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing” (1929, p306).

Austin Roxburgh is introduced to Ellen when he stays as a lodger at her parent’s farmhouse. He arrives looking apprehensive, wrapping himself in his woolen comforter knitted for him by his mother, looking “dejected and fatigued”, he appears to Ellen as “hesitant and downright timid” (FL 52). She finds courage and confidence at his nervousness and even persuades herself that “Mr. Roxburgh needs her protection” (FL 54). However, his status and education intimidates her: “the books stacked in the parlour…robbed her of her new-found confidence” (FL 52). What is first thought of as confidence in herself she comes to recognise as his simple dependence on her “to remind him of the time, to warn him of changes in the weather...” (FL 53). He is attracted to her in a superficial sense, thinking of her in stereotypically feminine ways. Initially she is the idyllic farm-girl: “standing in the light reflected off fuchsias punching a basinful of dough on a scoured table, or again, arms folded against a starched apron–bib as she crossed the yard on some undefined errand. He certainly needed someone. Perhaps he did love her” (FL 61). Ignoring Ellen’s strength of character Mr. Roxburgh’s reasons for marrying her are based on control and artifice: “That he might marry Ellen Gluyas became after all a tenuous possibility on seeing her not only as his wife but also as his work of art…to create a beautiful, charming, not necessarily intellectual, but socially acceptable companion out of what was only superficially compromising material" (FL 61). Mr. Roxburgh's behaviour towards her makes her subservient to the extent that the woman she portrays is the woman he has designed. The not-so-subtle oppressiveness of his remarks and actions throughout their marriage reiterate his expectations and subsequently her subservience:

> Who would have thought that a crude Cornish girl could be made over to become a beautiful and accomplished woman!
> When I used the word "crude" I did not mean to disparage you, my dear. It was to your advantage. The crude lends itself all the better to molding. He was caressing her cheek with the back of his hand. 'In a woman, at any rate. I do not think it applies to a man. Men are too rigid. There is more of a wax in a woman. She is easily impressed!' he pinched her cheek, laughing for his own wit (FL 121).

Mr. Roxburgh again refers to Ellen materialistically; like wax. He implies that a woman is flexible, not in the positive sense but rather as she can be controlled and bent to his will. He has the ability to make her feel ashamed in the same way her father did before him. Mr. Roxburgh and Ellen's father are linked by their ability to shame and oppress her, and her relationship with them causes her to retreat, withdraw, or look outward and imagine greater things. Ellen is forced to mask her true feelings to avoid shame and censure. Ellen's shame and guilt are moral and self-conscious emotions. Moral in that she never believes she can meet the standards of the men in her life, and self-conscious because she is accustomed to seeing herself as an object, as they do. So it is that when they caress her cheeks and speak of the wax in women, they are unknowingly referring to and figuratively reinforcing her masquerade.

As a result, Ellen Gluyas and Ellen Roxburgh become the masks that Ellen wears. She often switches between them as the narrative continues. They are contrasting women but are born from similarly oppressive circumstances. White demonstrates the nature of Ellen's shame through expressionistic configurations, and it is through these molds that Ellen will eventually be able to re-shape herself and transform her shame into a stronger sense of self. As a young girl, Ellen was ashamed of her looks thinking them unladylike and unattractive: "As for chapped hands and red cheeks, Ellen tried rubbing milk as soon as she learned she ought to be ashamed" (FL 48). It is as though from a very young age Ellen has been painfully altering her appearance. She was not admired and was misunderstood as a child, considered boisterous: "Ellen Gluyas was a hoyden by some standards. Pa would have liked a boy, an industrious one, to help about the farm and make amends for his poor husbandry. What he got was a strong girl he did not properly appreciate, who did such jobs as she was asked to perform and drove him home from Penzance when drunk on market day" (FL 48). Describing her childhood White adopts a more industrious tone emulating her methodical existence. He writes that she was "asked to perform" these tasks and errands. It follows that Ellen was asked to perform in other ways as well. Her face is always alluded to in this sense referring us back to the concept of the masquerade. She rubs her cheeks to soften them only for those cheeks to then be violated by her father's abuses:

> While she was still a little girl, he used to stroke her cheeks as though to learn the secrets of her skin. She would feel the horn-thing on his crushed thumb scraping her.
> …
> On one occasion, unable to near it any longer, she cried out, 'Cusn't they see I dun't want to be touched?' and threw him off.
> …
> He brooded and sulked a fair while, but it had been necessary; shame told her she was as much excited as disgusted; she grew more thoughtful as a result, and melancholy on wet afternoons (FL 63).

She is ashamed of herself. She has enticed him and won his affection and therefore is pleased with herself but then she feels disgusted by the kind of pleasure it invokes. It will be important for Ellen to release herself from the repressive influence of shame. In this instance, the masquerade of womanliness is switched. She withdraws and retreats to her own thoughts.

We now appreciate that while Ellen habitually forces her face into a mask, she also has moments in which that mask is dissolved. For example, in the early chapter immediately after she appears before the women, planting a severe smile on her face, "Her mouth grew slacker, and any hardness of the eyes dissolved perceptibly in thought. A lonely childhood, followed by marriage with a man twenty years her senior, had inclined her mind to reverie. Perhaps the most luxurious indulgence was a self-conducted tour through the backwaters of experience" (FL 27). Ellen's private reverie allows her to experience the world in a way not shaped by the men or other forces in her life. Her tours are "self-conducted". And White would have this transition not be simply black and white, her masked self and her unmasked self, but a dissolving from one to the other. For what she has experienced up until this point cannot be separated from her contemplation and re-imagining of it, like Riviere suggests, womanliness and the masquerade are interchangeable.

The Uncanny Legend of Tintagel

Exploring White's expressionist mode of writing closely allows for a more modern interpretation of the women in his novels. There are a myriad ways in which a masquerade has been employed to develop Ellen's multifaceted character. Still on board the ship, having been out on the deck, splashed by water and pummeled by wind, and after Mr. Roxburgh yells at her for looking so unkempt, Ellen considers her reflection in the mirror:

> Then she tore off her scarf and bonnet, which were not so much wet as limp with moisture. So too with all her outer garments. Her habitually well-kempt hair, dulled by salt, had strayed across her cheeks in tails. Her skin, mottled by the imperfect glass and watery stare of dazed eyes, brought to mind some anonymous creature stranded at a street corner in a fog of gin and indecision (FL 49).

Her thoughts bring to mind the awkward J. Alfred Prufrock from T.S. Eliot's poem (1942). Prufrock's well-known fretful experiences in social situations: 'do I dare eat a peach', and social 'indecisions and revisions' echo Ellen's experience. Even more so when you consider Prufrock's visions outside of such settings as far as the yellow fog on windowpanes and the 'mermaids singing each to each'– these images also appear for Ellen as she recalls the legend of Tintagel as told to her by her father.

> Some professed to have heard mermaids singing on the coast above Gluyas's. Pa told tales of tokens and witches, which he half-believed, and of the accommodating white witch at Plymouth. If Ellen wholly believed it was because she led such a solitary life, apart from visits to the cousins, flagging conversation with an ailing and disappointed mother, and the company of a father not always in possession of himself. She was drawn to nature as she would not have been in different circumstances, she depended on it for sustenance, and legend for hope (FL 50).

The Tintagel legend provides Ellen with an alternative fate. It is linked to her story and yet remains slightly different, more romantic, and more dramatic. This ties in with themes of confinement and a kind of double-act. Her current life is limited and solitary. Her father "half-believes" while Ellen wholly believes because she clings to these ideas of escape. White's inclusion of the image of the witch and the mermaids are strikingly female and powerful and he suggests that Ellen is drawn to these women - their offer of hope sustains her. Her own story is similar to this tale of Tintagel, but also markedly different: "Ellen never actually goes to Tintagel so that it retains its mythic purity. Its nearness (it is described as being practically on the doorstep of her parent's farm) is also symbolic. Ellen's summer lodger proves to be her anticipated king, an ironic analogy established by juxtaposition" (Morley 1982, p304). By juxtaposing her actual life with this myth White is making the difficulties of her existence more disparaging. Her King is to be the stuffy Austin: "It was Ellen Gluyas' hope that she might eventually be sent a god. Out of Ireland, according to legend. Promised in marriage to a king, she took her escort as a lover, and the two died of love. Pa confirmed that they had sailed into Tintagel" (FL 51). Their fate does not have them end as intense lovers: their ship is wrecked, and while Austin dies – Ellen survives. So does Ellen make it to Tintagel? "Her journey towards Tintagel is towards freedom, the archetypal quest (Morley 1982, p314)". Morley makes the point that Ellen is constantly seeking escape, as a captive, on the Bristol Maid, and her life as a gentlewoman. But Ellen's journey is not archetypal; her story is not the one she dreams about: she is not sent a god, she is sent Austin. Tintagel is a catalyst for hope, but rather than be linked to a king and to a lover for salvation, Ellen is ultimately a lone survivor. While her relationships with the men provide insights to her own strength, her situation is ultimately determined by her circumstances as a woman. She is much more aligned then with the mysterious mermaids and the accommodating white witch.

It is after we learn of her memory of this legend that Ellen recalls Mr. Roxburgh's imminent arrival at her home, confirming the link to him as her possible King and savior. As she walks with Mr. Roxburgh he tells her she is not dressed properly and that her ambition to see Tintagel is unambitious. He argues that it is not far from her already – unkindly emphasising the cruel irony. This makes her ashamed: ashamed for possibilities seemingly so close but always slightly out of reach, and ashamed that he has belittled her desires. Once again Ellen is inhibited by shame – she has been made to feel ashamed by her father and now experiences the same from Mr. Roxburgh. To feel ashamed with Mr. Roxburgh is a bad omen of what's to come. However, Ellen's reference to Tintagel is about more than a hope to see it. Tintagel is linked to her hopes for adventure and independence. Frustrated by the conversation, her imagination "inspired her to soar amongst the black clouds swollen to bursting above them" (FL 56). She responds to him with strength: "Her improvidence did not prevent her feeling much older, wiser, than this slanted stick of a gentleman. If the storm did burst upon them, she was strong and jubilant enough to steady the reeling earth, while he, poor man, would most probably break, scattering a dust of dictionary words and useless knowledge" (FL 57). Ellen is a survivor. This thought is a prediction of his death by shipwreck and spearing, clutching his copy of Virgil, while she survives.

