The preparation, research and writing of this thesis were all personally undertaken. Nothing appears that is not the result of my own work except those references so acknowledged.

Maeve Saunders.
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ABSTRACT

'Such a pity you didn't write about a Cheery aunt' was Ruth White's comment after reading The Aunt's Story. Since then, critical commentary has flourished, partly in recognition that there is no love that is not an echo. In the end, as Patrick White admits, 'only love redeems.' He has also admitted that his pursuit of that 'razor-blade truth' has made him a 'slasher'. This, also, is reflected in critical reception. Critics agree, however, that White's vision is both highly personal and idiosyncratic. The focus of that vision is the search, by all White's central characters, for enlightenment and reconciliation with a lost unity. Common to the elite, through all the novels, are distinctive attitudes to experience, time and language, which become, as it were, conditions of enlightenment. It is with these conditions, so called, that this thesis is principally concerned. In other words, this study examines the narrative structures and devices, common to the novels, which brought about the initial agreement that White's vision is both highly personal and idiosyncratic. A close analysis of the texts reveals that many distinctions are made concerning action, knowledge, character and how, for example, enlightenment is to be attained. This analysis takes place on what may be termed the literal level of exegesis which, while the source and foundation of all other levels such as the metaphorical, archetypal, mythical and religious, has been overlooked in their favour.
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Bibliography
I would like to draw attention to a convention which has been adopted for ease of reading in the footnotes. All references to Patrick White's novels have been abbreviated in the footnotes, since they recur numberless times. Listed below are the full titles and editions of the novels used, subsequent references to the novels in the chapters will be made in the respective abbreviated form; which is also listed below. All references to any novel are taken from the specified edition.

Patrick White's novels:

Short Stories:


Autobiography:

INTRODUCTION

'Pull down thy vanity
It is not man
Made courage or made order or made grace
Pull down they vanity, I say pull down.'

Ezra Pound.

'Life does not live.'

Ferdinand Kurnberger.
Critical opinion agrees that Patrick White's novels display a highly personal view of the world and human experience. Consensus, however, vanishes when it comes to interpreting the meaning of White's point of view. Some critics, for example, see in White a religious writer lurking at the fringe of the secular world, such critics include Peter Beatson, Patricia Morley and, to a lesser extent, Cynthia vanden Driesen and Veronica Brady. I do not agree. Yet Peter Beatson's seminal and elegantly written work, *The Eye in the Mandala*, focuses on many preoccupations which are also subjects of this thesis. However, our approaches to common subject matter are fundamentally different, our positions radically apart. These basic and underlying differences demand elucidation.

Along with dozens of other critics and readers, Mr Beatson and I have traversed the landscape and terrain of Patrick White's fiction and picked out common landmarks. Order and chaos, rationality versus intuition, time, love and enlightenment are examples. But the backpacks carried on our respective journeys, the locations at which we have lingered, the perspectives on the topography and the manner
in which we have found our bearings are dissimilar in every respect. Most critics agree that enlightenment lies at the heart of White's novels. Mr Beatson and I are not exceptions. However, at an early point in the text of The Eye in the Mandala, a quotation from Voss is used to illustrate a metaphysical structure which, the author argues, underlies all of White's works.

'How important it is to understand the three stages. Of God into man. Man. And Man returning into God.' I

The Incarnation, according to Mr Beatson, is White's central subject.

'White's novels explore the implications of the descent of the soul into matter, the plight of the incarnated soul separated from its source, and the return by Grace, at the end of the cycle, to God.' 2

I. Voss, p.386.

Accordingly, the schema of the Incarnation, in terms of a metaphysical structure, is applied not only broadly to White's whole body of work, but also, specifically, to recurring themes within the novels. Love, for example, is presented as conforming to the schema:

'Love for the individual, with the promise of individual happiness that accompanies it, must be sacrificed, in the last stage of the cycle, for love of something impersonal that exists on a higher plane.'

This comment is later amplified.

'The cycle of love moves from an initial love of the incarnation, love of the particular and of the flesh, even in its most imperfect forms, through a deepening spiritual awareness born of this love, to a final surrender of personal love for the sake of union with a higher and less personal love. This higher love is expressed to the end in sensuous or mythical terms but points beyond the novels to a final union of the soul with God.'

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3. Ibid., p. 48.
4. Ibid., p. 50.
In a later section, 'the Prison and the Flood', representing order and chaos, the same pattern of descent and ascent is traced. The soul of the 'endorsed' characters, Mr Beatson argues, must descend into the world of form, of order and ordinariness; it must also experience the opposite, the formless world of chaos. Both worlds, form and chaos, are agents of redemption.

'The terrifying world of Chaos is transformed into the tranquil sea of Brahman; the imprisoning cell of form reveals its transcendental aspect as the soul is incorporated into the firm geometry of the cosmic mandala' 5

In a later discussion on place, under the title of 'The Garden and The Desert', Mr Beatson traces the relationship between states of mind, for example joy and sorrow, and the changing of background, for example when the desert replaces Rhine Towers. Place, too, is related to the cycle of the Incarnation.

In the first phase of its lifecycle, the soul inhabits an earthly paradise, wooed into acceptance of the flesh by the sensuous beauty of the natural world' 6

5. Ibid., p.62.
6 Ibid., p.138.
'In the second stage, the central character takes on the archetypal resonances of the Wanderer.'

'But when the Wanderer is most lost, he finds himself coming home. Calvary is situated at the centre of Hell. At the moment of death, the new King is born. God waits at the heart of the labyrinth.'

The context in which 'Time and the Timeless Moment' is discussed is also that of the Incarnation.

'From both Platonic and Hebraic sources the idea that time is a moving image of eternity, or that human destiny is governed by the decrees of God, has flowed into Christianity. In all of White's novels there is a strong sense of a scheme, pattern or directing Providence which all local events, either good or evil, subserve. Whatever the origins or emphasis, however, the implications for the individual are the same. Everything in life from its largest panorama to its smallest coincidence, is the will of God.'

7. Ibid., p.139.
8. Ibid., p.140.
9. Ibid., p.73.
Time, it is argued, is shaped into a pattern which can be seen and understood only at the end of a lifetime. There are good moments, the 'epiphanies', which Mr Beatson equates with experiencing the 'Hidden God'. There are also bad moments, which are an inevitable part of the pattern, which are seen in terms of 'The Fall'. The good moments, or 'epiphanies' are described as 'timeless moments'.

'Although the timeless moments in White take different forms, they have the same rhythm and the same features. They tend to be organized around the movement of the three stages ... in which arrogance or a sense of pseudo-divinity gives way to humility or even despair, which is, in turn, replaced by a moment of Grace.'

The epiphany, the timeless moment, is the moment of enlightenment in White's novels. Enlightenment, therefore, according to Mr Beatson, is the encounter between the 'endorsed' character and the 'Hidden God'. I cannot agree that such a specific equation is always the case. It seems to me, if the various states of enlightenment in the different novels are examined, that Patrick White goes to great lengths to avoid just such specificity. While the central characters possess a purpose in their lives, which sets them apart,

10. Ibid., p.75.
II. The subject of 'enlightenment' is discussed in a later chapter.
neither they themselves nor the narrative voice identify
it precisely. The object of their search remains
concealed until the moment of illumination. The
illuminations are varied and described sparsely. So,
to say of the central characters that,

"Pursuit of the secular vocation and
thirst for God are their main
preoccupations."

I2

is to reduce all quests and illuminations to one
particular kind, a kind, moreover, that has very specific
Christian connotations. But, it is not at all clear
that White is a Christian, as Mr Beatson admits, I3 and
two novels, only, contain explicit references to either
the Christian or Hebraic traditions. To say, too, that
time in the novels is directed and controlled by Providence
is to overlook the intervention of contingency. I4 The
contingent world and the contingent event play a large
role in the lives of the central characters. To omit
contingency and see only Providence at work is to
place action in the novels in a preordained context.

I2. Peter Beatson op.cit., p.103.
I3. Ibid., p.2.
I4. In seeing Providence as the guiding hand behind action
in the novels, Patricia Morley would seem to agree with
Peter Beatson.
cf. The Mystery of Unity, University of Queensland Press,
1972, pp. 4-5.
The texts of the novels, I suggest, offer evidence to the contrary. The subject of contingency is discussed at greater length in chapter four.

The history of religious debate on the work of Patrick White has long been vexed. Peter Beatson is just one of many critics who have written on the subject. Closest to his position, if not in manner of approach, is Patricia Morley.

"His vision is not original but traditional, an expression of the Judaen-Christian cultural heritage from which it flowers."  

and

"White's vision must appear as ultimately Christian"  

In choosing the incarnation as a motif, Mr Beatson is ultimately making the same claim. Other critics have written on religion in White's novels while trying to avoid making specific connections. Veronica Brady's position has shifted considerably between the late sixties and the late seventies. In her Ph.D. thesis,

I6. Ibid., p.3.
submitted in 1969, her view of the religious aspect
of White's writing is more orthodox.

"White's role, in fact, is not unlike
that of the Hebrew prophet, reminding
men of their obligations to it."

More recently, in drawing on the writings of Simone Weil
as a source of illumination on White, Veronica Brady
highlighted a problem which bedevils most critics who
offer a religious interpretation.

"At best when White makes the vision of
God - whatever that may be - the reward
to be worked for he may seem to be more
of a hagiographer than a novelist, and
even then, as it has often been observed,
though his heroes and heroines may be
"saints" they are often also unpleasant
people, so that asking the reader to
admire them entails a kind of perversion
of thought and feeling."

The question of salvation is one of the knottiest
problems that has faced Christianity. In White's
novels salvation is the equivalent of enlightenment;
and why some characters, of doubtful virtue, reach

I7. Patricia Mary Brady, The Hard Enquiring Wind: A
Study of Patrick White As An Australian Novelist,

I8. Veronica Brady, 'The Novelist and the Reign of Necessity:
Patrick White and Simone Weil', Patrick White A
enlightenment is a problem confronting the Christian interpreter. Cynthia vanden Driesen circumvents the problem by viewing the central characters as 'saints'.\textsuperscript{19} This is to overlook, not only the very obvious flaws in Elizabeth Hunter, Hurtle Duffield and Voss, among others, but also the fact that, since \textit{Happy Valley}, we have been repeatedly told that 'man must cater for his imperfections'.\textsuperscript{20} That man, as Patrick White presents his characters, is imperfect is the point. Yet precisely this point continues to pose difficulties for the Christian interpreter, because 'the existence of the flaws' in the central characters makes 'them morally reprehensible'.\textsuperscript{21} Both the judgement of and accounting for moral reprehensibility are not problems presented by the texts, but are superimposed by the Christian interpreter as a result of extraneous doctrinal necessity.

The application by Mr. Beatson of the Incarnation cycle to such specific themes in White as love, form and chaos, and place is open to question. Love between individuals is not sacrificed in \textit{Happy Valley} for the sake of 'a final union of the soul with God.' Nor can this


\textsuperscript{20} H.V., pp.101, 103.

\textsuperscript{21} Peter Beatson, \textit{op.cit}, p.39.
be said of *The Living and the Dead*, *The Aunt's Story*, *The Vivisector*, *The Eye Of The Storm*, *A Fringe of Leaves*, or *The Twyborn Affair*. Indeed, as is later discussed, it is arguable that, in the novels between *The Living and the Dead* and *The Twyborn Affair*, love between individuals is explored for its beneficial and positive effects. Love is not presented as an agent of enlightenment. The opposition between form and chaos, I would argue is not experienced by the 'endorsed' characters, as Mr Beatson also suggests, but is rather an opposition presented between the world of the limited characters and that of the central characters. Order and form are consistent characteristics of those who 'can see clearly but not far'. Clocks, substances, lists, property and routine are features of those characters who believe they are in control of their lives. However, while the central characters do not believe they are in control of their lives, their world is not chaotic. Not chaos but contingency imposes itself on the lives of the elite. This, I think, is an important distinction which is later argued at greater length. The contrast in place, for example the coast as opposed to the interior, is another narrative device which the author uses to illustrate the differing goals of the central and minor characters. The limited characters restrict themselves to dwelling in safe areas; the elite, only, venture into unknown terrain. Further
points of difference between the critical approaches of Mr Beatson and myself include the source of suffering in the novels. Mr Beatson sees the root of suffering as 'the separation of the soul from God'.