After two miscarriages, a grief-stricken Ellen is once again seen imagining and longing for Tintagel, "she found herself scratching on an attic window with a diamond, as she had heard told it was possible to write. She printed on the glass TINTAGEL in bold, if irregular letters, and then was ashamed, or even afraid, for what she had done" (FL 77). The act captures her confined condition and her sorrow. She is situated deeply hidden within the house, in the attic, and out of reach. She looks out from a window, an invisible barrier, and uses a diamond (a material which possesses a strength and ability she has only been told of, never experienced, not unlike her own strengths) to write the name of a place she associates with freedom. Ellen then becomes nervous and ashamed, fearful of retribution, confused in her grief, only to reassure herself once again that "neither her husband nor her mother-in-law was likely to climb so high, and those who did would not connect the name with their mistress's thoughts or any part of the real world" (FL 77). This legend continues to sustain her and yet is always slightly out of reach. Feeling fraudulent in her domestic confines and unable to mother a child Ellen continues to fear criticism. She has been taught to feel ashamed – her task now is to gradually un-learn it. With the unusual but effective use of conjunctions at the beginning of sentences/paragraphs, White continues to create points of reference to an alternative:

> But Ellen Roxburgh did not remain for long oppressed: the canvas crowded back around her, together with the sting of spray, both on the deck of *Bristol Maid,* and further off, along the black Cornish coast (FL 50).

White tells us very specifically that she is not to be reduced to a captured/confined woman. The answer to Miss Scrimshaw's early question, who is Ellen Roxburgh, is finally being discovered, and this is illustrated to readers by White's continued use of the expressionistic symbols of reflection and distortion. We acknowledge that her life at present is just a cover, and that Ellen now has a sense of her own direction and she is searching for it. In the obscurity of the reflection in the mirror she can see a different version of herself: unkempt and wild like the mermaids or a witches in the legend of

Tintagel. Ellen continues to imagine the 'black Cornish coast' of Tintagel as described to her by her Father. Ellen is constantly hidden behind veils, reflected in imperfect mirrors, situated behind the glass of an attic window – on the other side of each of these veils, another version of her life is waiting.

Meanwhile, we are drawn back into the restrictions of her home-life. The roleplaying continues as Ellen's Mother-in-Law assists Ellen in playing the part of a lady and gentlewoman. Referred to as the 'old Mrs. Roxburgh' (suggesting the part of the *new* Mrs. Roxburgh is to be played by Ellen) Ellen's mother-in-law feels it necessary to guide Ellen, feeling that she is slightly helpless. There is a compassionate sense of duty in preparing Ellen for her life as a wife and lady of the house,

> Her servants despised her, the young Mrs. Roxburgh could tell; they suspected her of wanting them to re-admit her to a society she had forsworn without sufficient thought for the secrets she was taking with her.
> Old Mrs. Roxburgh, on the other hand, was convinced that this honest and appealing girl could never be admitted to hers except in theory, and her heart began to bleed for her (FL 72).

Ellen seemingly belongs to neither class at this stage. She is not accepted by the servants and is not considered a gentlewoman either. White is reiterating the inauthenticity of both identities. In such a vulnerable state, Ellen takes care to heed her mother-in-law's advice and often corrects herself by imagining old Mrs. Roxburgh's disapproval. It is the cultivation and presentation of a lady, "Mrs. Roxburgh (Ellen) yawned, and forgot that she ought to disguise it" (FL 67). (Notably, after Old Mrs. Roxburgh dies Ellen yawns without worry). Ellen admits she is affecting a "disguise" and her mother-in-law accepts that Ellen can only ever be a gentlewoman "in theory". Thoughtfully, old Mrs. Roxburgh provides Ellen with an outlet that will allow her to express herself more freely. "After her marriage, her mother-in-law had advised her to keep a journal: it will teach you to express yourself, a journal forms character besides by developing the habit of self-examination" (FL 47). It becomes the instrument with which she is able to write her admissions. Once again her true feelings are concealed from the world, hidden in the pages of a notebook. In the diary entries we are privy to some of Ellen's most honest thoughts, rather than see the shift between characters we see the combination of the two, Ellen Gluyas and Ellen Roxburgh, and the acceptance of both gives Ellen confidence. However, it is not long until her enjoyment of it is challenged: "Mrs. Roxburgh wrote in the journal which from being a virtue was becoming a vice" (FL 75). With her newfound confidence Ellen once again feels ashamed of her independent thoughts, and so she guards herself against them, as she has learned to do. She writes:

> Women on the whole are stronger because more knowing than men, for all the knowledge men lay claim to. We also learn to numb ourselves against suffering, whether of the body, or the mind… (FL 75).

Ellen confines her feelings and stifles her imagination. It is something she admits here that women have been trained to do – but significantly she notes that this has in fact made women stronger. This also suggests that by suffering in confinement, her desire for escape is inevitably growing stronger too.

Garnet Roxburgh

The light glinted on his teeth; his arms were open to receive his sister-in-law (FL 86).

Ellen's shame is produced by the recollection of her sensual experiences during this period and her guilt. Ellen's sensuality is repressed by her shame, so White allows readers to trace the contours of her sensuality in the atmosphere and the landscape. Sensuality is always figured in White's novels dramatically, theatrically, and expressionistically, especially in relation to women who have been oppressed. When Ellen meets Austin's brother, Garnet, it awakens the sexual desires linked to her masked identities, "He had something about him which she, the farmer's daughter and spurious lady, recognised as coarse and sensual… she was repelled, not only by the man, but by her own thoughts, which her husband and her late mother-in-law would not have suspected her harbouring" (FL 86). The impression of Garnet reminds her of her misgivings and her latent desires inspiring both repulsion and attraction. This entanglement of coarseness and sensuality is a result of her father's abuse. Ellen's guilt is further exasperated when her husband represses her amorousness, and her mother-in-law's strict guidance stifles any natural urges. Indicatively, after meeting Garnet she is ashamed of all three of her current masked identities: the farmer's daughter, the wife, and the daughter-in-law. Aware of her own inauthenticity Ellen calls herself a "spurious" lady. Now having met Garnet and associated him with those familiar feelings of attraction, shame, and guilt, her identity around him is becoming masked as well.

After meeting Garnet and during a carriage ride in which she is reliving these uncomfortable recollections, she tries to distract herself: "to escape from her inner self she looked out across the country" (FL 83). The shame she feels here is said to make one socially withdraw (Tracy & Robins, 2006, 1399). However, looking out into her environment as a form of escape Ellen finds that the environment around her mirrors her own experience. She cannot seem to escape her feelings. She is struck by the picture of prisoners pushing handcarts loaded with stone: "every face was raised to the sun, teeth bared in sobbing mouths when the lips were not tightly clenched, skin streaming with light and sweat. In contrast to the tanned cheeks and furiously mobile faces, the closed eyelids gave the prisoners the expression of unnatural serenity seen in the blind, and which makes them appear all but removed from the life around them" (FL 84) Their expression captures her imagination because it is a representation of her own feelings of shame and guilt. But where shame is linked to withdrawal, guilt is linked to more reparative behaviour and is more public (Tracy & Robins 2006, 1399). That is, it is understandable that while she is trying to reconcile these feelings, she is empathising with convicts who likely suffer from the same emotions. This image of the expression of the blind alludes to a mask of feeling. They display sereneness on their face that is at odds with their brutal existence. Despite the torture of their routine, they appear as though numb to it. Ellen equates the arduousness of the convict's existence to her experience of marriage and position as wife, "In the novel's skeptical view, savagery begins in so-called 'civilised' society and the account it gives of the brutalities of the convict system as well of the social cruelties of people like Mrs. Merivale and Mrs. Scrimshaw tends to undercut the gentility which Ellen is supposed to have achieved by reason of her marriage to Austin Roxburgh" (Brady, 1995, p53). Ellen makes the connection to herself. She too has described operating as numb to the world around her while displaying a suitably leaden expression. Now, "She could feel her cheeks glowing, not only from the chill, but from the veiled surprises the country had to offer at every turn" (FL 85). This is an *un-veiling*. Ellen's cheeks glow because she is becoming less numb. Her expression begins to more often reflect her true feelings. She writes about this crossing-over in her journal:

> How much 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? I wld like to talk to these miscreants, to satisfy myself, but do not expect I ever will (FL 86).

Ellen acknowledges that others might consider her "hypocritical", in other words: two-faced. And refers to unclear boundaries suggesting she is unable to recognise when she might cross a line. In searching for herself, she has to look to Austin, Garnet, the convicts, but it is the wilderness that captures her ultimate feelings of freedom from their influence, it is the environment that offers her a more honest reflection.

In response to this growing feeling of restlessness and attraction to her surrounds, Ellen decides to take a walk before dinner. The wandering involves an overlapping of Ellen's various fears. It becomes a psychological exploration of those boundaries she is unsure of overstepping. She reverts to her maiden identity: she wanders towards the kitchen offices both forgetting and remembering herself, "how her origins caught up with her!" There, she runs into the kitchen maid, Holly, who has been crying and fretting over marriage "Marriage is not for me, the girl positively howled!" (FL 91). It is not a coincidence that she should meet a maid who is afraid of an impending marriage. It is as though she has returned to a moment when she had a choice: the moment before she was married. As she wanders further she is looked on by the convicts and shields herself with her bonnet in an attempt to maintain a mask of dignity, an "unnatural serenity". Ellen says she is only "at ease when received into the countryside", but this countryside now offers dualistic enchantments where boundaries might be crossed or a different path might be taken. There are forked paths and forests and farms and tunnels – in this multitude of directions, Ellen continually feels like "she might be tempted" but continues to wander, finally succumbing to the overall sensory experience of "caressing ferns" in the "somber forest" and the road becomes "rougher, the light whiter". Ellen grows breathless and begins to slowly untie her bonnet strings – she removes her most tangible mask used to conceal her desires and finds herself succumbing to them.

Lying in the decaying leaves on the ground of a small clearing in the shade, Ellen falls into a dream. There she is able to remove not just her bonnet, but also the mask of her various selves: "Removing the superfluous bonnet and loosening her matted hair, she felt only remotely related to Ellen Roxburgh, or even Ellen Gluyas; she was probably closer to the being her glass could not reveal, nor her powers of perception grasp, but who she suspected must exist none the less" (FL 92). Ellen hunts for her identity. She has an intense dream in which three things are imagined: she dreams she could be drifting at the bottom of the sea, which speaks to her dream of sailing into Tintagel and also of her fate to be shipwrecked on the reef; she dreams a man is bending over her who could be either her father or Garnet, their similar features merging them into one; and she dreams of the exasperated kitchen-maid, Holly, wielding a knife in her direction and thinks to herself *you cannot frighten me Holly*, in a way that suggests she is thinking of herself or seeing herself in Holly's predicament/entrapment and attacking herself for her indecisiveness.

Upon entering this country Ellen has affiliated herself with the blind-eyed: "Often on such a night at Z. a country to which I *belonged* (more than I did to my parents or family) I wld find myself wishing to be united with my surroundings, not as the dead, but fully alive" (FL 104). The irony being that it is making her feel completely awakened. Similar to the purpose of the masquerade: "I begin to feel closer to the country than to any human being…my instincts hanker after something deeper, which I may not experience this side of death" (FL 104). While being aware of superficial surroundings Ellen is becoming more engaged with her natural surroundings and a freer identity. Ellen is lifting the veil. In other words, there is more reality in her dreams than when she is awake.

The masquerade is a veil. Three things are referenced by this "veil": the veil she has adopted in her physiognomy to reassure those around her of her subservience and submission to her role as wife and gentlewoman; the actual veil of her hat/bonnet which further conceals her facial expression should it give something away which is less compliant with conventional behaviour (this is also extended to her costumes which dress her for each female role – the farm-girl, the gentlewoman, the captive); and the country/environment surrounding her which is full of "veiled surprises". All are connected to Ellen's identity, which is consistently veiled and unveiled. The earlier chapters go through her veiled existence and when Ellen begins to expose herself to new experiences in the later chapters the veil comes off – the novel is an unveiling. One critic refers to this as "the hatching process". Phyllis Fahrie Edelsen, in her article 'The Hatching Process: The Female's Struggle for Identity in Four Novels by Patrick White' looks at the same protagonists as I have done in my thesis: Theodora Goodman, Laura Trevelyan, and Ellen Roxburgh. She credits them as "deviant but superior females…women of outstanding intellect and spirit, who defy the boundaries of their assigned social roles" (1985, 229). Their defying of boundaries is achieved, Edelsen argues, by what psychiatrist Margaret Mahler refers to as the "hatching process", whereby the "human infant moves from an initial phase of differentiation from the mother…to independence…to a consolidation of identity" (1985, 230). She suggests that White's novels imply that women in a closed society must grow up twice to find "true selfhood": once from human infancy and again out of the social infancy their society imposes upon them (1985, 230). This argument is substantiated significantly in the novels I am looking at in this thesis. And the 'hatching' metaphor and argument for having to 'grow up twice' is also appropriate in relation to these women. It also works well considering White's particular use of the symbol of the egg, which appears in all three novels in relation to the women. However, the idea of 'hatching' feels limiting in terms of the layers of confinement. In the case of Ellen Roxburgh, she appears to struggle through multiple kinds of oppression before beginning to understand herself. Her restrictions are more varied than a simple closed/open binary. Ellen's unveiling is complicated by her own trepidations. She moves between the veiled and unveiled multiple times before even contemplating a "true selfhood".

One example of this veiling is the way Ellen's enforced identity and her unease with these roles is realised in her costumes. Her transition from one female role to another is marked by her change in costume. Her costume represents a masquerade, the removal of which reveals a more dynamic and passionate personality. Ellen's costumes also illustrate that her femininity and womanliness is a performative act, or as Luce Irigaray (1985) posits in *This Sex Which is not One*, mimetic:

> To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means…to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means, "to unveil" the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere…(p76).

Ellen removes her bonnet like a veil, allowing her hair to flow wildly, freely, and theatrically. Likewise, corsets and petticoats mark the distinction between farm-girl and gentlewoman. Her costume shows her submission/oppression as well as her subversion and as temptress, her boots and her lace and her skirt are referred to constantly. Ellen wakes, seizes her bonnet, feels ridiculous with her boots showing out of the hem of her skirt, she pulls her dress/self together, and in her haste feels exasperated rather than distressed mostly because she is "not able to piece together a dream which was already becoming indistinct" (FL 93). The merging of her masked and unmasked self is complicated further still by the appearance of Garnet.

The scene in which Ellen has a sexual encounter with her brother-in-law, Garnet, is a good example of her shift between passivity and agency, and the move between masked and unmasked. After coming across Ellen in the field after she has fallen from her horse (a fallen woman) Garnet takes possession of her after losing "self-control" at the mention of his name. The passage does not give details of the act but instead focuses on their possession of themselves at this time. He loses control, while she maintains it: "What prevented her feeling afraid was to realise she was the one in control. She thought she heard herself snicker, before contempt (for them both) made her suppress it" (FL 116). Ellen here experiences conflicting emotions: she moves from shock, to control, to contempt, and finally to suppression of all three. She imagines herself as a bird whose plumage is both "tormented and tormenting", "opening and closing", until she finally imagines herself as a fathomless sea engulfing the humanly manned ship that had ventured on her" (FL 116). (A metaphor that proves apt for her survival in the shipwreck to come). So this is not simply suppression but a significant overpowering of Garnet's advances on her. During the sexual act she "closes her eyes again for an instant, to bask beneath the lashes in an experience of sensuality she must have awaited all her life, however inadmissible the circumstances in which she had encouraged it" (FL 116). Despite the pleasure she experiences, Ellen is simultaneously disgusted with herself. She wonders if she has brought herself this low, as he "covers her, his fingers plaited into her hair…ploughing her cheeks mechanically with his" (FL 116). The reference to her cheeks recalls her father's advances towards her; a memory which evokes similarly torn feelings of guilt and shame. This also makes Garnet the third man of her acquaintance to aggressively touch her cheeks and alter her face. Her personal conflict and reverie is always referenced in her face: what is "beneath her lashes" in this case is not unlike what is hidden in her smile. She moves from victim to perpetrator, imagining herself as a "murdered woman" (again, scantily clothed), and then imagines this victim as "a man". Importantly, she is always conscious of her clothing, her habit is lifted, her boot is off, and her openwork stocking is showing. It is the difference between having control and losing control, but it is always Ellen's control to gain or re-gain, it is *her* costume. After the liaison she "had to perform, in front of his cynical stare, all the humdrum, the vulgar acts of re-arranging torn clothes, putting up her hair, retrieving by its veil the hat which had rolled amongst the ferns" (FL 117). It is Ellen's form of composure. "Only when she was again veiled could she feel to some extent protected – from Garnet Roxburgh's eyes, if not from judgment by herself upon herself" (FL 117). This scene illustrates Ellen's experiences of succumbing or unveiling and then re-composing or reinventing herself constantly. Even when she offers reason and accusation: "I was thrown from my horse, and while I wasn't in my right mind you took advantage of it", she is aware of her own artifice: "hearing her own defense, she knew it to be insufficient" (FL 117). Like Riviere's theory of the implementation of the masquerade, both passivity and agency are in play. Ellen feels put upon to play the role of the temptress and scantily clothed lover, while simultaneously relishing the experience and finding power in the role.

Removing the Mask

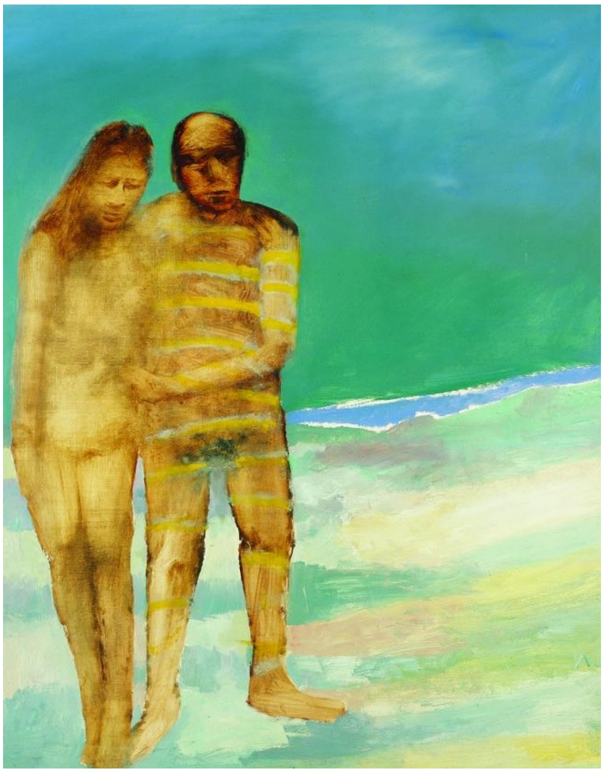
> A perfect Woman, nobly planned / To warn, to comfort, and command (Wordsworth).

This quotation from Wordsworth opens the novel. It is taken from his poem 'She was a Phantom of Delight' (Poetry Foundation 2016). It is a superficial illustration of how an elite "civilisation" has envisioned 'Woman'. The poem captures an image of a perfect woman, 'a phantom of delight', her 'household motions light and free' (not unlike the way Austin looked at Ellen upon meeting her), while the poem simultaneously suggests she is producing this very image herself and on purpose. It also evokes an other-worldliness but not from the point of view of the woman. Suzanne Edgar writes: "Patrick White has set down the history of a passive woman: a modest, unassuming and unacquisitive woman, who nevertheless possesses enormous strength of character" (1977, p69). As Wordsworth reminds us, this passive woman is an apparition, an ornament. Having now seen Ellen's experiences in the confines of the domestic and understood that she longs for something more primitive, we can acknowledge that Ellen is often warned and commanded but requires not to be in order to free herself. Moving into the second half of the novel, after Ellen is shipwrecked and taken captive by an Aboriginal tribe, White explores this other side of Ellen's nature. The decidedly uncivilised behaviour of the coloniser represents a culture of hierarchies: class, gender, and race. "Western culture tends to value power, energy, domination, and possession. But this story and this heroine throw emphasis on passivity, subjection, and dispossession. As a woman Ellen is more in tune with these values. But the epigraph which sees her as ‘a perfect woman, nobly planned’ suggests that she is also meant to be the type of complete human being” (p51). Yet the image of Ellen as perfect and noble is an illusion. The men in her life have been orchestrating this illusion and Ellen has been indulging them. Her freedom lies in her imperfections. Ellen must remove her mask and reveal all. When Ellen is wild, unkempt, and looking at her reflection in imperfect glass, she might finally see herself falling from this restrictive grace.