I would rather follow the lead established in Happy Valley.

'There is a mystery of unity about the world, that ignores itself, finding its expression in cleavage and pain, the not-world that demands I shall run away from myself, that I too shall be a creature of cleavage and pain walking with my eyes closed.'

It is through the denial of aspects of selfhood, a running away from self, that cleavage and pain result. Moreover, the denial of selfhood and the ignoring of the mystery of unity are internal to the world. If Happy Valley can be said to be an exploration of the condition of cleavage and pain, subsequent novels are explorations in search of a unity that is innate. As well as the religious perspective, a psychological approach is also present in Mr Beatson's commentary. John Colmer has already expressed my objections with more eloquence.

22. Ibid., p.27.
23. H.V., p.166.
Peter Beatson has usefully drawn attention to the various kinds of duality that we meet in White's fiction, but for the common reader one of the disadvantages of his patient analysis is its Jungian Terminology. There are of course striking parallels between Jung's ideas on individuation and those of White, especially in The Solid Mandala (1966), and the two writers share a common interest in the mandala as a traditional symbol of unity; but it should be possible to examine the ideas of duality and unity in White without continuous recourse to either Jungian or theological terms. After all, he is a writer of fiction not of technical psychology or Christian apologetics, an explorer of reality, not a psychologist or priest.

More specifically, in his section on 'Identity', Mr Beatson begins his discussion with the character Theodora Goodman. Two passages from The Divided Self by R.D. Laing are quoted, initially since 'they illuminate so vividly the source of her madness'. Following the quotations Mr Beatson comments that,

'(...there is no better gloss on all of White's early writings up to and including The Ham Funeral than The Divided Self and its central theory of "ontological insecurity".)'  

To begin, critical opinion does not agree that Theodora is mad. The text itself offers no indisputable evidence that such is the case. At no point does the narrative voice make it clear to the readers that they should regard Theodora as insane, not to mention schizophrenic which is what the quoted passage from Laing implies. What the narrative voice does make clear is that such characters as the Johnsons, and 'those who prescribe the reasonable life', within the novel, regard Theodora as certifiable. Psychological tracts, such as R.D. Laing's, may well be helpful in illuminating thematic difficulties in texts, but to cite The Divided Self, without discrimination or demur, as a general gloss on several of White's texts, not only deprives the fiction of its flexibility and subtlety, but is inaccurate and misleading. It is also inaccurate to state that 'Happy Valley begins with a miscarriage', when in fact it is a stillbirth.

26. Ibid., p.122.
To summarize, what may be called the spiritual dimension in the writings of Patrick White, that is the search for enlightenment, which characterizes the central characters, has been perceived by certain critics in very specific terms. Peter Beatson and Patricia Morley are two such critics. The former sees White's vision as Christian, the latter draws upon the broader Judaen-Christian tradition. Other critics such as Cynthia vanden Dreisen and, more particularly, Veronica Brady, in her later writings, have attempted to discuss the 'religious' aspect of White's work while avoiding the narrow confines of a specific religious tradition. However, the Judaen-Christian tradition also influences their respective discourses. Such interpretations arise from an initial assumption that spirituality necessarily involves religion. Yet this is an assumption which can only be dated as post-Christian. When Aristotle, or any of the Greeks for example, speaks of the soul, there is no corresponding attempt, by the interpreters, to associate their spirituality with a religion. We are content to allow pre-Christian spirituality to be a-religious, we are not content to allow post-Christian spirituality to remain so. Within the commentary, positions seem to have become polarized between the critics with a religious perspective and those
who have not. The former often seem compelled both to defend their position and proselytize the opposition. The following passages provide examples.

"While not wishing to imply the presence in White's work of a formula coldly thought out and applied, this paper attempts to elucidate broadly how his fiction seems so shaped as to counter the main objections which militate against the acceptance of the religiously oriented work, the distrust of religion as belonging to the order of the irrational, and the idea of the religious stance as being simply escapist because incompatible with a full awareness of basic human realities." 27

The discussion then charts the prominence of intuition and those characters, the intellectuals and rationalists, who are presented as being 'spiritually dead' in the texts. The following comments are made.

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These figures conform most interestingly to just those types in Australian society which Ronald Conway finds reject religion—the intelligentsia, who regard Christianity as outworn myth and who, in Fulton Sheen's words, "repress religion as our fathers repressed sex", and the type never concerned with issues beyond immediate material contingencies; a type of "metaphysical moron".

If there is a direct association made here between the limited characters of White's novels and the 'metaphysical moron' of the Australian 'intelligentsia', the context of the discussion also implied a connection between the latter and critics who object to 'the religious stance.' However, any reader or critic would have to be either, extremely prejudiced, or short sighted to miss the consistent undermining of rationality that takes place in White's novels. I have never read any paper, article or book which interprets White exclusively as a rationalist. Most readers or critics, therefore, recognize the non rational elements in White. To claim, then, that critics reject the religious label, because religion belongs 'to the order of the irrational' is both unjustified and illogical. I would suggest that the reason why some commentators fail to be convinced by the religious stance is, precisely, because the investing, of White's spiritual content, in a specific religious system is too large an assumption.

28. Ibid., pp. 79-80.
It is too great a step taken without textual evidence, and the enthusiasm with which it is undertaken suggests a greater interest, on the part of the critic, in the religion than in Patrick White's novels. Moreover, it is a step which sometimes results, as in the case of Mr Beatson, in a schema, like the incarnation, being much too rigidly and broadly applied. The specific Christian and Judaic points of reference in Voss and Riders in the Chariot are overt, but cannot be extrapolated and generalized to build a frame on which to hang White's spirituality. The obvious, too, has been overlooked. One of White's major preoccupations is with cleavage and pain. It is neither remarkable nor incredible that, in some of his writings about suffering, the most powerful archetype of human suffering in Western culture, the Life and Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, should inform the imagery. Without ever subscribing to a specific Christian tradition, the Crucifixion could still represent the ultimate image of suffering in human consciousness. The history of debate about the question of spirituality in Patrick White's novels has been bedevilled by a reluctance to discuss it either in the abstract, or in the context of each individual novel. Instead, an investment has been
made by interested critics in a specific religious system. Such investments both confuse and colour the arguments. The last words on the subject I leave to Patrick White.

'What do I believe? I am accused of not making it explicit. How to be explicit about a grandeur too overwhelming to express, a daily wrestling match with an opponent whose limbs never become material, a struggle from which the sweat and blood are scattered on the pages of anything the serious writer writes? A belief contained less in what is said than in the silences. In patterns on water. A gust of wind: A flower opening. I hesitate to add a child, because a child can grow into a monster, a destroyer. Am I a destroyer? this face in the glass which has spent a lifetime searching for what it believes, but can never prove to be, the truth. A face consumed by wondering whether truth can be the worst destroyer of all.'

'Each respects what the other believes, though Manoly, I think, disapproves of my erratic spirit, chafing free, rejecting tradition.'

29. F.G., p.70.
30. Ibid., p.145.
ii. Happy Valley as embryo.

Having discussed, at some length, certain issues in the critical debate on the works of Patrick White, and isolated the points of difference between such critics as Peter Beatson, Patricia Morley, Cynthia vanden Driesen and Veronica Brady and the approach taken up in this work, it is, perhaps, time to outline the intention, scope and nature of this thesis. Many years ago Harry Heseltine wrote that 'White's prose habitually indicates possibilities beyond the present moment.'\textsuperscript{31} I agree; but would add that the possibilities so indicated are not always the same. Certain themes recur throughout the body of White's work and become like old familiar music. Only the playing will sometimes change from novel to novel, as the orchestration alters in relation to each novel's central foci and preoccupations. While speaking of himself and his background in \textit{Flaws in the Glass}, White explains, what could be seen as his defection from the social class into which he was born, thus:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
...'to me the refractions from that many-sided crystal, truth are more diverse than they would have been had I remained blinkered by the values of the Australian rich.'

'Refractions from that many-sided crystal, truth', is also a good description of Patrick White's texts. His novels are concerned with human experience about which they ask difficult questions. If in each novel he is looking through a different side of the crystal, this would account for the manifold possibilities beyond the present moment indicated by the prose. White is a writer who conceives his purpose as presenting those realms of experience which are unaccounted for and inaccesible, not what is familiar and known. In pursuing this end, he tackles not only the more oblique questions of human existence but also the commonplace and the ordinary. Such things as natural objects, man's relationships with animals and the landscape, and the daily habits and mundane practices of human lives are examined afresh for the original mysteries out of which they first arose. Philosophers, at different times, have warned against the dangers of overlooking what is obvious

32. F.G., p.151.
and familiar. For, in accepting numerous facts and features of daily life without question, we run the risk of diminishing sensibility and hardening into a state of complacency.

Patrick White is a natural questioner. His answers, however, can be ambiguous. The ambiguity is a result of the multiplicity of refractions. The crystal image aptly describes White's notion of truth and human experience. For him all human experience is valid.

'...Double values abound amongst those I used to respect: and as for myself, I have never disguised a belief that, as an artist, my face is many-faceted, my body protean, according to time, climate and the demands of fiction.'

'It is not, therefore, a question of double values or hypocrisy. It is more that Patrick White is led through the labyrinth of human experience by his explorations, and is predisposed to accept whatever he finds. This quality of being led rather than leading, is also characteristic of his novels. What constitutes human life, its purpose and meaning is to be discovered, and the stories of Voss, Stan Parker,

33. Ibid., p.I53.
Theodora, Himmelfarb, Alf Dubbo and Elizabeth Hunter, among others, are precisely such illustrations.

'Young Man (beating on the door with his hands)
Then tell me what is the most I can expect? How am I to discover?
Girl (stalling) Discover?
It is in the air, it is in the wall..' \footnote{George Steiner, \textit{On Difficulty and Other Essays}, Oxford University Press, 1972, p.xi.}

George Steiner once wrote that 'to ask larger questions is to risk getting things wrong. Not to ask them at all is to constrain the life of understanding to fragments of reciprocal irony or isolation'. By asking the larger questions Patrick White takes this risk. He has also paid the price, he has got things wrong. Quite apart from critical debate and its tidal wranglings, there is the matter of \textit{Happy Valley} which has never been permitted a reprint. White, presumably, would prefer the novel to remain in oblivion. It is not difficult to speculate on the reasons why such is the case, nevertheless, in considering White's entire oeuvre, \textit{Happy Valley} is of considerable interest. The novel contains many seeds which flower in later works and includes character types and themes which reappear in subsequent novels. That 'man must cater for his imperfections' is repeated through the course of

\footnote{Patrick White, \textit{'The Ham Funeral'}, \textit{Four Plays}, Melbourne, Sun, 1967, p.32.}
Happy Valley and is clearly one of the novel's central themes. Yet man's imperfections and the catering thereto form a considerable portion of all the novels. Oliver Halliday is a paler prototype of Elyot Standish and Alys Browne is an undeveloped Theodora Goodman, with a greater faith in romance. Her life is, in the novel, largely spent in waiting, another point of resemblance to Theodora.

'When he had gone she sat down, she was upright, she was firmer, something had happened to her, she felt. As if her body, and perhaps her mind, had suddenly grown taut as he touched her hand, tightened the bandage, touching some nerve that had always hung slack. What is it, she said, and why am I sitting like this, waiting, like sitting with pamphlets in my lap about California, and then not going, I never went, there was no significance in it all, and what am I waiting for? It was one of those questions you could not answer.'

In fact, waiting is a central theme of the novel and is connected to the underlying metaphor of Happy Valley itself.