Part Two: Sensuality Explored: Ellen’s Experience in the Wilderness

> She was finally unhooked. Then the shift, and she was entirely liberated (FL 244).

When Ellen’s masks are figuratively removed she must contend with who she is without them. Her experiences after the shipwreck are multifaceted and complex. White explores Ellen’s sensuality, her body, desires, and identity in an environment with less certain social codes. In the wilderness she begins to blur her civilized and primitive selves with no firm distinction between the inner world of feeling and the external order of existence (Bell 1972, p8). Beyond modes of primitivism, I also argue that White employs expressionistic techniques that torture the body and dissolve boundaries, therefore distorting the standard representations of her outer-world (2012 Abrams, p117). He does so because Ellen must fall into a state of dissoluteness in order to discover new perspectives. This is not as simple as moving between the dualities of civilized/uncivilized, male/female: “To be fair, it must be said that Patrick White's novel provides us with a most complex narrative construction of character and culture. The representation of Ellen Roxburgh's split subjectivity arising out of a number of self/other distinctions is one in which the binary oppositions which construct and maintain the unified self are constantly conflated and ultimately transgressed” (Schaffer 1991, p136). White has shown us that her previous societies have been harsh and unforgiving, but so too is her existence in solitude and having to contend with her more primitive desires. Ultimately, White argues for the social. Ellen still longs for a human connection, both to her self and to others. Ellen’s relationships have taught her as much about herself as being apart from them. The difference is she can now return to her old world with a new knowledge and a mastery of herself.



'*Mrs Fraser and Convict'* 1962–64 (Sidney Nolan, Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art, 2016).

Referring to Sidney Nolan's representations of a shipwrecked Eliza Fraser, whose legendary tale of survival on which White's novel is based, Kay Schaffer points out in her article, 'The Eliza Fraser Story and Constructions of Gender, Race and Class in Australian Culture', that White's first inspiration for his take on her story was Nolan's images of her. After meeting the Nolans, White is noted as saying: "His painting gives me such a lot in my work, and he claims I do the same for him" (Underhill 2015, p298). But in the main, Schaffer writes, portrayals of Eliza Fraser have been inherently reliant on stereotypes of femininity:

> Eliza Fraser, in her various forms, is never constructed as a hero or spokesperson for the dispossessed. Given the absence of feminist or post-colonial interpretations, however, Eliza Fraser, as a cultural icon of the 1970s, signifies an old order of femininity. In each of the texts she remains tied to nature, the instincts and the sensual, as an object of fear or desire for men within masculine culture. In all the representations she is a troublesome Other (1991, p136).

Sidney Nolan and Patrick White made Eliza Fraser's portrayal more complex: "The interpretations and meanings given to the events in the novel, as well as the construction of Ellen Roxburgh's character, depart dramatically from the historical records. White was not interested in authenticity. His sensuous and imaginative novel blends information from a variety of sources, including historical materials, themes and settings suggested by Nolan's paintings and details from White's personal past" (Schaffer 1995). In Nolan's paintings, Eliza Fraser is troubled, drawn, washed, distorted, and dissolving, illustrating an otherness to her depiction. White's representation also explores this but his Ellen Roxburgh is not simply an Other; instead, Ellen is depicted as exploring her otherness - that is to say, another side of herself, "If I hadn't substituted Ellen Roxburgh for Eliza Fraser, little more than a hardbitten shrew from the Orkneys, [the novel would not] have had the psychological complexities, the sensibility, and the passion I was able to explore" (White 1989, p84). White's representation of Eliza Fraser, Ellen Roxburgh, ties her to nature and sensuality. His intention is to portray a heroine embracing those elements both tentatively and then vehemently – it is an emotional battle, and as he says, 'psychologically complex'. It is not as simple as black and white, self and other. Ellen is exploring multiple sides of her identity.

Consider this transitory moment in the middle of the novel: In Hobart on a day when she is particularly exhausted by her life, just prior to their fateful departure on board the Bristol Maid, Ellen wanders away from the town into the surrounding bushland and realises that this is a mechanism of escape she has employed before:

> On a day when she was at her lowest Mrs. Roxburgh tied down her bonnet and ventured into the windy street. […] In roaming round the Point alone and unprotected, she had no aim, unless the vague one of escaping her own thoughts. Not only vague but vain, she realised from experience. For it occurred to her that on the day she ordered them to saddle the mare so that she might escape from discontented thoughts and the general constriction of their life at 'Dulcet', she had ridden out to substantiate a thought she would have liked to think did not exist, from being buried so deeply in her mind" (FL 133).

Ellen is always striving to understand her restlessness and this makes the connection to a wilder landscape necessary. Alternative to the reasonable and civilised, the primitive and the sensual images in the novel show expressionistic characteristics that appeal to White's sensibilities: "the incorporation in art of visionary or powerfully emotional states of mind that are expressed and transmitted by means of distorted representations of the outer world" (Abrams 2005, p90). Likewise, Ellen's transition at this point in the novel is not simply a subversion of gender binaries. Ellen is deliberately aligning herself with a more natural environment. This torturous experience is as necessarily expressionistic as it is powerfully feminine.

I would argue that in White's representation, Ellen actively associates herself with the wilderness because it is a space where she can freely express her emotions. The wilderness – this more wild environment of the Tasmanian forest - is a space where Ellen can project her feelings more dramatically, more expressionistically. We have watched Ellen veil herself and mask her feelings obediently, and gradually her obedience is waning. She opens herself up and connects with her surroundings. And it is often a violent and torturous experience, almost to a destructive degree. Ellen is not submissive – this distinction is important – she is surrendering herself to the elements.

> She was dragged back into the forest clearing, the filtered light, the scents of fungus and rotting leaves, to the only instance when her will had asserted itself, and then with bared ugly teeth.
> Mrs. Roxburgh opened her mouth in hollow despair, and the wind, tearing down her throat, all but choked and temporarily deafened her (134).

Expressionist artists (friends of and influences on Patrick White) liberate their subjects by depicting moments of anguish and distress. Renowned expressionist artist and friend to White, Francis Bacon's 'Three Studies for Figures at the base of Crucifixion" (Ficacci 2010, p17) comes to mind here. Bacon's painting illustrates what Ficacci describes as the "lacerating expression of a cry […] it is a cry reduced to its wild force, beyond that normal human need to identify and resolve the causes of the malaise. More animal than human, so excessive to become aware of its own expressive implications […] to reveal and transform into comprehensible terms something originating in the unconscious: the complex, multiple, and contradictory mass of emotions and the obsessive images that arouse it" (2010, p17). Like Bacon's subject, Ellen's transformation has to be violent. In order to illustrate her escape from marital and domestic confinement, White transforms Ellen's repression into something sensational, open, and furious. Rimbaud, the expressionist poet White had "grown drunk on" (Marr p317), also uses this image, particularly his 'Being of Beauty' in his poem 'Being Beauteous' from *Illuminations:*

> Shudders rise and groan and the frenetic flavour of these effects fills with that mortal whistling and raucous music that the world, far behind, hurls at our mother of beauty – she recoils, she rears.

> Oh, our bones are clothed with a new amorous body!
> Oh, the ashen face; the escutcheon of horsehair, the crystal arms!
> (*Poetry in Translation,* 2016).

Sidney Nolan's image of Eliza on the beach in his Mrs. Fraser series is similarly expressionistic in its distorted portrayal of Eliza. Her figure looks fluid, as if dissolvable. The convict, her rescuer, looks the same. The two are connected in body. White develops these elements within his character Ellen Roxburgh and extends and expands them, paying particular attention to her condition as a woman. Ellen exerts a passive resistance. She is accepting of her condition as a kind of fallen woman and is now willing to fall – the shipwreck is a long-awaited crisis.

The Shipwreck: Reversals and Dispersions

"Mrs. Roxburgh let down her hair into a sea of silence where men's voices had ceased shouting" (FL 144).

During and after the shipwreck Ellen's submissive role in her marriage is reversed and dissolved. The influence shifts from Austin to Ellen. Ellen's previously ridiculed mysteriousness and overemotional temperament is suitable for the drama about to unfold. It awakens in her a fierceness and strength, "Half-fowl half-woman, Mrs. Roxburgh was panting in her husband's ear. Her teeth must have gashed his cheek, he felt, but the shattering of several breakable vessels in the saloon beyond, dispersed any possible resentment he might have harboured against her" (FL 167). Suddenly it is Ellen who is dominant. Ellen is pressing her self against her husband and demanding from him the closeness she has longed for: "Ellen Roxburgh then, was pinning her husband against the wall, grinding her cheek into his as she would never have dared. 'Tell me – this once,' she commanded, 'I have not made you unhappy?' (FL 170). Along with her aggression there is also desperation for closeness and desire to please. Or rather, her position in this marriage has made her desire to please and longing for closeness reach an extreme level. His response is unfeeling and impatient: "Ah *Ellen*, it is no occasion for foolish questions! His voice issued from its deepest source to expire at the surface amongst what sounded like dry reeds" (FL 170). And while they momentarily look to each other "contained in the same luminous bubble which circumstances threatened to explode", White has it that "It was she who broke. Her tears were streaming" (FL 170). The flow of water is coming from Ellen, the disaster that they find themselves in is illustrated in

Ellen's actions, she is fully appreciating and embracing the shipwreck as a proper destruction of every artifice she has been trying to keep afloat. Mr. Roxburgh warns her to "keep calm" and not be seen as "agitated", but her reaction is far more appropriate than the one he tries to maintain: "Never since boarding *Bristol Maid* had Mr. and Mrs. Roxburgh looked so awkward, foolish, and superfluous". And just like that their cover is blown. They are no longer a picture of contentedness and this satisfies Ellen. This climactic event marks the change in their false impressions and in Ellen's readiness to give up the façade: "The fog was lifting, as though to expose the full irony of its work. The stranded ship had swung round and was lying broadside on to the sea" (FL 172).

The two are now openly different. Austin goes back to fetch his copy of Virgil and Ellen willingly renounces him and his faith "Mr. Roxburgh was too distracted to detect in his wife signs of apostasy" (FL 175). Meanwhile, Ellen is glad of his absence:

> It was the greatest luxury to be sitting alone, to give up the many-faceted role she had been playing, it now seemed, with mounting intensity in recent months – of loyal wife, tireless nurse, courageous woman, and more unreal than any of the superficial, taken-for-granted components of this character – expectant mother. Yet her body told her that this child was the truest part of her, of such incontrovertible truth that she had not submitted it to the company of those 'formed' thoughts, affectations, and hypocrisies recorded in her journal, just as she had banned from its pages another, more painful truth – herself as compliant adulteress (FL 175).