36. H.V., p.104.
'Happy Valley became that peculiarly tenacious scab on the body of the brown earth. You waited for it to come away leaving a patch of pinkness underneath. You waited and it did not happen, and because of this you felt there was something in its nature peculiarly perverse. What was the purpose of Happy Valley if, in spite of its lack of relevance, it clung tenaciously to a foreign tissue, waiting and waiting for what? It seemed to have no design. You could not feel it. You anticipated a moral doomsday, but it did not come. So you went about your business, tried to find reason in this. After all, your existence in Happy Valley must be sufficient in itself.'

However, it is not until The Aunt's Story that the theme of waiting is more fully explored and developed. Chuffy Chambers, whose joy in living is inextricably connected with playing the accordion, is the forerunner of the 'simple' characters who appear in later novels. Clem Hagen, the manager of Glen Marsh, whose expectations of leisure time revolve around drink, tall yarns and sex, points to the 'aggressively masculine world' of another property manager, Don Prowse in The Twyborn Affair. Sidney Furlow, wealthy, privileged and suffocated, represents the class of characters from which Elizabeth Hunter's story is ultimately drawn; while Hilda Halliday's desire for security prefigures Amy Parker. The preoccupation

37. Ibid., p.116.
with lust which recurs through several of White's later works, being highlighted in the episode of Amy and Leo in *The Tree of Man*, can be seen at source in the affaire between Vic Moriarty and Hagen. Stan and Mrs Furlow, the owners of Glen Marsh, for whom life revolves around their sheep and their assets, are the embodiments of White's limited characters who persist, in one form or another, throughout the rest of White's work. Finally, the children, Oliver Hallidav and Margaret Quong, who in their respective ways come to realize that they are different from their peers, resemble Lou of *The Aunt's Story*, Kathy of *The Vivisector* and the grandson in *The Tree of Man* to whom 'thought and experience are bequeathed.'

In short, many of the familiar concerns and preoccupations which characterize White's fiction are present in *Happy Valley*. Their presence, however, is more vague and less well-defined. The sharp contrasts and stark oppositions, which are the hallmark of White's novels from *The Aunt's Story* on, are absent. There are no illuminati or elite in the first novel. The process of self discovery is mentioned explicitly only once.

'I've wanted something else. I haven't known what I wanted. I don't think many of us do. Except very occasionally by a sort of intuitional flash. Sometimes it's a physical or material solution, sometimes it's spiritual, sometimes its both. All of a sudden you know.'

38. Ibid., p.162.
Despite the harmony that Oliver Halliday and Alys Browne discover through their relationship, neither character is sufficiently developed in self-awareness, nor refined, nor worked upon by experience to be classified among the elite. They are not so presented. The world of Happy Valley is explicitly referred to as 'the embodiment of pain;' and the epigraph, chosen for the novel from the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, makes the roles of the characters in such a world very clear:

'It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering, which is the one indispensable condition of our being. Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone . . . . The purer the suffering, the greater is the progress.'

While Happy Valley is a very creditable first novel, it suffers greatly in comparison to what was to follow. Its thematic limitations are obvious and are probably a result not only of the author's inexperience as a writer, which besets most first novels, but also of the structure chosen. Happy Valley is an 'ensemble' novel. In attempting to portray human suffering in a geographical location, identified as the embodiment of pain, the author assembled a large group of characters whose stories had to be told. The consequent result is either the absence of central characters or, alternatively, central characters who are under developed. What emerges from the novel is certainly
a portrayal of many kinds of suffering. However, the second half of the term: 'the purer the suffering, the greater is the progress', is not illustrated by the novel. There is an element of reconciliation at its conclusion, in the sense that both Oliver Halliday and Alys Browne are resigned to their fate, but no progress is obvious. Progress, in terms of transcendence or enlightenment, is totally absent and must wait to be developed and encompassed in the later novels.

'There is a mystery of unity about the world, that ignores itself finding its expression in cleavage and pain, the not-world that demands I shall run away from myself, that I too shall be a creature of cleavage and pain walking with my eyes closed.'

Happy Valley principally explores the condition of 'cleavage and pain' through the stories of several characters. In one story, only, that of Oliver Halliday and Alys Browne, the condition of 'cleavage and pain' is briefly replaced by unity and harmony. Their denouement involves their return to their separate existences forfeited by their transitory happiness. While Happy Valley cannot be said to fulfil its own aims, it is, nevertheless, of

39. Ibid., p.166.
considerable interest in the tracing of White's development. It is a novel which explores ordinary lives without, on the whole, prior judgements having been made by the author. The starker and somewhat presumptory divisions of characters in later novels are not manifest in this first work. The myriad levels of consciousness, which feature largely in the portrayals of Theodora, Stan Parker, Voss and the others, are not present either. Yet, in assessing the larger body of White's work, it is reassuring, in some sense, to see that his first novel was a genuine enquiry into the experience of 'cleavage and pain' of ordinary characters, who had no unusual aspirations or intentions and who did not exist, to any marked degree, in physical, spiritual or emotional separation from their community. It is a proper starting point, both intellectually and emotionally, for the paths that White would later follow and explore.

In terms of style, Happy Valley is also quite different from subsequent novels. To begin, the ironic title accounts for about all the irony in the novel. One or two sentences do surface occasionally, for example,

'Now when he took to his bed his wife sent for the doctor to give him an injection, and incidentally herself a little spiritual support.'

40. Ibid., p.121.
The vein of irony, however, which runs through the later novels and dexterously depicts the foibles and oddities of human behaviour, is not present in the writing of Happy Valley. Neither is the brilliant evocation of place. The first few pages of the novel strain laboriously to describe the environs of Happy Valley, but the narrative suggests an aerial view and the resulting picture is blurred and indistinct, lacking the powerful rendering which characterizes Meroe and the locale of Stan and Amy Parker, the deserts of Voss and the landscape of Bogong. In general terms, the writing in Happy Valley lacks the elliptical nature of the later style, the allusive quality of the narrative voice which implies and suggests significance and the sureness and authority of the author's intentions. In Happy Valley there is far less distance between the author and the narrative voice, as the following passage illustrates.

'At Happy Valley man was by inclination static. That was the rub. Watch a man complaining at sundown over a glass of beer, watch him wipe the dust off his mouth, listen to his pale yellow voice, if you want to understand what I mean. Because there you will find that static quality I'm trying to suggest, I mean, the trousers hanging on, but only just.'

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41. Ibid., p.115.
In subsequent novels the narrative voice never alludes to its meaning. No explicit signposting ever occurs in the texts after this first novel. Since Happy Valley, Patrick White has traversed a lot of ground where it would seem a virtue is made of never being explicit about what, in fact, is being suggested.

All of White's novels, in a certain sense are one novel, or to put it another way, the novels present different aspects of an underlying obsession. The term obsession is used because, in the span of eleven novels, at no point do the recurring central concerns alter. The novels are a series of attempts to answer certain questions, which are, to revert to George Steiner, the 'larger questions.' These questions concern the lost 'mystery of unity about the world' and the consequent condition of 'cleavage and pain.' the walking through life with 'eyes closed.' The first two novels, Happy Valley and the Living and the Dead examine and probe the condition of human 'cleavage and pain' as envisaged by the author. How this applied to Happy Valley has already been discussed, and Elyot Standish is a portrayal of a man walking with his 'eyes closed'. In neither novel is this condition transcended. It is not until The Aunt's Story that the reconciliation of the central character is attempted in any genuine sense.
This was the breakthrough in White's development as a novelist. At the end of the novel Theodora Goodman discovers a mystery of unity; as do Stan Parker, Hurtle Duffield, Voss, the riders in the chariot and Elizabeth Hunter. Eddie Twyborn, on the other hand, does not. The Twyborn Affair, therefore, marks a fundamental and radical departure from the main body of White's work. The intervening novel, A Fringe of Leaves, while belonging in type to the larger body of work, shows distinct signs of the change that was to follow.

Reconciliation and the mystery of unity, therefore, lie at the heart of almost all White's novels. This process of recurrence has been, at the same time, a process of crystallization. For in all those novels, from The Aunt's Story to A Fringe of Leaves, which present central characters in search of enlightenment and reconciliation with a lost unity, certain characteristics recur. Common to the elite, through all the novels, are distinctive attitudes to experience, time and language, which become, as it were, conditions of enlightenment. It is with these 'conditions' of enlightenment that this thesis is principally concerned. The manner in which the elite reach their respective and various illuminations and, indeed, what constitutes enlightenment from the subject matter of chapters one
to seven. Specifically, chapters one, two, and three discuss knowledge, passion and silence, which encompass the central characters' attitudes to experience and language. Chapters four, five and six analyse contingency, memory and reciprocity, which are aspects of time. The narrative device for establishing such attitudes on the part of the elite is through a broad spectrum of recurring oppositions, contraries and polarities. Hence, the discussions revolve around the tracing of these oppositions through all the novels. These oppositions include rationality and intuition, permanence and impermanence, action and passion, language and silence, order and contingency, love and solitude among others. Useful distinctions, I hope, are made, as in, for example, the role of contingency. Much criticism of White supports the notion that the elite tread a preordained path.

"...White shows spiritual progress as an abnormal pursuit, and his protagonists are harried into pursuing illumination, either to fulfil their character or their destiny ('it was intended'). Because they are not entirely free agents, but act out a role (as visionary, illuminate, divine fool, quester), and because aspects of the main characters are projected into other supporting characters, the fiction is to that extent quasi-allegorical dramatization, and the spiritual truths are peculiarly external realities."

By tracing the subject of contingency in the novels, I would suggest that the elite are not a chosen few on whom the gift of enlightenment is bestowed, but are active spiritual explorers for whom enlightenment is also a matter of contingency. Chapter seven traces the subject of enlightenment itself and analyses the manner of its portrayal in the novels. Chapter eight looks at *A Fringe of Leaves* in the light of the preceding chapters. In other words, how the oppositions, contraries and polarites come together in one novel, and how the resulting attitudes to experience, language and time are established, is also discussed. Interestingly enough, while all the familiar aspects reappear in *A Fringe of Leaves*, Patrick White has tentatively begun to shift his focus. This novel clearly reflects change. By *The Twyborn Affair*, this shift in focus is complete. Accordingly, chapter nine analyses this latest novel. Enlightenment, the quest of all White's central characters does not occur in this novel. What has enabled the enlightenment of Theodora, Stan, Voss and Elizabeth Hunter fails for Eddie Twyborn. This is a radical change, and it is of profound interest that this should happen in what may be White's last novel; for Eddie Twyborn's failure is not an accident of bad or muddled writing; it is deliberate. Chapter ten turns to the short stories for the reason that the short stories offered White the opportunity of presenting...
different versions of his themes. The familiar preoccupations and concerns reappear but the emphasis is often differently placed, sometimes radically so. For example, some stories deal with those characters who would belong to the limited type of the novels and who, within that framework, receive scant attention. As a result, the short stories fill in gaps left by the novels and contribute significantly to the overall balance by which White's view of human beings and human experience can be judged. In the final chapter of the thesis attention is turned to style. White's style has long been a subject of critical contention. Style, in the end, is simply a question of language, and in a novelist's use of language lies the heart of the matter. Style identifies the vision, intentions, aspirations, certainties and uncertainties of a writer. Style is the writer's heaven and hell.

Within the span of his novels White attempts the most difficult thing of all, to hold in balance and reflect the contradictions of which a human life is composed. Hence, the host of oppositions and contradictions which prevail in many of the texts. The equivocal nature of the man himself is, no doubt, also a contributing factor:
'The unknown is the man the interviewers, the visiting professors, the thesis writers expect to find, and because I am unable to produce him I have given up receiving them. I don't want to pretend to be me, as the poet Philip Larkin has said of himself in similar situations. The masks I put on in my fictions are very different from those which strangers try to force on me, or to use another metaphor, the characters of whom I am composed cannot include those not yet revealed to me. At the age of sixty-nine I am still embarking on voyages of exploration which I hope may lead to discovery.'

Theodor Adorno, with less rhetorical flourish, has put the difficulty in more commonplace, more universal terms.

'...knowledge comes to us through a network of prejudices, opinions, innervations, self-corrections, presuppositions and exaggerations, in short through the dense, firmly-founded but by no means uniformly transparent medium of experience.'

43. F.G., p.182.

iii. The Literal Level.

In approaching Patrick White's novels as a 'series of refractions from that many-sided crystal, truth,' this thesis has, correspondingly, taken a curious form. The sequential development of a central argument would have been, for example, inappropriate, as the intention was to elucidate the refractions presented by the novels. No such sequential development exists from novel to novel. Rather the refractions cross, repeat, intermingle and connect at odd points, hence my task has been to follow and present their trail. Accordingly, the texts of the novels have played a large and primary role in this study and are offered, in the main, as the guiding authority. While, obviously, this kind of literary criticism has limitations it, nevertheless, has both an honourable ancestry and serves a useful function. The use of frequent textual quotation in literary criticism was likened, by Walter Benjamin, to the process of 'drilling' a text rather than its 'excavation'. In her introduction to Illuminations, Hannah Arendt states than when Benjamin

......'was working on his study of German tragedy, he boasted of a collection of "over 600 quotations very systematically and clearly arranged." (Briefe I,339); like the
later notebooks, this collection was not an accumulation of excerpts intended to facilitate the writing of the study but constituted the main work, with the writing as something secondary. The main work consisted in tearing fragments out of their context and arranging them afresh in such a way that they illustrated one another and were able to prove their raison d'être in a free-floating state, as it were."4,5

The intentions of this thesis, however, do not coincide with those of Walter Benjamin because our attitudes to the philosophy of language differ. Nevertheless, while extracts from White's novels do not, in the spirit of Benjamin, constitute the main work of this thesis, their selection and sequence are of primary importance in that they elucidate and, as it were, comment upon each other. The following may be said both of White's novels and the issues therein traced in this thesis.

"Anyone who seeks truth fares like the man in the fable about the veiled picture at Sais: "this is caused not by some mysterious monstrousness of the content to be unveiled but by the nature of truth before which even the purest fire of searching is extinguished as though under water" (Schriften I,151,152)."6


46. Ibid.
The function of this study, not only the sense of the approach taken but, also, its relationship to the greater body of criticism on White, may best be illustrated by returning briefly to the work of Peter Beatson. In a chapter on 'Alternative Language' in The Eye in the Mandala, Peter Beatson sets out a five-level system of exegesis which he employs. These are:

1. The Literal Level.
2. The Level of the Individual Situation or Objective Correlative.
3. The Level of the Human Condition.
4. The Archetypal or Mythical Level.
5. The Nouminous or Anagogical Level.

All of these levels, according to Mr Beatson, are present in all the novels, if in varying proportions. The first two levels are the domain of the particular, while the third and fourth deal with images and mythic patterns. 'All four levels work together to release the fifth in which the unique and the universal merge'. It is with the first level, however that I am specifically concerned. Mr Beatson describes it thus.

'The Literal Level. At this level, things are simply themselves; it is the only level which would concern us if White were only a
realist novelist. At this level, a marble is only a marble, not a cosmic mandala, a sunset is only a sunset, not a fiery chariot. This is the anchor and the ground for the other levels, without which they could not exist. But granted this, and granted also that White's superb powers of description and evocation are among the highest attributes of his genius, little will be said about this level. Participating in a realm of pure existence, things on the plane do not "mean" but "are", and since the subject of this book is "meaning", this first level will be taken for granted, and the remaining four will be concentrated on.'

As he has said Mr Beatson does not concern himself with the literal level and suggests that such a concern is redundant. At first glance his reasons seem unexceptionable, but on a more studied reading certain questions arise. To begin, the assertion that the literal level is 'the only level which would concern us if White were only a realist novelist' implies, that, since White is more than a realist novelist, the literal level is irrelevant. This is not logical especially as Mr Beatson later admits all five levels are present in all the novels. Neither is the fact that 'White's superb powers of description and evocation are among the highest attributes of his genius' a reason for discounting the literal level, since such descriptions and evocations also occur on this level. One may cite, for example, descriptions

of the material and phenomenal world where White is concerned with presenting things precisely as they 'are', and those portrayals of moments in his characters' lives where 'being is enough'. This thesis disputes both the implication that the study of the literal level is redundant and the statement that it may 'be taken for granted'. The literal level, that is the 'reason of pure existence', is not without meaning and, indeed, the meaning of language at this level often presents the knottiest problems. The most difficult questions of all are those which deal with the 'realm of pure existence'. The meaning of life, death, body and spirit are such questions, which no human being can easily answer. Furthermore, our understanding of the literal level can also be hampered by our assumption that its meaning is obvious. Many critics, including Mr Beatson, have rendered illuminating accounts of the other levels in White; this thesis is, I believe, the only work which consciously concerns itself with the literal level. What Mr Beatson defines as 'the anchor and the ground for the other levels', is surely worthy of attention for precisely that reason.

The title of this thesis 'Structures of Discovery in the novels of Patrick White', is so called because it seemed an appropriate description. The word, structure, according to the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*, is the "manner in which a building or organism or other complete whole is constructed". As most critics agree, the quest for enlightenment is central to the majority of White's novels. The quest for enlightenment can be broken down into consistent parts or elements which also recur in the novels. Therefore, this thesis examines the mutual relation of the consistent parts, or elements, of enlightenment which determine its unique nature. According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, this is another definition of structure.

The word discovery was chosen because it describes the manner in which enlightenment is presented in the texts. Experience in the novels is not prescribed, there is no plan, no blueprint; rather the characters find out in the experience what is to be done. This process of active discovery, on the part of the central characters, is a crucial and important distinction qualifying the nature of their quest. Neither is enlightenment prescribed; no predictions exist in the novels concerning the context or import of enlightenment. Both are presented as matters to be discovered.
"You must let me teach you that abstractions are a great mistake. If I do not follow my own precept, it is because the concrete often offers itself in a somewhat unattractive form"
It is not possible to define in precise or neat terms what is meant by 'knowledge' in the narratives of Patrick White.

What emerges more clearly is often what knowledge is not. So that by following through a series of negatives one arrives at a clearer idea of what, in fact, is involved. To begin, those characters who aspire to knowledge are frequently presented as figures of simplicity. Theodora Goodman, for example, says of herself that:

"I never thought about being anything in particular. One lives, and that is all."  

Also, in introducing the character of Stan Parker the narrative voice states that:

"He was no interpreter. He shifted beside his fire at the suggestion that he might have been. He was nothing much. He was a man."

While one can add to the list of central characters who are presented thus, obvious exceptions such as Voss, Eddie Twyborn, Elizabeth Hunter and Hurtle Duffield also spring to mind. However this group of more sophisticated aspirants to enlightenment are, in their respective novels, made to undergo a process of unlearning their assumptions and values until they reach a state of humility, which resembles the point from which the other group of characters begin. Therefore, what both groups
share, at some point in their narratives, is a state of simplicity. This state is one of potentiality, of receptiveness to experience which is unfamiliar; and which pushes beyond the frontier of the social norm.

'My whole life had been a failure, lived at a most humiliating level, always purposeless, frequently degrading. Until I became aware of my power. The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming.' 3

It is this endlessness of becoming, this limitless potentiality that characterizes all of White's central characters, whether farmer, socialite, artist or explorer and gives to them their fluidity and 'Blake-like' innocence.

From the earliest novels, knowledge is associated with instinct and intuition:

'There were the two countries, the countries of different moons, the different languages, intuitive and reasoned.' 4

Here, knowledge is firmly disconnected from reason and any of its practices. Explanation, for example, is a product of reasonable behaviour and is generally accounted to be a valid means of acquiring knowledge,

yet it receives the following dismissal, which recalls the opening chapter of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* by Saul Bellow.

'Don't ask a painter, don't ask anybody to explain. All you ever know is what you find out for yourself by butting your head through the wall.'

Explanation is associated with the process of understanding, and the role of understanding, as distinct from knowledge, is one of the clearer distinctions made in the early novels. What is understandable, it is suggested, is containable, static and finite. Understanding, therefore, runs contrary to the infinite and the limitless, to the perpetual becoming which is recognised as the central truth by White's principal characters. In *The Living and the Dead* the metaphor of a box for the wrong kind of knowledge is first introduced.

'He touched the lid of the glass box. It had become a symbol. It was like the words, the symbols you exchanged, Elyot Standish and Muriel Raphael, the symbols of finite knowledge.'

Also, toward the beginning of Theodora Goodman's retrospective narrative of Meroe, it is stated from a youthful perspective that:

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"I would like to know", said Theodora, "I would like to know everything.... I shall know everything", Theodora said. To wrap it up and put it in a box. This is the property of Theodora Goodman.

But, by middle age, it is not Theodora but her sister Fanny who is accredited with a specific kind of understanding.

'Theodora... could not mourn like Fanny, who would cry for the dead until she had appeased the world and exhausted what she understood to be sorrow. Fanny understood most things.'

What it is that Fanny can understand is presented as being of a fixed shape that can be enclosed and possessed. The image of enclosure is important for it recurs many times in different novels and always represents knowledge that is worthless.

'Her life was a life of full cupboards. She kept them locked. She made inventories of her possessions. She did quick sums on the backs of envelopes, and was both amazed and afraid at the answers that she got. She was afraid that the plenty might diminish, just a little; this made her lie awake at night.'

The difference between the kinds of knowledge which Theodora and Fanny seek is illustrated by the difference between the kinds of questions they raise.

'Father once said to Mother that Fanny would always ask the questions that have answers.'

Theodora, on the other hand, makes people uncomfortable.

'Theodora made him sidle. To sit with her alone in the same room. Her ugly mug, that was always about to ask you something that you could not answer.'

Fanny and Theodora are opposites. The former lives in a way which neither challenges nor questions. Moreover, she is content to accept automatically as her own, the values and assumptions which she inherited from her background and culture. It is left to Theodora not only to ask the awkward questions but to personally undertake the search for their answers. When the novel begins Thedora has already reached middle-age, yet still 'the shape of her own life had not been fixed', whereas Fanny is presented as one whose 'face was closed to her own reality.' The quality of fluidity in Theodora's life, as she seeks her answers, involves her in the leading of several lives. This notion of several lives is one of the many recurring themes in White's novels and is discussed at greater length in a later chapter.

10. Ibid., p.40.
11. Ibid., p.15.
12. Ibid., p.16.
13. Ibid., p.94.
' "How many of us", said Theodora, "lead more than one of our several lives?" '  I4

This process of decortication, whereby Theodora lays herself bare through the successive shedding of skins, is, undoubtedly, the central action of the novel. She relentlessly explores and discovers the illusion of appearance until she reaches the point where:

' the soul, left with little to hide behind, must forsake its queer opaque manner of life and come out into the open.'  I5

By the end of the novel, Theodora cannot even

'answer for the substance of the marble clock.'  I6

The images of youth, when 'knowledge' might be put into a box, are finally dispelled. Ironically, at this point in the text, the box reappears as an image whereby Theodora, in her turn, might be trapped. For Theodora the image of the box has gone full circle from an image of desire to one of total rejection.

'Now she suspected the house. Man would be very admirable within his own freckled limits, if it were not for his native slynesses, and, more particularly, his desire to strain perpetually after truth. It was this which had led him to fix the roof of the house, propped like a lid on a stick. Twitched

I4.  Ibid., p. 166.
I5.  Ibid., p. 140.
I6.  Ibid., p. 272.
from a distance by a cord the stick would fall, and the lid imprison the unsuspecting victim. So Theodora avoided the subtlety that Mrs. Johnson had prepared.' 17

Reason and the reasonable mode of behaviour, as valuable precepts, are also examined over the course of several novels. What is different about this examination, in contrast to the last discussion, for example, is that the questioning is ascribed to a broader range of characters. Frequently, the characters in White's novels can be loosely divided into those who are sympathetic to the central characters, and those who are not. The opposition and conflict which arise between the two groups are often used as devices for explicating central themes. This explication occurs as a result of outlining details of the nature and world of the unsympathetic characters, whereby a contrast is either explicitly drawn, or implied, with the sympathetic characters. So that information about the central characters cumulates by occasionally pointing to what they are not. On the subject of reason and rationality, however, the process of questioning is also extended to some characters who belong to the unsympathetic group. The following two quotations provide illustration.