Ellen slowly removes the layers of her prescribed femininity during the shipwreck. She moves from the ship, to the life raft, to the shore. And her relationship with Austin goes from desperately close, to indifferent, to losing their child, to his death. Leaving Ellen completely removed from the world, as she has known it. The effect is one of stupor. "They were temporarily possessed by an almost sensual indifference to their fate. Mrs. Roxburgh's stance against the bulwark was almost slatternly; the scuttle of her bonnet had lost its symmetry, and the hem of her skirt several inches of its stitching, with the result that in hung in a dangerous loop" (FL 185). Both Ellen and Austin are temporarily shocked by the circumstances in which they find themselves, as though this moment temporarily holds them in the eye of a storm with the chaos around them ready to thrust them in opposite directions.

Echoing this eerie calm, Ellen wonders about her unborn baby and remarks on the child's inevitably prearranged identity: "Trapped between the walls of a room she might have gone on to torment herself with the speculation on the nature of the seed which had been planted in her body, whether it would grow to reveal her better or worse side, and whose face it would wear"(FL 192). She speaks about her unborn child as another version of herself – but a purer form, a form undefined by gender or class. She is equating her child's survival with her own. Once born out of this wreck, what kind of woman would she be? Ellen is describing her confinement along with the child's. She is preparing herself for her own delivery: "Of all the company, Mrs. Roxburgh was perhaps the most deeply moved: to be ejected thus from the cramped cabin and rather inhospitable saloon which her own moods, and thoughts, and attempts at occupation had furnished as a dwelling place (FL 187). It becomes clear that a more primitive version of Ellen is revealing itself. The harsher environment is changing her physically. The harsh light and conditions are stripping back any superficialities, "Looking at her hands, Mrs. Roxburgh noticed that she was returning, and not by slow degrees, to nature" (FL 195).

Images of femininity are mocked and undermined by Ellen's giving over to the elements: "Swinging and bumping on the rope ladder, she was at the mercy of her own initiative, and that of the wind filling her skirts, making of her a mute bell which would have emitted a pathetic tinkle had it attempted to chime" (FL 194). As she becomes closer to the sea her prescribed "lady-like" costume disintegrates and instead only rags and patches of her dress remain. The result is an image of femininity that associates Ellen with a wilder environment. Ellen's hair now presents a more impressive aura, aligning her with the mermaids of Tintagel: "Night fell at least, and with it her blue-black hair she sensed escaping into sleep and water. We shall wake, she promised herself in leaving her body, and find we have arrived, and begin afresh" (FL 220). Ellen comforts her husband with this promise of survival, but it is becoming more apparent that she is the one to survive, the one who is merging and connecting with her environment and more aware of her surrounds: "The fringe of her green shawl trailed through the depths in which it was often indistinguishable from beaded weed or the veils and streamers of fish drifting and catching on coral hummocks then dissolving free from the simple reason that the whole universe was watered down" (FL 227). Like the sea creatures and coral, Ellen is metaphorically dispersing herself. She imagines fluidity in her presence and detaches herself from anything permanent.

Just as she does so, Ellen loses her child. She cries: "There's no question –it's lost – however I tried – nobody can blame me, Austin – can they?" (FL 228). She continues to fear culpability. In an effort to seek comfort and reassurance, she clutches at her husband while he "hisses" at her, "desperate as he was irritated". His compassion is always measured, she thinks to herself: "All his life he might have been on equal terms with reality". His only comforting words to her are that she will not likely die from it. And yet, the tragedy in its veracity draws them closer to one another. They are humbled by the experience. "The Roxburghs appeared untouched in the halcyon evening prepared for their child's burial. Beneath a peacock sky her face, reduced by suffering to a drained pudding-colour, wore an expression of assent bordering on tranquility, while her husband, upright beside her, might have been enjoying congratulations for his performance in a classic role" (FL 229). Each in their own way has accepted the situation and therefore each other. Mr. Roxburgh affectionately squeezes her and "kisses her on the mouth in full view", smiling, as they imagine that the child, a boy, had a likeness to him, and that this would have made them happy. But it is an imagined future only, a comforting myth, as their raft lands on shore Austin is killed by a spear to the throat, thrown from a member of an Aboriginal tribe attacking the remaining survivors of the shipwreck. In his final moments, he looks at Ellen: "He opened his eyes. 'Ellen, you are different. The light…or the brim of that…huge…country…*hat.* Raise it, please…so that I can see…' (FL 240). It is a final recognition of the way he has always seen her, and seeing her more honestly in this new light. Ellen's final 'kindness' to him is to tear the spear from his throat so as not to prolong his suffering. "Oh, no, Lord! Why are we born, then?' It is a lament for the pointlessness of his death as well as the loss of finally sharing a brief and honest moment in their relationship. It is also the final connection she has to her former life. She has detached herself. All her ties are broken.

Ellen in the Wilderness

Ellen's capture by a tribe of Aboriginal women, it has been argued, aligns her with the experience of women and the experience of the colonized, "Atwood and White write women [in a way that] demythologises the false idealism that denied women power. Both writers see the marginalization of female experience as an analogue for the marginalization of colonial experience generally, and both therefore link their central women characters with their country's aboriginal inhabitants in opposition to the institutionalized structures that render these groups silent and invisible" (Brydon 1984, p389). This is doubtful in that Ellen's position or condition as captive can not be wholly compared to the brutal experiences of indigenous Australians, but ironically White shows Ellen feeling just as socially defunct as she did in so-called "civilized" society: "Ellen Gluyas had not encountered a more unlikely situation since forced as a bride to face the drawing rooms of Cheltenham" (FL 243). Referring to herself by her maiden name, recalling a time when she felt disguised and awkward, Ellen is symbolically stripped of her former identity:

> She was finally unhooked.
> Then the shift, and she was entirely liberated.
> They ran from her trailing the ultimate shreds of her modesty, as well as the clattering armature, their laughter gurgling till lost in their throats or the undergrowth to which they had retreated (FL 244).

As she is captured by the women and at their mercy, it now appears she is also at the mercy of their more wild behaviour and their more wild environment into which the scene suggests they take shelter.

Ellen takes with her the only symbol of her former life she still has, her wedding ring, and hides it amongst a vine which she tears at and fashions a garment out of to "feel to some extent clothed" (FL 244),

> Her only immediate concern was how to preserve her wedding ring. Not by any lucid flash but working her way towards a solution, she strung the ring on one of the runners straggling from her convolvulus girdle, and looped the cord, and knotted it, hoping the gold would not give itself away by glistening from behind the fringe of leaves (FL 245).

This is symbolic because the image of the garment and Ellen's attempt at modesty is what gives White the title of his novel. I believe he considered this not only because the image of that garment has become iconic in the popular story of Ellen Fraser's adventure and survival, but also because the "fringe of leaves" is another kind of mask. It is the veil with which she is able to conceal her marriage and her former civilized self, in a way she is fashioning the woman she is expected to be - although her experience in the wilderness is one in which she has no control over herself; she doesn't have an "identity" here. Once again, Ellen is switching between multiple identities and performing a double-act, "As Ellen clings to the fringe of leaves, she fights to return to the settlement, which will allow her to re-establish her identity as Mrs. Roxburgh. Given the brutality of the world she leaves, such a return is essential" (Journet 1998, p10). Ellen is now at the shore. She is at a critical juncture and a crucial point in her transition. She is lured by the ecstatic experience of being ungoverned and is able to live more freely. After eating a piece of stolen roasted snake, she experiences "and ecstasy never felt before"

> The ecstasy of physical passion she had experienced with her husband scarcely ever, and with her one regrettable lover it had been more a wrestling match against lust. Now reduced to an animal condition she could at least truthfully confess that ecstasy had flickered up from the pit of her stomach provoked by a fragment of snakeflesh (FL 266).

The 'snakeflesh' awakens her primitive sensibility. Her relationship to the natural world has now become a "state of mind" (Bell 1972, p57). White's focus on Ellen's inner-state is suggestive of another identity, one she is less familiar with and is therefore less artificial. Ellen admits to the mimicries and hypocrisies of the masks she wore as a conventional woman. She becomes the heroine of this novel not because she survives in this primitive, "uncivilised" landscape, but because she thrives in it.

After a time, Ellen *willingly* endures her capture: "she positively panted after the tribe to which she now belonged" (FL 256), perhaps predicting all the while that she would return to society. In doing so, she gains new perspectives that will armor her for that re-entry, "Ellen accepts [the female tribe's] condition of subjection including their guilt as "natural," *until* their experiences in the wilderness enable them to see civilization with new eyes, from outside its own sense of itself instead of from within" (Brydon 1984, p394). Weisstein explains: "breaking through the individual shell or mask (persona), Expressionist art (paradoxically) fuses the extremely subjective with the starkly objective" (1973, p25). Ellen and the tribeswomen's perspective demonstrate a subversion of the dominance of male over female, and of colonizer over the colonized. Problematically, White suggests that the experiences of the Aboriginal women and Ellen are mirrored: "their faces were her glass" (FL 260). The oppression experienced by women, it is implied, is not dissimilar to that of indigenous people by the colonisers. These women are seen to possibly "envy" Ellen, and "recognise their own shortcomings" (FL 260). In his attempt to immerse Ellen in a primitive setting, White's representation of Aboriginal tribeswomen is largely ignorant and stereotypical, and Ellen remains undeniably privileged. However, what is necessary for the reader is to focus on the idea that Ellen is responsive to the experiences of the Aboriginal women who have captured her, and she is affected by their world-view. Once again, she finds herself forced into a new environment and therefore a new psychological setting: "She was immured, not only by the blacks' island stronghold, but in that female passivity wished upon her at birth and reinforced by marriage with her poor dear Mr. Roxburgh" (FL 265). Her passivity actually makes her alert to the experiences on the island and this crucially changes her perspective:

> She felt accepted, rejuvenated. She was the 'Ellen' of her youth, a name they had attached to her visible person […] but which had never rightfully belonged to her, any more than the greater part of what she had experienced in life. Now this label of a name was flapping and skirring ahead of her … (FL 271).