17. Ibid., p.283.
'Reason is the most unstable raft, as Mrs. Golson was learning. She suspected that she, and any other refugee from life lashed to its frail structure, was threatened with extinction by the seas of black unreason on which it floated, sluiced and slewing.'

The frailty of reason is again alluded to in the course of the same novel.

'In the shaft of light the Judge's concern glistened like bone: that this son whom he loved - he did, didn't he? should have perverted justice by his disappearance. Judge Twyborn did not intend to pursue the reason why; it might have been too unreasonable for one who put his faith in reason despite repeated proof that it will not stand up to human behaviour.'

What is implied in these passages is, firstly, the vulnerability and, secondly, the exclusiveness of reason. Reason may operate only when met by reason, otherwise it may not prevail. Furthermore, those who believe in, and pursue, the reasonable life, are ill-equipped to confront behaviour or events that do not conform to a rational model. More explicitly, we are told in an earlier novel, that the function of rationality itself, as opposed to the range of human activities that it can encompass, is another obstacle to the potential development of man.

I9. Ibid., p.156.
"They will come for you soon, with every sign of the greatest kindness", Holstius said. "They will give you warm drinks, simple, nourishing food, and encourage you to relax in a white room and tell your life. Of course you will not be taken in by any of this, do you hear? But you will submit. It is part of the deference one pays to those who prescribe the reasonable life. They are admirable people really, though limited.'

A fundamental and recurring proposition in Patrick White's novels is that 'there is no limit to man'. This pursuit of the infinite in the finite human being is explored with passion and relentlessness, 'till I am no longer filling the void with mock substance: myself is this endlessness'. For the central characters, therefore, who discover the infinite or 'this endlessness', any agreement to remain within the confines of the world of reason is retrogressive and a willingness to travel beyond the borders of rationality quintessential.

Long after her father was dead, and disposed of under the paspalum of Sarsaparilla, and the stone split by sun and fire, with lizards running in and out of the cracks, Miss Hare acquired something of the wisdom she had denied possessing the night of the false suicide .......If tears ever fell then from her saurian eyes, and ran down over the armature of her skin, she was no longer

22. E.S., p. 551.
ludicrous. She was quite mad, quite contemptible, of course, by standards of human reason, but what have those proved to be? Reason finally holds a gun at its head - and does not always miss.'

For those central characters who seek enlightenment, who explore and probe behind the world of appearance and facts, and who assume nothing, reason is both inadequate and self-defeating. The texts suggest it is in some context, other than rationality, that the prospect of enlightenment lies.

'For he was racked by his persistent longing to exceed the bounds of reason, to gather up the sparks, visible intermittently inside the thick shells of human faces; to break through to the sparks of light imprisoned in the forms of wood and stone'.

In the task of exceeding or breaking through 'the bounds of reason', language, or more precisely words, are also seen as being of little use.

'Judd was soon hidden by the blessed scrub. He who could squeeze the meaning out of a line by pressing on it with his fingernail, always hastened to remove himself from the presence of true initiates when they were at their books. All the scraps of knowledge with which he was filled, all of those raw hunks of life that, for choice, or by force, he had swallowed down, were reduced by the great mystery of words to the most shameful matter. Words were not the servants of life, but life,

23. R.C., p.37.
24. Ibid., p.140.
rather was the slave of words. So the black print of other people's books became a swarm of victorious ants that carried off a man's self-respect. So he wandered through the bush on that morning, and was only soothed at last by leaves and silence.'

What is being teased out in this passage is the relationship between language and experience. Language, it is suggested, in the more ordinary world of books, readers, and education predominates over experience. It is the educated and wealthy Ralph Angus who looked up at Judd 'from his dry book', so that language, far from being at the service and disposal of life, is the master which enslaves experience. Experience does not shape and give form to words, rather do words form and give shape to experience. Furthermore, it is implied that experience, which has not already been identified and accepted by language, remains an outcast in the wilderness of inarticulacy. Whether White's diagnosis of how language works is valid or not, some no doubt would agree while others disagree, the possibility of a replacement model is not pursued in the texts. But, in the end, I do not think that this is the important point. What I do suggest has been raised for consideration

is this, that in the relationship between experience and language, experience is prior.

It is not without irony that a dispute about the position of language should arise in the novels of White. For, obviously, language is the medium through which he has chosen to express his interest in instinct, intuition, silence and those areas of human behaviour and experience which are not easily articulated. However, no awareness of this irony is ever presented explicitly as part of the novels. A longer discussion of this subject follows in a later chapter.

Closely connected with the question of language and words is that of intellect. How intellect and its processes determine action and behaviour are also considered.

'Some people, it was true, and more especially those endowed with brilliance, were dazzled by their minds into a state of false security. Unlike animals, for instance. Animals, she well knew, peered out perpetually into what was still to be experienced.' 26

The 'false security' of human beings, in contrast to animal instinct, suggests a lack of awareness of potential experience. Presumably, the distinction that is being drawn is between one aspect of human

26. Ibid., p.302.
development, which is solely through the mind, and other kinds of experience, which are not so attainable. To permit the mind to dominate, therefore, is to exclude other areas of human development. ' "Clever people", she was saying, "are the victims of words".' to which Himmelfarb replies ' "I agree that intellect can be a serious handicap. There are moments when I like to imagine I have overcome it".' He then asks ' "Is there any concrete evidence of danger ?"' to which the answer is ' "Concrete? You should know that real danger never begins by being concrete". ' In opposition to the 'concrete', what is being called into question, and also disrepute, is the intellectual process of abstraction. This, in turn, calls into question the basis of human action, which has been commonly accepted as a proper model of behaviour in Western culture. Towards the beginning of The Eye of the Storm Elizabeth Hunter admits that,

'I wanted very badly to love my husband, Sister, even after I knew I didn't - or couldn't enough.'

When placed in the context of her marriage, this statement suggests a very different basis of action, which recalls more the voice of the Old Testament: We do and then we

27. Ibid., pp. 302 - 303.
28. E.S., p. 20.
will listen. The much more customary model of action is to think, then act. Once the action has been undertaken, considerations may arise from the experience which will subsequently influence future courses of action. Experience, in this pattern, is accordingly dominated by rationality and is curtailed and shaped by the considerations which may arise. This model of human development has been progressively established in European thought, particularly by the rationalists of the 18th Century, and stresses a philosophy of knowledge in which action is conceived of as science. But the marriage of Elizabeth Hunter, like many of the actions which the narrative of The Eye Of The Storm recalls, is an act from which discovery proceeds. Action is the mode, never the end, of enlightenment. Most important is the fact that there is no blueprint for experience; the characters are presented as discovering in the experience what is to be done. To conceive of action in the philosophical rationalist tradition is what White is disputing. For the notion of a controlling reason presupposes a universe that is subject to control. Rational thought seeks to impose order and design upon the world because rationality prizes, above all else, the ideal of order. The opposite to order is chaos, and chaos is conceived of by the orderly mind as a total breakdown of order.
And so, on this subject alone, White has been attacked by critics for appearing to present chaos without question.²⁹ Christians, for example, see the world as being ultimately controlled by God. Rationality, on the other hand, is an alternative mode of control. Patrick White, however, explores a world where neither is the case. The process in which something other than rationality or control might be conceived of, is often undertaken by rejecting and negating what is established. The absurd worlds of Sartre and Camus are an example. What White is trying to suggest is a different sort of universe where a guiding hand is not conceived. The religious imagery in *Voss* is ironic. In the Christian tradition, fulfilment lies outside the world. The characters in White's novels do not transcend, or even make an attempt to transcend, the world in this way. In the Christian tradition too, union with God, which is the purpose of life, is not subject to chance. Whereas, in the novels of White, chance, randomness and contingency give rise to action whose purpose is its own experience.

²⁹ cf. Peter Shrubb: "Patrick White: Chaos Accepted;" QUADRANT (12,3.) May/June 1968.
"Lord Chance" - he is the world's oldest nobility, which I have given back to all things; I have released them from servitude under purpose."

Besides the undermining of intellectual, rational and linguistic processes, of the sensory perceptions, sight alone is presented as being a doubtful means of knowledge. 'Yes I can feel it. It is morning', an elderly Elizabeth Hunter says, while her stare can still 'unshutter glimpses of a terrifying mineral blue.'

This can be read as either an interesting paradox or as evidence that Elizabeth Hunter no longer relies on sight as a truthful means of perception. However, in a later novel, the narrative voice undermines the function of sight much more explicitly.

'Removing the superfluous bonnet and loosening her matted hair, she felt only remotely related to Ellen Roxburg, or even Ellen Gluyas; she was probably closer to the being her glass could not reveal, nor her powers of perception grasp, but whom she suspected must exist none the less.'

The argument embedded here seems to run something like this.

32. F.L., p.92.
All that can be seen is the appearance. The appearance is not all that is there, but is all that can be seen. Seeing, therefore, is in some sense misleading. Provocative statements concerning sight make their first appearance in The Aunt's Story. Within the space of one page it is repeated twice to Theodora that:

"It is not necessary to see things.... if you know".33

In the texts, sight is not presented as a means, or even an aid, to the kind of knowledge which is being aspired to. One is reminded of the tradition both in our culture and literature, of the blind being able to see in a way that those who possess eyesight cannot. The image of the blind seer is common, the character of Tiresias being one such example. Of Mrs. Goodman it is said that 'everything had a form like bronze or marble. She saw clearly, but not far.'34 Sight is presented as a seeing which lacks penetration, sight glances off surfaces and appearances and enables the recognition and identification only of shapes, information and data. A clear example of this occurs in an ironic passage from the third section of The Aunt's Story.

34. Ibid., p.65.
Theodora heard the difference between doing and being. The corn could not help itself. It was. But the man scrabbled on the surface of life, working himself into a lather of importance under his laundered shirt. She heard the man's words, which were as significant and sad as the desperate hum of telephone wires, that tell of mortgages and pies, and phosphates, and love, and movie contracts, and indigestion, and real estate, and loneliness. The man said that the population of Chicago had risen from 2,701,705 in 1920 to 3,376,438 in 1930. The population was being raised all the time. But in Chicago also, Theodora had seen the nun who danced along the sidewalk, unconsciously, for joy, and the unnaturally natural face of the dancing nun had sung some song she had just remembered. The nun's feet touched grass. So that Theodora smiled now. And the man in the perfect shirt was encouraged. He leaned forward to tell the population of Kansas City, St. Louis, Buffalo, and Detroit.

Light is, of course, necessary for sight; there would be no possibility of seeing if light did not exist to see by. The image of light as a source of knowledge is innate; and our entire civilization has, in some sense, been based on the dominance of the image of sight. It is sight, for example, which enables us to divide, break up and classify the phenomena which we perceive. For this reason, sight since Aristotle has been defined as the most intellectual of the senses. The terms commonly associated with knowledge have their source in sight; clarity and insight are two such examples.

35. Ibid., pp. 255 - 6.
In literary criticism, as in all other studies, we attempt to illuminate, cast light, reflect meaning. The quest for knowledge in White's fiction is also spoken of in the terms of enlightenment and illumination. There are, however, limitations to sight and light and it is these limitations that are being emphasized in the novels. For if, as an example, seeing is enabled by light, on the other hand too much light blinds. This may well account for the line from Riders in the Chariot that:

'illumination is synonymous with blinding.' 36

What is meant by this, I think, is that it is not through the more customary means of knowledge, sight being one such means, that enlightenment will be reached. For the central characters who do attain enlightenment are not in the mode of Tiresias or the blind prophets. The manner in which light functions reveals a more pertinent limitation. Light has two sources, these are emitters and reflectors of energy. Almost all phenomena can reflect energy; but there is, in addition, the factor of absorption. Blackness, for example, is the absence of any light. What determines, however, the luminosity of an emitter is the percentage of energy being emitted, while what determines the luminosity of a reflector is a property of the chemical elements of

which it is composed. The important point in this is that light can illuminate only what is present; yet all that is present cannot be illuminated by light. It is this limitation: what is present but not illuminated by light, which is of concern in White's narratives. His narratives are very much preoccupied with the gaps between appearance and reality; with all that exists but is not immediately visible.