Like the position she imagined her own child would have been in, Ellen's is a journey towards a new life. She is now forced to consider her existence as something more intrinsic. It is at this moment that she finds cooked human flesh and consumes it: "She was less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed by the fact that she was moved to do it" (FL 272). There are these occasions where literary expressionism traces precisely these movements away from psychological motivations, toward a supra-personal consciousness, which is that of the primitive (Weisstein, 1973, p25). White's focus on her "stiffened body", "tearing teeth" and "spasmodic chewing" (FL 272), expresses an inscrutable and violent act that reveals this rift between the nature and culture. Ellen is amazed at herself and the situation simultaneously eludes and terrifies her – just before she had been looking on at her captors with entangled emotions of "fear from amazement, disgust from pity" (FL 272). Ellen is beyond consciousness and will – she is stimulus and reaction only: "what she was about to do, what she was, in fact, already doing" (FL 272).

What impresses Ellen is her impulsiveness. She explains it felt as though she had partaken in a kind of "sacrament" (FL 272). The religious connotations are reconciled in Ellen's eclipsed consciousness on the one hand and White's dark religiosity on the other. In some way she feels she has given herself over to this existence where she belongs to no one, where she is free from social order and decorum. Necessity is the driver here, the primal necessity to survive and White suggests that this necessity coexists with the human need for spiritual sustenance. After all, the "monstrous object" (FL 272) of the thighbone is no longer monstrous when she has cleaned it with her teeth, her hunger, and her need, but merely a bone to be "flung…away"(FL 272).

White shows Ellen as being conscious of her choices and actually relishing in the experience – therefore expressing Ellen's purposeful letting-go of what is deemed conventional. Especially in this case what is conventional for her as a woman. Ellen has been identifying with multiplicity and connectivity to her environment in a way that disputes any absolute distinction between nature and culture. During the scene in which she is forced by the tribe to climb a tree, Ellen calls on both of her former feminine identities: "or else it was the spirit of Ellen Gluyas coming to Mrs. Roxburgh's rescue" (FL 263). Ellen is reconciling with her multiple selves. Beyond that, she uses her relationships to discover herself anew in what I would argue is an undermining of a masculinist romantic construct in that she is rallying all parts of herself to understand the conventional life which has previously stifled her. White's intention is to push against these boundaries, take his characters to their limits, and allow them to explore other sides to their personality. As White makes clear at the end of the novel by including in his final scenes three different women discuss their points of view of their place in the world; the foremost perspectives are female. In order to return however, Ellen, ironically and certainly not in the classic sense, needs to be "rescued".

Jack Chance

> Her face she was unable to see unless when she turned it towards him, and it became reflected in his (FL 299).

Ellen is pulled back into the emotional domain of relationships when she meets the runaway convict, Jack Chance. All that she has experienced living with the Aboriginal women now takes shape in the form of her relationship with Jack. Given that she has become a less governed, more primitive woman, her relationship with Jack will understandably be more violent in its intimacy – but this is also symbolic because we know White sees these emotions in all intimate relationships he explores in his novels. Her experiences with Jack offer new perspectives and Ellen is more likely now to reject any attempts to oppress her. Nevertheless, Ellen's entanglement with Jack signifies her consistent association of herself with convicts and her own dishonesty, "ambivalence marks Ellen's relation with Jack Chance, a man who is both lover and murderer. He inspires in Ellen, not only love and pity, but also a kind of vicarious guilt and remission of her own sins (Journet 1998, p281). Jack introduces her to love, passion, and tenderness, but he also commits her to "following him through whatever subterranean darkness he led, however foul the unchanging air, however daunting the rustle and splash-ing of rats" (FL 298-99)" (Journet 1988, p69). Meeting Jack and realizing a reliance on him is a torturous experience for Ellen and her return to civilization is psychologically fraught with confusion and anxiety. Additionally, as Jack talks about his wife whom he murdered, Mab, Ellen begins to associate herself with her character. She behaves in a masochistic way as though she is deserving of the role of a woman destroyed: "from his tone of voice she thought this must be all, when presently he all but crushed her in what she knew to be gratitude: she was acting as proxy for this Irishwoman of gummed-up lashes; she must not, she did not, feel resentful; she returned his embraces as though she personally deserved them" (FL 310).

Ellen is urinating in the bushes when she meets Jack, by chance. He is "horny toed" and his face is weathered as though he is wearing a "leather mask". Both of them have, especially in body, assimilated into their indigenous tribes. He has lost the ability to speak, instead he makes unintelligible grunting sounds. She too hates to hear her own voice now that she speaks so rarely. And yet both immediately recognise their former roles in search for survival – she needs to be rescued and it is he who must do it. "'We shall have to trust each other,' she persisted. 'Only bring me to Moreton Bay and I promise they'll give you a pardon'". Despite this agreement, Ellen continues to struggle with feelings of shame and guilt. After Jack helps her escape and they begin their journey back to civilization, Ellen begins to feel keenly ashamed of herself and of him and their current physicality – even more so because she enjoys it. She feels guilty asking him for assistance and because she is aware of her own selfishness and artifice. And she is unsure how trustworthy he is because in him she sees herself and she knows she has also been untrustworthy in the past. "She was not entirely won because, according to her knowledge of herself, she was not entirely trustworthy" (FL 299). Their relationship is based on mutuality. Jack is Ellen's shame, personified. Their connection is awkwardly and somewhat forcefully made as they camp together, but in those moments they are both a comfort and a torture to each other. Their sexual encounters become the act that symbolizes their attraction to depravity and their mutual shame: "They must have reached that point where each is equally exalted and equally condemned" (FL 299).

Debra Journet suggests in her article: 'Patrick White and D.H. Lawrence: Sexuality and the Wilderness in 'A Fringe of Leaves' and 'Lady Chatterley's Lover'', that White's novel "describes the journey of a woman away from a life of sterility toward a life of sexual passion and love" (1988, p63). She elaborates on this outline by explaining: "In *A Fringe of Leaves* the brutal vision of nature is paralleled by a presentation of sexuality which includes not only love and the possibility of moral growth, but also violence and animality" (1988, p63). What Journet fails to discuss is the link between this violent environment and Ellen's attraction to it as a woman. Not merely because a female in this period is socially repressed, but because Ellen in particular has a complicated history with an attraction to a more primitive existence. She is also attracted to this quality in men. It is a form of debasing herself but it actually has a positive effect. White's portrayal of this mechanism in women is not unlike novelist Jean Rhys': "Rhys's protagonists are not merely destroyed by their world; their seemingly inevitable downward spirals ultimately point to a need for an alternative to the narrow definitions of white female respectability" (Cunningham 2013, p376). White makes Ellen's fall from grace purposeful. Her narrative is not a love story. Her relationships lead her towards self-discovery, and the establishment of these relationships is as torturous and difficult as the environment in which she finds herself. Ellen feels connected to the harsher, more intense landscape as well as the man she meets within it – because in Jack she can see herself.

Ellen's hunger and her experience of cannibalism is not as base as it seems. "[Jack] could not press her deep enough into the dust. Yet with aroused hunger rather than anger or contempt. It became a shared hunger. She would have swallowed him had she been capable of it" (FL 299) It is a metaphorical act of her hunger for another body, another person, and her own self on a primitive and violent level. Throughout these encounters she loses her language, speaks in another language, tears at him with her nails. Ultimately they are connected by their most sensual and animalistic desires. This blending allows Ellen to equal Jack in strength and influence.

The dynamic between Ellen and Jack is at times more respectful, even if depraved, than her previous relationships, because the depravity removes artifice: "She could remember her panic, a sensual joy (not lust as Garnet Roxburgh had aroused) as well as gratitude for her fellow survivor's presence, kindness, and strength" (FL 302). She describes it as both a “panic” and a “sensual joy” because there is more openness and consideration of her own desires in their coming together. She continues to have sex with him in anguish, accentuating further this seductive combination of dignity and depravity. However, despite Ellen’s experience of this relationship at a more instinctive level, it appears to be as much a performance as any that has come before. Ellen cannot escape the need to perform and appease the men in her life. One evening by their campfire, Ellen considers: “she is at once revolted by him and desirous of his affection. So she is careful of her reactions. After staring at his broken teeth, “rotted stumps”, she shudders. Hoping to disguise the true reason for her shiver she says she would like to go to bed with him out of the cold. “So she must make amends to him for her passing revulsion. ‘Shan’t we go inside? We’ll find it warmer’ (FL 307). But then Ellen changes her feelings. Consistently merging her feelings of revulsion and attraction, she becomes aware that she is excited by his affection: “Because it was what she most desired, again she shuddered, and hoped he would interpret it as shivering” (FL 307). She also feels guilt at her revulsion, and as he leads her inside she hopes she has “made amends”. Guilt is forever entwined with her sensuality. Ellen has never been able to embrace her sexuality fully without this element of guilt; it has become an ironic and unfortunate aphrodisiac.

In the midst of this complexity of feeling, Ellen still acknowledges her search for a real connection, “she wanted to be loved. She longed for the vast emptiness of darkness to be filled as she encouraged him to enter her body and pressed her mouth into his, against what she only momentarily remembered as a grille of broken, stained teeth” (FL 307). Sadly, despite their physical connection, Ellen is left feeling unfulfilled, “so she cried out, and he redoubled what might have been demonstrations of love. Or was it desperation? After they had fallen apart, exhausted, they continued soothing each other with the hands of hardened criminals” (FL 307). To Ellen, it is only in this environment where she can fully embrace this menacing side to herself. She embraces her shame in a sense, “as she covered him with her breasts and thighs, lapping him in a passion discovered only in a country of thorns, whips, murderers, thieves, shipwreck, and adulteress, the gilded day-bed refused to yield, nor yet when one of its legs screamed” (FL 312). She considers herself a criminal and a liar. This excessive personality gives her strength. It is distorted and embellished in this environment but it has always existed and is only now fully realised. “Even if the pardoned convict respected the laws of decency, would society think to see her reflected in his eyes, or worse still, the convict in hers?” (FL 329).

The knowledge she has discovered has meant that Ellen has been able to rescue *herself*. Jack led her back to civilization but it is up to Ellen to survive.

The Black Widow: A Female Perspective

> As for Mrs. Roxburgh, she accepted once more the fate or chains that human beings were imposing on her. It was not altogether weakness on her part: surely her survival alone proved her to be possessed of a certain strength? (FL 383).