'On the occasion of Mrs. Davenport's intimate dinner for her Greek friends her house was splendidly floodlit. No crevice of it was exposed to the danger of mystery. Its extra-solid white drenched mass and the increased formality of the balustrades, shaven lawns and stereoscopic trees seemed to proclaim that the material world is the one and only. If doubts entered in, they were encouraged by the less than solid wall of bamboos to the West.'

In casting aspersions on the world which is readily visible, and those characters who are content to remain within its boundaries, the narratives are emphasizing the importance of the noumenal forms which lie beneath the surface, and all that is not readily accessible to sight. It is this terrain which is of interest to the central characters. Neither are reason, intellect nor articulacy helpful as means of knowledge. Reason, it is suggested, cannot account for human behaviour nor

explain human experience. Experience is not predetermined or controlled, or purposeful. What is gained from experience is presented as purpose enough. The kind of knowledge which is associated with facts, figures, information and explanation, the kind of knowledge which becomes yet another possession is always connected with those characters who are portrayed as limited. Knowledge in the novels leads, usually, to enlightenment; or so, at least, is the aspiration. Both are presented contrary to the customary terms in which we might expect to understand them. If this presents a difficulty for the reader, it is also a difficulty shared by the central characters:

'The whole business was either a mystery, or else meaningless, and of the two, the meaningless is the more difficult to take.' 38

38. L.D., p.9.
CHAPTER TWO
PASSION

'It is now a question not of truth but of being'

M. Foucault
The discussion in this chapter will centre around contrasting attitudes to experience or 'life', which the narrative attributes to different groups of characters within the novels. The distinctions that emerge are, I think, important to our reading of White; for preconceived and critically agreed notions of what is understood by terms such as character, or action for example, are frequently overset by what White is, in fact, presenting. As an example of an instance in which a critic discussed White's use of character, based on preconceived critical criteria, one may cite a paper entitled 'Eventually, White's language: Words And More Than Words' delivered by Adrian Mitchell in a seminar on Patrick White at Flinders University, February 1978. Mr. Mitchell found his expectations of 'change, transformation' and of 'a maturing of character, as in, say Jane Austen' to be disappointed. He then continued the discussion by pointing out the ways in which White's characters failed to fulfil these expectations. This failure in characterization was seen to be a failure in Patrick White's abilities as a novelist. The point I wish to make, and which I hope will become clearer through the

course of this chapter, is that certain central characterizations do not follow common notions of characters or action; and to be disappointed that this is not so may be to miss the point.

An important distinction that is initially made in *The Aunt's Story* concerns the connection, or more precisely lack of it, between action and existence.

'Theodora heard the difference between doing and being'.

This preoccupation with 'being' as opposed to 'doing' recurs throughout most of the novels, becoming a fundamental division that characterizes the values and worlds of the central characters, as opposed to those who are unsympathetic. It is also interesting that an explicit reference reappears in the latest novel, to date, *The Twyborn Affair*.

'He had hardly sat down after Eadie's exit when the Judge began.

"What do you think of doing, Eddie?"

You could hardly answer, Nothing; surely being is enough?'

Prior to, and notwithstanding, this division, however, is a common ground of potentiality that is the birthright


of all human beings. This is also established in the second novel, and is repeated in the later works.

'I want to unite those who have the capacity for living in any circumstance, and make it the one circumstance. I want to oppose them to the destroyers, to the dealers in words, to the diseased, to the most fatally diseased - the indifferent. That can be the only order. Without ideological labels. Labels set a limit at once. And there is no limit to man.'

That 'there is no limit to man', potentially, is a proposition which recurs throughout White's work. Forcefully implied is that, at birth, all men resemble a tabula rasa and all are potentially limitless. When dealing with the same subject, but related specifically to women, the narrative becomes more specific and less neutral. Nevertheless, the principle remains consistent.

"Actually girls don't change, I think from generation to generation. They're like moths blundering about in search of their fate. You know how moths hit you in the face - soft, velvety things - and are sometimes killed .... Nor do I think that girls grow up into anything very different from what they were. They're still blundering about after they've promised to honour and obey. Oh, I don't mean they're dishonest - not all of them - but they're still quivering and preparing to discover something they haven't experienced yet".

5. Viv., p.I64.
The reader is presented with the belief in the tabula rasa state of humanity and, then, with characters who represent 'the destroyers' and 'the diseased' and 'the indifferent'. The reader is also presented with those who oppose the latter, who wish to break through the constraints and the limits. These, of course, are the central characters and the greater part of most of the novels deals with their development and growth. In contrast, the development of those characters who grow from a state of potentiality into states of destructive-ness and indifference is much less detailed. In other words, we are not told why this is, only that it is so. What is supplied, however, are some features of the way in which these limited characters live. Fanny in The Aunt's Story is one example.

'Her life was a life of full cupboards. She kept them locked. She made inventories of her possessions. She did quick sums on the backs of envelopes, and was both amazed and afraid of the answers that she got. She was afraid that the plenty might diminish, just a little; this made her lie awake at night.'

This kind of character is presented as believing in permanence and is reassured by the evidence of possessions. It is the opposite point of view to The Man who was Given his Dinner who says that if you

'put (life) in a house .... it stops, it stands still. That's why some take to the mountains, and the others say they're crazy'.

This, in fact, is how it turns out in The Aunt's Story. By the end of the novel Fanny believes her sister Theodora to be unbalanced. This sort of character constantly recurs. Maman, Mrs. Courtenay, is another such example of White's 'busy' ladies. She was 'proud of her needlework - or talked, or wrote letters - talking - or read, again talking about it'. Maman who 'wasn't prepared to let herself get carried out of the shallows', and who can 'turn to a fury of letter-writing and committees while continuing to harp on the theme of her wasted life' represents the type of character who is interested in the measurements of what can be accomplished and attained. A similar representation is the character of Mrs. Bannister, for whom:

'... what made the whole affair far more ghastly was to discover the limits of her own powers: when she had always secretly believed that, with the exception of cancer, air disasters, and war, she had circumstances under control'

7. Ibid., p.44.
8. Viv., p.163.
10. Ibid., p.141.
II. 'The Night the Prowler', Cock., p.120.
The character of Mrs. Goodman, 'for whom things existed in hard shapes', offers another reflection:

'She said from her sofa, let there be roses, and there were in clay carted specially from a great distance. 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.'

These characters, who represent fixed perspectives and attitudes to experience, who find comfort in materialism and are afraid of change, are often described ironically by the narrative voice. Their limitations would appear to provoke the irony. They are also characters who do not recognise that:

'You can also create the illusion of other people, but once created, they choose their own realities'.

Thus, Eadie Twyborn, Mrs. Courtenay and Mrs. Goodman, for example, fail as mothers as a result of regarding their created children possessively. Possessiveness of any kind, but particularly in relationships, is presented as a destructive force in the novels, and possessiveness is presented as a pervasive presence in most kinds of relationships. Accordingly, the majority

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12. ArS., p.56.
13. Ibid., p.21.
of relationships which this set of characters form are presented as either failing or not being worthwhile. In addition, these characters share a common attitude which basically assumes that they are in control of their lives. Moreover, change of potentiality, if admissible at all, is encountered with the expectation of control over what is to be met. This is, perhaps, their most important characteristic. It is this attitude to experience which divides and polarizes this set of characters from the others. It might be appropriate to mention here one example of an instance in which this kind of character is developed in a more exaggerated fashion. The presentation of Mrs. Jolley and Mrs. Flack, in Riders in the Chariot, occasioned a measure of resentment, particularly among Australian critics and the Australian reading public, when the novel was first published. It is true that their characterization was more extreme:

'Mrs. Jolley walked on her way, briskly but discreetly, down the hill, towards Xanadu. She would have liked to kill some animal, fierce enough to fan her pride, weak enough to make it possible, but as it was doubtful any such beast would offer itself, scrubby though the neighbourhood was, she drifted dreamily through the series of possible ways in which she might continue to harry the human soul'.

15. R.C., p.216.
Mrs. Jolley and Flack are active agents of destructiveness. They bring to fruition what has been present in previous novels as a possibility. Hitherto, the conflict between the conventional and non-conventional had been both less extreme and of a more local kind as, for example, between Theodora and her mother. But in this novel, Mrs. Jolley and Flack, as the neighbourhood despots, represent harassment and prejudice on a wider social level. It should also be stated that their roles are peripheral.

So there exists in the novels of Patrick White the hypothesis that all humanity is a priori 'blundering, preparing to discover' and 'in search of their fate'. The narrative then presents the reader with an opposition in conflict, those characters who can, and will, discover their fate, and those who can't or will not. The latter are conceived of as resenting and frustrating the former. This opposition is succinctly expressed toward the beginning of *The Tree of Man*.

"In the meantime he was growing a bit older. His body was hardening into the sculptural shape of muscular bodies. And for the casual speculator there was no obvious sign that his soul too might not harden in the end into the neat, self-contained shape it is desirable souls should take".

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The limited characters of inventories and property, those whose souls harden 'into the neat self-contained shape', are presented in White's novels as people of action. They do not, like Theodora, recognise "the difference between doing and being". Their lives of action, at least, impinge upon and, at most, threaten the existence of those characters for whom being is enough.

'I would only point out that spiritual faith is also an active force. Which will populate the world after each attempt by the men of action to destroy it'

The central intention in most of White's novels is to present a mode of existence, or being. This is effected by character perspective, narrative commentary, the distinctions made by the narrative voice, and the device of revelation which recurs in many of the novels. The mode of existence, or of being, is a progressive one and is slowly revealed through allusion, discovery and inference.

I7. R.C., p.192.

I8. The exceptions are The Vivisector, where the plot is made more complex by there being, in addition, a 'portrait of an artist'; The Eye Of The Storm where the central character is a hybrid of the two basic categories of character normally used in the novels; and also, perhaps, A Fringe of Leaves which is, I would suggest, a novel of betrayal. Otherwise, the collection of short stories allow White to focus on his men of action, within the limits of the genre.
'He remembered her saying: I don't believe artists know half the time what they're creating. Oh yes, all the tralala, the technique - that's another matter. But like ordinary people who get out of bed, wash their faces, comb their hair, cut the tops off their boiled eggs, they don't act, they're instruments which are played on, or vessels which are filled - in many cases only with longing.'

Contrasted with those who act are those who don't. The statement that men 'don't act', that they are 'instruments' or 'vessels', is frequently repeated.

'The struggle to preserve her own instrument for some final, if also fatal, music that Holstius must play, had been at times difficult and unpleasant, but at least it was preserved.'

And, of the struggling Himmelfarb, it is said that:

'Mostly he remained at a level where, it seemed, he was unacceptable as a vessel of experience'.

Again, in The Eye Of The Storm, the same image reappears:

'He sat on his stool, sideways to the bar, not entirely unaware of his own predicament as reflected in the peach-tinted mirrors: that of a vessel waiting to be filled'.

What is involved here is the form of passivity which is presented as a manner of being or mode of existence. Passivity, I would suggest, is commonly understood as an inability to make decisions or take action. It is not

22. **E.S.**, p.130.
uncommonly seen as a defect, or as evidence of a weak character. Moreover, passivity is a term sometimes used to describe compliance, that is, in the absence of personal opinion, a compliant personality will accept the decisions or views of another and act accordingly. Almost always passivity is a judgement passed on one person by another. None of these interpretations are pertinent to our understanding of the term as it operates in the novels. What White is representing, in contrast to action, is a way of receiving experience. This way of receiving experience corresponds more to the Greek concept of passion. Aeschylus' Prometheus is an example: pathei mathei: by suffering, through passion, one learns. It can also be translated as through experience one learns. Thus, in classical Greek thought, passion and experience are connected.

The central characters rather than determining action submit to it. This is absolutely central to the notion of character and plot in all of White's novels. Development of both character and plot in much of traditional fiction revolves around a sequence of decisions and action, or actions arising one from another. The biographer often presents the life of his subject in much the same manner. In this way order and patterns can emerge in fiction and biography from the kinds of decisions taken, the choices
made and the action accordingly undertaken. Whereas, in White, the narrative is organised less by the decisions made than by the decisions not made, less by determining action than by accepting it, in whatever shape or form it takes.

'She lay and submitted to someone to whom she had never been introduced. Somebody is always tinkering with something. It is the linesman testing for the highest pitch of awfulness the human spirit can endure. Not death. For yourself there is no question of dying.' 23

Thus does Elizabeth Hunter begin her encounter with the eye of the storm. Elsewhere, other central figures reflect their attitude to experience, their passion.

"No" said Theodora, "I shall go home for the present. I shall live - well as I have always lived." Because living was still something that happened in spite of yourself. She did not really believe, as apparently, Miss Spofforth did, that you could turn living to profit'. 24

and

'At no time in his life was Alf Dubbo able to resist what must happen. He had, at least, to let it begin, for he was hypnotized by the many mysteries which his instinct sensed' 25

23. Ibid., pp. 432 - 4.
The former quotation suggests the lack of purpose which often characterizes action. Theodora does not project herself, nor does she appear to possess any filter through which she views her world or her participation therein. In one sense, The Aunt's Story is about a process of reduction whereby 'the great monster self will be destroyed' and the 'desirable state achieved which resembles nothing more than air or water'. 26 In the latter quotation, the state of passion, in which Alf Dubbo lives his life, is also one of subjection to manifold possibility. This state is seen as being more conducive to perception and enlightenment. It is, in fact, presented as being the sole means of enlightenment. 'Objects, including the human ones, are often more powerful than people.' 27 These figures, the Dubbos, Theodoras, Eddies and Arthurs encounter experience in preparation and readiness for what it might reveal:

'There is another world, but it is in this one'. 28

The relationship between passion and being is developed further by an enigmatic statement which makes its first appearance in The Aunt's Story:

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27. E.S., p.104.  
Life is full of alternatives but no choice'

It is a premise which recurs in the novels.

'She looked at him with an expression of surprise. "I came back here". Her throat knotted, she appeared startled, as though it might not have occurred to her that life offers alternatives'

And reappears in the last novel.

"I do admire you", Ursula said, after nibbling for propriety's sake at the corner of her bread-and-butter, "for your originality and independence - in choosing the life you wanted to lead". "In choosing? I'd like to think it, but never feel anything but chosen"

Even in his memoirs, White speaks of his own life as he has presented his characters.

'Lucky the man who can choose an idyll for his old age. I wish I could, but my life continues to be chosen for me'

The elite in White are presented as having no choice about who or what they become. The rejection of choice is connected with the rejection of control. Experience cannot be controlled, and, seen from the perspective of a controlling hand, neither can life be chosen. For the

30. E.S., p.341.
elite 'Life starts afresh with each fresh journey, even into the dust'. This is conceived of as their strength and their difference. Their lives are less a series of achievements than a series of investigations. The ways of investigation are granted wider scope and freedom by the absence of a controlling hand or choice.

'In my case, I never went through the agonies of choosing between this or that sexual way of life. I was chosen as it were, and soon accepted the fact of my homosexuality. In spite of looking convincingly male I may have been too passive to resist, or else I recognised the freedom being conferred on me to range through every variation of the human mind, to play so many roles in so many contradictory envelopes of flesh'.

One implication which arises from the preceding quotation is that in being 'chosen' there is an element of predestination or fate at work. This is not true of the lives of the elite as they are presented in their respective texts. There is no external force or power organizing or determining the events in the characters' lives. It is exclusively by their own efforts and will that they reach the end of their individual quests. If 'enlightenment' is sometimes external to their own lives, the way that they led their lives is presented as having made enlightenment possible. In this sense, they are not

33. Woss., p.213.
34. F.G., p. 35.
a chosen few on whom the gift of enlightenment is bestowed. Their stories are largely chronicles and accounts of how and why they reached enlightenment. Intrinsic to their achievement is their recognition of the following:

'The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming'

and again

'They inhabited a world of trust, to which their bodies and minds were no more than entrance gates .... The nurse might have wished to remain clinging to their state of perfection if she had not evolved, in the course of her working life, a belief - no, it was stronger: a religion - of perpetual becoming.'

It is, I would suggest, about the 'perpetual struggle' of 'perpetual becoming' that there is no choice. Experience is not determined but submitted to. In their long treks across the deserts of life, the elite blunder in search of themselves and enlightenment. And while enlightenment was struggled for, its substance was not chosen. Enlightenment is presented as an instance of recognition and acceptance. Death or withdrawal, by which I mean the 'putting away' of Arthur and Theodora, usually follow. And, about the entire movement from becoming to enlightenment, which is expressed as Himmelfarb and Theodora's following

35. Voss, p. 271.
36. E.S., p. II.
'the rivers toward their source', there is also no choice.

Related to passion and being is the role of waiting. Waiting, as a state of being, appears in several of the novels, but not always in the same way. Waiting is a word which describes our consciousness of time passing in the intervals between anticipated events. We wait for a phonecall, a letter, a delivery, all of which are expected. And, in the time of waiting, we are conscious that this is what we are doing: waiting. In this manner, waiting is experienced as consciousness of time passing while anticipating the event. The experience of waiting in this way is presented in The Living and The Dead.'

'She wanted not to criticize, not to destroy. So that she forced herself to accept, whether it was words or the sexual act. She became a kind of dog-like silence. There was much of the dog's attitude in the relationship of women with men, she decided. The acceptance, the waiting for the next move. For this reason you lay waiting on the beds of cheap hotels. You waited for a sign.'

This kind of waiting, where what is being waited for has either a recognizable shape or form, which makes the time of waiting acute or tense, is a familiar subject in fiction.

38. L.D., p.159.
However, in The Aunt's Story, an entirely different kind of waiting is presented which also appears in Voss. It is said of Theodora that:

'She had waited sometimes for something to happen' 39 and that

'She waited for some act that still had to be performed'.

Waiting, in this context, does not occur in the intervals between anticipated events. Nor is what is being awaited open to anticipation or prediction. For what is being awaited is largely unknown. Waiting, in this context, is yet another way in which the central characters lead their lives; waiting is part of the struggle for enlightenment.

'The moments of severest trial are surely the obscure details of a design that will be made clear at last -if we can endure till then' 41

40. Ibid., p.231.
41. Voss, p.240.
'In waiting', Heidegger has suggested, 'we leave open what we are waiting for', which, I would suggest, defines more the kind of waiting experienced by Theodora, Stan Parker, and Laura. It is a waiting which occurs within passion, and passion is itself removed from the arena of action, decision, and choice. 'Theodora was removed. She had the strength of absence'. What Theodora is removed from are the rounds of preoccupations and activities which, for example, concern her mother and her sister Fanny. Because of her detachment, she, like other central characters, can blunder on in her own personal quest, unaffected by opposition from those who see clearly but not far.

One of the central episodes for which Theodora has waited, is her encounter with Moraitis, at the end of which, it is said

'Now existence justified itself!'

So that, while what is being waited for, in this context of waiting, is never specified, moments of recognition and justification do occur. More importantly, these moments of recognition and justification are experienced by those who have been willing to suffer most for the sake of learning. Pathei mathri.

42. A.S. p.II2.
43. cf., A.S., pp. 105-II2.
44. Ibid., p.II2.
CHAPTER THREE

SILENCE

'A word is worth a sela; silence is worth two.'

'Wisdom does not lead to words; nor is it words that lead to wisdom'.

The Wisdom of the Fathers

That thirst, fever and physical exhaustion, even the sound of falling rock, are preferable to being subjected to some of the words people would seem a rather violent comparison to make. They stretch the credulity to the limit except that words are more damaging than physical deprivations and would seem rather to give substance to the claim made by various authors.
Another opposition, related to the contrast between action and passion, is speech and silence. Silence is consistently alluded to within the novels and would, therefore, appear to have a role of some importance. Before considering silence, it might be useful to take a look at how language is presented.

'All this time Voss was standing his ground. He was, indeed, swaying a little, but the frayed ends of his trouser legs were momentarily lost in the carpet. How much less destructive of the personality are thirst, fever, physical exhaustion he thought, much less destructive than people. He remembered how, in a mountain gorge, a sandstone boulder had crashed, aiming at him, grazing his hand, then bounding away to the mutilation of trees and death of a young wallaby. Deadly rocks, through some perversity, inspired him with fresh life. He went on with the breath of life in his lungs. But words, even of benevolence and patronage, even when they fell wide, would leave him half-dead.'

That thirst, fever and physical exhaustion, even the menace of falling rock, are preferable to being subjected to words would seem a rather violent comparison to make. It stretches credulity to the limit to accept that words are more damaging than physical deprivation; and would seem, rather to give substance to the claim, made by various

I. Voss, p.18.
critics, of White's penchant for overexaggerated statements. At this point in the novel no explanation or clarification is offered. The narrative proceeds indifferent to any effect upon the reader. Later, however, the subject is recalled.

'All the scraps of knowledge with which he was filled, all those raw hunks of life that, for choice, or by force he had swallowed down, were reduced by the great mystery of words to the most shameful matter. Words were not the servants of life, but life, rather, was the slave of words. So the black print of other people's books became a swarm of victorious ants that carried off a man's self-respect. So he wandered through the bush on that morning, and was only soothed at last by leaves and silence.'

There are a few implications here which throw light on the earlier passage. Language, it appears, reduces the kind of knowledge which is comprised of 'raw hunks of life'. This, it must be remembered, is knowledge of being, it is knowledge which comes, not from the pursuit of the rational or intellectual, but rather from the activities of 'looking, smelling, listening, touching' which are specified in The Twyborn Affair. In other words, experience of this kind is diminished by language. It is not simply that language fails to adequately express

2. Ibid., p.203.
experience, it is more that language lessens, takes away from, and demeans the experience. There is also the added implication, which is more contentious, that language and experience have reversed their proper functions. Rather than the former being at the service of the latter, it is suggested that the reverse is the case. So that language dominates; it occupies the higher place and, instead of being the expression of experience, can now control and determine it. Language is presented as an arbiter and a control which can, and does, make of certain kinds of experience an outcast. This rather more provocative viewpoint is clarified by a less cryptic statement in a later novel.

'As for Arnold Wyburd, he realized he had lost his faith in words, when his life of usefulness had depended on them: they could be used as fences, smoke-screens, knives and stones; they could take the shape of comforting hot water bottles; but if ever you thought they were about to help you open a door into the truth, you found, instead of a lighted room, a dark void you hadn't the courage to enter.'

It is of interest that the terms in which language is presented are as a defence, a weapon, or as a reassuring comfort in times of cold feet. Language, it is clear, is not a means of reaching truth. It does

not act as a guide to enlightenment. Yet again White appears to stand against this mainstream of thought in Western philosophy where man is so identified precisely because he is a speaking being. For example, Heidegger writes in his "Letter on Humanism" that 'Language is the dwelling-place of being.' It is not, however, I would suggest, the fact of language about which White is arguing, but the uses to which it is put. In his novels, broadly speaking, White represents the functions of language as chatter, as a means of concealment or as a means of attack. Faith in language is seen as being the property of those who believe 'in the reasonable life.' It is yet another control employed by the limited characters and avoided by the illuminati.

'On occasions when he asked whether he too might squeeze the butter or knead the dough, Waldo was told. "No. That's something for Arthur. He has a particular gift for it". Once Arthur, who was watching the buttermilk gush out from between his fingers, laughed and said: "It's my vocation, isn't it, Mother?" Waldo was more jealous of that word than he was of Arthur's privilege. He wondered where he had got it from. Because words were not in Arthur's line. It was Waldo who collected them, like stamps or coins. He made lists of them. He rolled them in his mouth like polished stones. Then Arthur went and sprang this vocation thing of his'.