In the final chapters of the novel, Ellen emerges as a kind of female prophet and few are privy to her self-discoveries. "*Naked?'* The voice was just discernable; it was a woman's and of a tone she had not thought to hear again" (FL 334). This voice belongs to the woman who finds Ellen but her identity we do not know at first. It could be Ellen speaking aloud to herself, or it may be a merging of voices. The reference to the voice being "just discernable, and a woman's" strikes me as an instruction to reading the final chapters. Brydon (1984) points out that this focus on female voices makes the ambiguous end to the novel "more intense". She explains, "the novels' revolutionary potential resides in their shifting of emphasis from a male focus to a female, more diffused focus - what could almost be seen as a placing 'out of focus'". White has been illustrating Ellen's more nuanced and complex train of thought as absolutely necessary for challenging the restrictive circumstances in which she always found herself. She moves away from, as Brydon explains, "a single language to a complex interplay of competing languages" (1984, p395). Her appreciation of this more fluid perspective is the radical revelation that allows her to question her society.

We learn that the voice calling out to Ellen belongs to Mrs. Oakes: "You're a survivor', she asked, 'from the wreck we've 'eard tell about? From the *Bristol Maid*'" (FL 336). Mrs. Oakes comforts her by covering her in a harsh blanket, to that she responds: "I will only want to sleep and forget" (FL 334). Ellen has to muster the courage to re-enter the "civilized" world. It is a reemerging; some have called it a re-birth, but it is more accurate to think of it as a willful re-entry to an environment that previously confined her but which now she is seeing anew. Ellen replaces her mask: she is naked, then clothed in an old shift, then made up in petticoats - but this time, we are more certain of who she is without it.

> For the present, she made no special effort to return; the clothes she had been sent she accepted out of necessity rather than with enthusiasm […] Her own ugliness, physical at least, had begun receding, so she learned by touch and from the images in a distorting mirror, the only looking glass the Oakes possessed. Its depths reflected fluctuating shapes in which she was at first reluctant, then grateful to admit that she detected traces, scarcely of beauty, but of what is known as 'looks' (FL 348).

Ellen is now able to see the world from a new perspective. From this fresh standpoint she will have to find her way back. To do so she affects a similar passivity to the one in the earlier chapters, but this time there is a sense of knowledge and acceptance – not resistance. Ellen asks Mrs. Oakes while they sit down to look at old photographs: "Do you regret your life?" (FL 347). She forms a close relationship to Mrs. Oakes, like mother and child. Mrs. Oakes responds: "No. Why should I? This is where I belong now. It's different for a man, perhaps. A woman, as I see is more like moss or lichen that takes to some rock or tree as she takes to her husband. An' that is where we belong.' To which Ellen responds: 'I have no husband – no children. I'm in every respect free' (FL 347).

A series of meetings and interviews take place that give Ellen great control. So too does the overwhelming focus on female authority in this final chapter. At a similar point in White's *Voss* and *The Aunt's Story,* the female leads are given powerful status. They are treated as mysterious, but impressive – and they remain passive in their countenance: Theodora Goodman's face in *The Aunt's Story* remains stoic when she is taken away; Laura Trevelyan in *Voss* is reverently seated in the middle of the ballroom. But the passivity of all three has a sense of receptiveness to another way of thinking. This knowledge gives them agency. The mystery Ellen once was is now one of legend and she exerts a sense of power over her enquirers: "So it would take place, Mrs. Roxburgh saw. 'I shall do my best to behave as I am expected to" (FL 351). This is not a passive remark, it is a hostile one, and the effect her demeanor has on her interlocutors is clear. The lieutenant when meeting Ellen reflects: "But it had become increasingly his aim to carry out instructions and escape without delay from the this deluded widow and her possibly contagious obsessions; his experience hitherto was of placid wives and fizzing girls" (FL 352). All of these encounters are loaded with sedation and outward indifference on Ellen's part. But her passivity shows resistance. As discussed, passivity is usually seen as a negative concept, but White presents this as an attitude vital to their experience – one of receptivity and transformation. Recalling Ellen's early experiences of confinement and masquerade, her efforts in performing them again now are loaded with meaning. There is a layer of command and awareness. We recognise she is exhausted and frightened, but that is now counteracted with this source of knowledge she has acquired during her experiences up until now, “he was again troubled by this ladies eyes” (FL 351).

Now, she must play the part of the ‘black widow’, the survivor, and the heroine. And this role does not sit well with her either, but it is a more appropriate amalgamation of the kind of mysterious woman she has always been - more than a ‘placid wife or fizzing girl’. She intimidates people. “You should know, my dear,’ Miss Scrimshaw reminded, ‘that you are something of a heroine, and must pay the price accordingly’ (FL 358). Ellen takes comfort in the private control she has gained. “Instead she stood awhile enjoying the moist, palpitating air before returning voluntarily to the prison which she had been sentenced, a lifer from birth” (FL 359). Despite the reference of confinement, a prison and life-sentence, the “palpitating air” is now instilled in Ellen’s body as she returns to society. This is much more clearly depicted now, and Ellen is much more proud of its display and its energy.

The interviews continue with various male figures approaching her to tell her story. The process appears to be a metaphor for having to contend with the father figures that have previously swayed her, to which she is now able to perturb. “These women's quests to come to terms with a father figure's legacies are clearly also quests to come to terms with patriarchy itself, and its contradictory messages to them as women” (Brydon 1984, p393). Duly, the Commandant is the next to visit her: “he was only used to, no doubt, to sweetness and compliance in a woman” (FL 366). Ellen is formidable and increasingly visionary when discussing her experience with her captors: “The Commandant could not help but notice the pulse beating in the throat of this woman who moved and disturbed him more perhaps than domesticity and his official position warranted” (FL 399), Ellen suggests to the Commandant: "surely it is possible to understand what words are about without understanding the words themselves? "(FL 364), this is to explain her ability to share in cultural rituals with her aboriginal captors. Brydon explains that her experience with different languages of social class has prepared her to be more open than the Commandant to multiplicity (1984, p391). What knowledge Ellen gained environmentally and physically in the Australian wilderness she now uses socially and those around her can sense it.

Pilcher too remarks upon his impressions of Ellen misapprehending her strength and capacity for human connection: "Love was weakness. Strength of will – *wholeness,* as I saw it – is what I determined to cultivate. That is why I admired you, Mrs. Roxburgh – the cold lady, the untouchable' (FL 379). Ellen's survival is a result of her search for connection, not independence. Pilcher mistakes her liberation for coldness, rather than an alternative to a world that made her cold because she felt no sincere connection to it. Now there is a sense of possibility in connection and meaningful relationships – there is a hope that springs from her newfound identity. As the captain's wife, Mrs. Lovell tells Ellen: "You must not be so merciless, my dear, towards yourself. Whatever is past, you have much to look forward to. A woman can look to the future, don't you see? However unimportant we are, it is only in unimportant ways. They will always depend on us because we are the source of renewal" (FL 382). It is important to consider that Mrs. Lovell is not just referring to childbirth, but to a regeneration of identity and self. Ellen's affirmative reemergence is similarly painful but empowered:

> Mrs. Roxburgh was standing alone at the bulwark, staring it seemed, at the foreshore of grey mangroves, at their oily reflections in muddy water, for the sun had gone in and the sky removed the last of its blue twitching streamers from the brown surface of the river. So the commandant observed, so too, Mr. Jevons, so Miss Scrimshaw, more closely than any. She would always remember what sounded like a sudden cry of pain, as quickly suppressed as it was briefly uttered (FL 400).

Her cry is far removed from the earlier violent cry before her departure on the Bristol Maid. Her cry then was a call for experience and release – since discovered during her time in the Australian bush. The reason for this stifled cry as she stands at the embankment might be that she felt genuinely connected to that place, just as she is being removed from it. However, Ellen's resilience overwhelms the difficulty in returning to a more conventional life. She demonstrates here not a stifling of emotion but rather a command over it.

Aboard the ship that will sail Ellen back to England, Miss Scrimshaw is carried away by the momentous occasion in stark contrast to Ellen's placidity.

> "How I wish I were an eagle!"
> "To soar! Miss Scrimshaw wheezed. "To reach the heights! To breathe! Perch on the crags and look down on everything that lies beneath one! Elevated, and at last free!"

> Have you never noticed that I am a woman only in my form, not in the essential part of me?' (FL 402).

White has Miss Scrimshaw confirm in her speech that to be a woman is not be defined by that role. The "essential" part of any person is uniquely un-definable and fluid in its soul, but it is the confined condition of womanhood that allows women to be uniquely equipped to fight to discover this. Having escaped once already, Ellen remains tranquil now in the face of such aspiration. She has already enjoyed that tumultuous experience: "Somewhat to her own surprise, Mrs. Roxburgh remained ineluctably earthbound. 'I was slashed and gashed too often,' she tried to explain. 'Oh no, the crags are not for me!' She might have been left at a loss had not the words of her humbler friend Mrs. Oakes found their way into her mouth. A woman, as I see is more like moss or lichen that takes to some rock or tree as she takes to her husband" (FL 402). Again, this speaks to an ability to masquerade, but now it takes on the tone of control. We sense in Ellen maturity and adaptability that is not the result of subservience but rather optimism in possibilities and a hope in finding that same kind of elation via a relationship.

> Nor did Miss Scrimshaw attempt to enforce the discipline she advocated: she was too engrossed, her onyx going click click, shooting down possible doubts; for however much crypto-eagles aspire to soar, and do in face, through thoughtscape and dream, their human nature cannot but grasp at any circumstantial straw which may indicate an ordered universe (FL 405).

This final passage is very different from the one during the shipwreck in which Ellen imagines her body dissolving like weeds over coral in the sea. In that passage she cannot cling to anything and she describes the universe as "watered down". It was a necessary period of experimentation. Here she describes having learned that it is human nature to want to grasp at something, someone. Ellen has reconciled her desire for adventure with her desire for companionship. She exudes a balance between passion, imagination, and a trust in her future she has not displayed before. The final scene is an analogy for Ellen's life now. Mr. Jevons, her likely future husband, spills tea and cake in a situation of the utmost propriety. He spills it on her skirt and the guests are in uproar and he shakes and clumsily attempts to clean her skirt. Ellen sat "looking down at this troubled bull-frog of a man with what almost amounted to languid acceptance of her due, until she made an effort, and returned to the human situation" (FL 404). We are drawn back in, along with Ellen, to a domestic setting and her vulnerability in social confines. Similar to *Voss* and *The Aunt's Story* we see White's repeated intrusions of vulnerability in social situations.

But Ellen is now able to remain somewhat removed from this. If and when she participates in socialising, it is a conscious effort to include herself in opportunities for engagement: "When calm had re-settled, Mrs. Roxburgh accepted another cup, offered by Tom. Her eyes grew moist, her vision blurred, but steam was rising out of the tea, and if she felt breathless, restless, her stays she told herself, were not yet broken in" (FL 404).

Ellen's worlds have merged. Her transition from the background to the foreground is appropriate in regards to her feeling "breathless and restless", even now. And her attraction to wild environments and imaginative spaces like Tintagel, or Ellen's description of herself as 'blank paper containing invisible writing', or her reflection in distorted mirrors. As Journet argues, White has "associated Ellen with surfaces and edges" (1988, p69). In regards to her physiognomy, fashion, and environment, Ellen has masked or veiled herself. Journet continues: "The pattern of the novel does not just take Ellen away from the edge, the 'secret depths', it also brings her back to the surface" (1988, p69). There is always a possible transition or at least a pull to another world. Now those elements have emerged within her identity and nature and she is able to apply them to her social existence. We leave Ellen as she sets out to conquer her environment, her relationships, and herself.

Conclusion

Much madness is divinest sense
To a discerning eye;
Much sense the starkest madness.

Emily Dickinson

Throughout this thesis I have examined the ways in which White's expressive portraits of his three female protagonists demonstrates how they have achieved self-realisation and transcendence from a confined and oppressive domestic existence. White champions the elements of awareness, sensuality, and multiplicity as central to his female characters' agency and authenticity. Distinctly, White presents their psychological fragmentation and alienation through modes of expressiveness (Weisstein, 1973) as a legitimate response to their confinement.

In each chapter I have outlined in what ways the three novels, *The Aunt's Story, Voss,* and *A Fringe of Leaves* can be considered as expressionist in their technique. White remarks in his autobiography, "What drives me is sensual, emotional, instinctive" (1998, p81). In his portrayal of the novels' protagonists, Theodora Goodman, Laura Trevelyan, and Ellen Roxburgh White employs key features of an expressive aesthetic: distortion, the dissolution of boundaries, embodiment, colour, multiplicity, sensuality and fluidity, and extreme or violent emotion. In this thesis I have demonstrated how through Theodora, Laura, and Ellen, White explores and undermines conventional gender roles – he also demonstrates the importance of relationships, and illustrates how these experiences permeate our lived-in spaces or environments. White writes in his autobiography that until well into his life "houses, places, landscapes meant more to me than people" (1998, p16). From this analysis an important question arises: what do these experiences afford women?

In David Marr's (1991) biography, *Patrick White: A Life,* Marr cites White's response to critics who have wondered about the resolution of his novels, for example, his references to Theodora "returning to Abyssinia" in *The Aunt's Story.* He proposes: "I was just fascinated by the idea of returning to one's origins after exploring the 'world' and finding in those origins the perfection for which one has been looking" (p242). This is significant for each of the women because even though they do not always literally explore the world (hence White's use of quotation marks), the interior worlds or imaginative worlds they explore give them access to worldliness or understanding – and as a result, White explains, they are able to find a kind of contentment. As Laura Trevelyan reflects in *Voss:* "the little that I have seen is less, I feel, than what I know" (V 475). In the final chapter of the novel the reader learns that Laura eventually inherits the "Academy for Young Ladies" and is "held in universal respect" as its headmistress. In particular it is her relationship with her adopted daughter, Mercy that suggests Laura is in the process of passing on some secret gospel, she "had implanted in the daughter a respectful love for the forms of all simple objects, the secrets of which she was trying perpetually to understand" (V 467).

White indicates that at the end of each of their journeys, Theodora, Laura, and Ellen have discovered something profound. When Marr asked White about the symbol of the black rose on Theodora's hat at the end of *The Aunt's Story*, as she is being taken to an asylum, he replies: "Because I see perfection in the rose, both of the flesh, and of the spirit […] I think I gave Theodora the black rose because it was at the point where she had been finally reduced – charred and purified" (White cited in Marr 1991, p242). He suggests that she has had a spiritual experience, stripping her back to an essential self, that allows for transcendence; a movement towards the sublime. That is, this experience is representative of a reflective state of mind that has moved the character beyond common sense and understanding. Likewise, White uses the symbol of Miss Scrimshaw's onyx ring "going click click" to draw readers into her final thoughts in *A Fringe of Leaves*. She confesses, "however much crypto-eagles aspire to soar, and do in fact, through thoughtscape and dream, their human nature cannot but grasp at any circumstantial straw which may indicate an ordered universe" (FL 405). Now, like Theodora and Laura, Miss Scrimshaw's journey ends with her in a transient state – she notes that even as she anxiously grasps at what counts for a normal life, she will continue to her secret desires within. It is also important to recognise that each female protagonist studied in this thesis has a young female protégé: Theodora's niece Lou, Laura's adopted daughter Mercy, and Ellen's young friend Miss Scrimshaw. There is a suggestion of inheritance or legacy here, even though each of the three has no children, that this spiritual understanding of the world can be learned and is especially valuable to young women whose fate is tied to the same social conventions,

> She thought about the cardboard aunt, Aunt Theodora Goodman, who was both a kindness and a darkness. Lou touched the sundial on which the time had remained frozen. She was afraid and sad, because there was some great intolerable pressure from which it was not possible to escape (AS 302).

Through close analysis, my thesis makes the following cumulative discovery: White is an expressionist, he writes powerful female protagonists, and he ensures they are, to an extent, unconfined at the end of their narratives. Barbara Hill Rigney in her book, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood,* explores the devastating psychological effect on a female protagonist that male-dominated society can have, where women are often considered lunatics (1978, p119). She argues that novelists like Woolf (and, I would now add, Patrick White) condemn such social systems. They indicate that oppressive societies deny individual freedom and that this contributes to "psychological fragmentation, alienation, and madness" (1978, p119). The female character in particular suffers, Rigney suggests, and is "torn between male society's prescriptions for female behaviour, their own tendencies towards the internalisation of these roles, and a nostalgia for some lost, more authentic self" (1978, p119). Through my research it has become clear that the combination of expressive qualities White's female characters present are reactions to their social circumstances. Considering each female character's narrative trajectory and the denouement of each novel, it has been possible to discern that these are not depictions of "madwomen" but instead women who have moved beyond the domestic into a sublime state of being in the world.

As I have shown, far from being lunatics, his female protagonists are forced into a kind of "madness" which actually enables their liberation. The thesis explains that the confinement of all three women also refers to both the limits and limitlessness of introspection, but the women transcend these conditions. Where they were confined by physical circumstances or social convention they had imaginative experiences that allowed them to gain knowledge and power. Where they lingered in this imagination they resurfaced with new perspectives on the world that granted them an awe-inspiring mysteriousness and confidence.

White notes in *Flaws in the Glass,* "One English critic finds it a serious flaw in my novels that my women are stronger than my men. I see nothing anomalous in this imbalance; it arises from a lifetime of observing my fellow Australians" (1998, p155). Again, I would argue that the strength of his women is the strength of his novels. Throughout this thesis I have given serious attention to the female protagonists, concentrating on the female perspective, because this is a perspective I observed was lacking scholarly analysis of White's work. It was the lack of close analysis of White's writing style in relation to the women that meant these narratives and the female journey to something visionary and profound was either misunderstood or left unnoticed and unexplained. Extensive close analysis demonstrates the extent of his expressive writing style and the power this affords the female characters.

There are areas explored in this thesis that warrant further research. This primarily involves considering White's use of expressionistic features in his other works. More specifically, how White's expressive writing style liberates all characters on the periphery, not just women. *The Vivisector* in particular uses artistic expression and offers explicit and extensive portrayals of emotional intensity. Furthermore, further critics might explore how the female characters from White's other novels are portrayed expressively in this way, perhaps not always for the same purpose of liberation but in order to show how they respond to their circumstances. While I have touched on the modes of expressionism and expressionistic style in White's novels, the sole focus of my thesis has been *The Aunt's Story, Voss* and *A Fringe of Leaves* – and White's oeuvre deserves to be examined in regards to this style in greater depth.

It would also be important to consider how this style of writing sits in the context of Australian literature and in what ways other Australian writers have employed similar styles when depicting Australian characters. The culture and landscape certainly provide the setting for expressionistic representation and dramatisation. Ken Goodwin (1986) in his book *The Nature of Australian Literature* explains that Australian literature is inevitably a literature of violence in response to a sense of alienation, oppression, and loneliness. He claims Australian literature is characterised by persistence, endurance, and repetition almost beyond endurance and that these qualities are foremost a physical response to the environment but also evident in their fictional representations: "they are qualities of construction and style"(p4). Could this style not be thought of as expressionist? And if so, does not this torturous depiction offer up new ways of seeing the world? Re-thinking this negative discourse Stephen Knight (1990) suggests, in *The Selling of the Australian*

Mind, that in “spite of Geoffrey Blainey's (1966) memorable summary distance could be not so much a tyranny as a liberation. Travel to Australia was also travel away from a set of patterns and into a different set of possibilities” (p154). Perhaps with this expressionist lens, fictional depictions of women in Australian fiction could also be re-read and examined to understand their confined conditions and whether or not an expressionist style of writing that explores their “tyranny” might actually help to liberate them.

This thesis was born out of my reading of the expressive episodes in the three novels I have discussed. Simon During claimed that White’s women were superfluous to a feasible narrative (1996 p89) and I think this is where I felt I could claim precisely the reverse. White’s use of what During referred to as the “symbolic plot” (1996, p89) was actually more significant than the narrative arc of the novel as it explored the emotional experiences the women went through, however minor. This was White’s success. He was able to demonstrate a “synthesis of living sensuality” (1998 p27). I hope I have identified the power of these episodes and White’s appreciation for the importance of an expressive response to the world.

> I believe it is this rag-bag of a disorderly mind which has more than anything offended some of my Australian academic critics. For them the controlled monochrome of reason, for me the omnium gatherum of instinctual colour which illuminates the more often than not irrational behaviour of sensual man” (1998 38).

White gives close attention to human relationships and reactions in episodes of daily existence to demonstrate that incidental moments can enlighten us and reveal sublime understandings of the human experience. Reading White’s novels is a sensory experience. When this is tied to the experiences of women railing against social convention, the impact is extraordinary in its agency.

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