5. S.M., pp. 35-36.
While the illuminati express either a reluctance for language, like Theodora, Voss, and Hutle Duffield or an inarticulacy like Stan Parker, Arthur, and Mary Hare, nevertheless, it is not without its irony that their use of language is essential to the novels. Indeed, it is not without an even larger measure of irony that, having ambivalent attitudes to language as he does, Patrick White writes his novels.

However, in setting the language of the central characters against a background of silence, White is, I think, making an important point by drawing our attention to the role of silence. A note on a scale has its own tone but its value is relative to the notes around it. This is, I think, a useful analogy for the relationship between silence and language in the novels.

Like being, or love, silence simply is and cannot be traced to a derivative or a cause.

'Father did not speak. He respected silence, and besides, whether it was summer or winter, the landscape was more communicative than people talking. It was close, as close as your own thought, which was sometimes heavy and painful as stone, sometimes ran lighter than a wagtail, or spurted like a peewit into the air.'

6. A.S., p.32.
Of initial importance is the fact that silence is not conceived of as a lack, or as if something was absent. Silence is presented: it is summoned into presence and has a positive role.

'All that was needed now, in order to communicate, was a moment of total silence and light.'

Silence is not negative, it is not a void. More specifically, it is not the word that has not yet been spoken, or has not succeeded in being articulated. Silence is not seen as the lapses between speaking; for, conceived of in this way, silence would be merely the punishment which follows the failure of speech. Of interest too is the assertion that silence can communicate that which presumably can be heard by those who listen. Listening is an activity associated with silence. Listening and silence belong together just as much as listening and speech. Several of the central characters, like Theodora, Mary Hare, and Elizabeth Hunter are presented as listening. Their listening takes place in silence:

'Left alone, which after all was how she wanted to be, with due respect to poor broody faithful de Santis, Mrs. Hunter lay with her eyes closed listening to her house, her thoughts, her life.'
The illuminati with their own distinctive order of things recall the relationship between the Israelites and the God of the Old Testament: we do and then we will listen. For often it is after their experiences have been undergone that the resonances are felt, their meaning clearer and justification apparent.

Toward the end of The Vivisector there occurs the following assertion:

'Play for time, play for safety, play for silence, the only state in which truth breeds.'

Yet again White would appear to be contentious. For it is language, or more precisely it is in and through language that decisions are reached and made concerning truth and falsehood. Silence is passive, it does not make decisions, offer opinions or take action. It makes no distinctions, nor does it show any favouritism or partiality. Truth, then, as it is traditionally valued by Western Society, is not the same ideal as presented in White.

'In the end, if not always, truth was a stillness and a light'.

10. R.C., p.422.
While the quest for truth in philosophy concerns itself with absolutes and abstractions, truth in White is much more likely to be a property of acceptance of realities which appear irreconcilable.

"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".

We can imagine a world of silence but not a world of speech. A world of continuous incessant noise could only be conceived of as hell. Four senses are violently disconnected while one sense is continuously assailed, with the result that any prospect of harmony is banished. Whereas a world of silence could be regarded as the source of all potential and, therefore, also as the source of fulfilment.

'All that was external to himself he mistrusted, and was happiest in silence, which is immeasurable, like distance, and the potentialities of self'

II. A.S., p.278.

I2. Voss, pp.21 - 22.
Silence is pure existence. It is being at its most uncomplex. It has no body, it requires neither language nor matter to determine its existence. It is not divisible, nor can it be added to, there is no gap between its appearance and reality. Silence simply is. Of fundamental importance too is the quality of infinity which can never be completely expressed or exhausted by words, but which is present in silence. Time passes silently.

For Voss and the other central characters silence as a background is the source of all potential. The personal taciturnity and silence of the characters, of which Stan Parker is a good example, permit the possibility of enlightenment, a development that garrulosity would prevent. Furthermore, their silence is the context for their passion. It is their silence which permits their passion and their passions which assist their enlightenment. Silence in the characters is an image of what silence is to the world. The illuminati pursue the mystery of their being and mystery has always traditionally been separated from man by a veil of silence. That also serves as a reminder that men should preserve a silence in which to approach the mystery.

There are two periods in a human life which are spent close to the edge of silence. One is extreme youth and the other is old age. The language that is
spoken naturally by children has a more original and idiosyncratic expression than occurs at any later stage. Their language, therefore, is a more personal and individual vehicle of their thought. 'Who put the light out?' I have heard a three year old ask, as he peered out the window at nightfall. The broad appeal of The Little Prince stems from the same principle of original expression. At the other end of life, there is the spectre of old age and the imminence of death. Death is another mystery which is surrounded by silence. There is much discourse conducted on the subject. Myths have been fabricated and religions propagated to make the mystery less awesome, less to be feared. But, in the end, silence prevails.

Death too has its place in the novels. All of the central characters die, or are confined in asylums or disappear. The variations are merely aspects of the one phenomenon. Their ends either coincide with, or shortly follow, their illuminations. These illuminations are never fully articulated, for the substance of enlightenment is more than language can express; or so it is implied.

'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.'

Enlightenment, then, is largely a silent event and is followed by silence.

'She herself would embrace the dust, the spirit of which she was able to understand at last.'  

Mary Hare, Arthur, Theodora, and the others reflect, with repeated and consistent clarity, an inescapable fact of human life that man's life is but a journey between the silence of his origin and the silence of his death.

'Our intention is to affirm this life, not to bring order out of a chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.'

John Cage.
In The Living and the Dead two important suppositions are contained in one brief passage.

'You're a distant creature, Maynard said. She failed to comment. Whether or not, she failed to know. To know yourself. That ludicrous presumption before entering the maze'

Self knowledge, that is, knowledge of self is introduced here as a 'ludicrous presumption'. Life, or experience, is presented as a 'maze'. These two suppositions grow more into articles of faith as they recur and become established in all of the subsequent novels. As we saw earlier, the central characters in White discover in the experience what is to be done. A consistency therefore becomes apparent. For, if there is no blueprint for life, then no experience can be predicted, hence the maze; neither can reaction to experience be foreseen, hence the impossibility of self-knowledge in any absolute form. Elizabeth Hunter, as already pointed out, married Alfred and subsequently discovered that she didn't love him. Action precedes knowledge; in White's novels the central characters always learn from what they do, never the other way round. For the illuminati, the world is not ordered, life is not ordered and self is not ordered.

I. L.D., pp. 159-60.
That 'order does prevail'\textsuperscript{2} is, however, presented as an opposing perspective. For example, the former lives of the explorers in Voss are so described in contrast to the experience they are about to undergo.

'They realized, standing on the wharf, that the orderly, grey, past life was of no significance. They had reached that point at which they would be offered up, in varying degrees, to chaos or to heroism'.  \textsuperscript{3}

In other novels the two perspectives of order and its absence are presented by the use of characters who oppose the illuminati.

Consider the following references:

'But she did not know, even now, what next.'  \textsuperscript{4}

and

'She even thought she might have reached that point of impersonality she had liked to believe attainable: protected against disorder, directed towards a logical destination, saved from desire.'  \textsuperscript{5}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{2} Voss. p.12.  
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p.96.  
\textsuperscript{4} A.S., p.129.  
\textsuperscript{5} E.S., p.587.  
\end{flushleft}
Yet again,

'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.' 6.

and

'To distract herself from her twinges, the princess looked at her watch, which confirmed that everything was, in a broad superficial sense, in order ....' 7

In the first two passages there is a stark contrast between the two characters' attitude to experience. For Theodora nothing is planned, anything can happen and, therefore, anything is also possible. For Dorothy Hunter exactly the opposite is true as she strives to protect herself against any unexpected intrusions which arise from the unplanned event. Moreover, such is her need for order that she even avoids the common experience of desire in which all human beings are at risk. In the second two examples different perspectives on time are opposed. For Theodora time has its meaning in terms only of personal experience. There is no external measurement. Whereas Dorothy is reassured by the clock, order is defined by the allocation of time to event.

7. E.S., p.434.
Events take place according to a predetermined time. Her life is conducted on the basis of appointments.

Mr. Bonner in *Voss* is another such character:

'How people act or feel on specific occasions had been reduced for Mr. Bonner to the way in which he had been told people do act and feel. Within this rather rudimentary, if rigid, structure of behaviour, he himself did also behave with jolly or grave precision, according to rule. For such souls, the history primers and the newspapers will continue to be written.'

That the newspapers and history primers are written for such orderly souls as Mr. Bonner requires explication. At first glance the remark could seem to amount only to a rather snide attack, but there is, I think, an issue of some importance involved. The limitations of newspaper and journalistic reports have been, by now, well argued. While there may be many people who read newspapers in the belief that they are reading all of 'the facts', there are just as many for whom the truth of newspaper reports is both partial and tentative, no matter how effective or persuasive the account. This is a result of the recognition that newspapers report current events and incompletion is a factor of the present tense. We wait for all the

facts to emerge and expect modifications and alterations to occur as a result. The writing of history is, however, supposed to correct the partial nature of newspaper reports. History is expected to render a true account of the past. This is a more complex and less familiar debate. While historical writing may once have been accorded an unquestionable accuracy, this is no longer the case. For the structure of history is often presented in terms of an orderly design which may be logical, inevitable or, at least, comprehensible. Historians have seen it as part of their duty to offer explanations and divine reasons for what happened or occurred. Current thinking, however, about historical consciousness includes the argument that, if history is to be a valid account of experience, it should correspond to the general structure of experience. The general structure of experience involves contingency. That we live in a contingent world is a factor often omitted from historical presentation. Contingency, too, is a factor which is banished by the Mr Bonners and Dorothy Hunters in White's novels. It is disallowed in favour of the control they assume over their own lives. This is the connection which is, I think, being alluded to in the last reference. For those who believe that they can order and control experience, the appearance of order and completion in historical and newspaper reports is a reassuring illusion.
The world, however, in which White's central character live is one of contingency. In the contingent world there is order which is incomplete and regularities which break down. In Aristotle, for example, 'happiness' and 'judgement' take place in a contingent world and so are matters of contingency. The set of actions, therefore, which amount to a man's life are opaque as a result of the mediation by contingency. The degree of opacity surrounding action in real life was thought by Aristotle not good for display. This may well account for the demanding criteria for art set out in the Poetics. White, however, does not follow Aristotle's precepts, preferring to represent in his fictions the structures of experience which he perceives in real life.

'She would have given anything to open a box containing the sum total of expectancy, but as this did not happen (except in a single comforting dream in which she discovered in a little marquetry casket a splinter of rock crystal lying naked and unexplained on the lead lining) she must expect her answers outside boxes, in the colder contingencies preparing for her.'

The recognition of contingency does not involve chaos, which is traditionally posed as the polar opposite to order. There is no anarchy in the novels, no chaos.

Order lies at one extreme and chaos at another. On this occasion when the central characters rid themselves of notions of order, no alignment with the opposition follows. Rather is the narrative more in the spirit of the reference from John Cage, quoted as an epigraph, which is 'to wake up to the very life we're living.' White's writing concerns being and how he conceives aspects of experience.

"I know you are smiling", he said. "Why?" he asked, and laughed. "It is our beings that pleases me", she replied."

A line from Avicenna also springs to mind:

'The being of that which possesses being is either a necessity due to itself or is not such a necessity.'

Contingency is one aspect of existence which is undeniable if existence is to be truly explored. What is to be learned from experience, I would suggest, is not this particular truth or that particular truth. In the quests for enlightenment by the central characters no sets of absolute truths or insights are presented. Wisdom, that is what is learned by the illuminati, and revelation take a very non specific form in the novels. If there is any central message in White it has to do with

acceptance of reality, with accepting that this, or that, is so. What is gained from experience by the central characters is knowledge of what is. And any and every experience that contingency places across the path of the illuminati is part of being. This is also, I think, the meaning of Avicenna. It is not a question of the superiority of one truth over another, or the validity of one experience and the invalidity of another. Much more simply it is this: if it is, then it is, or else, it is not.

Even the illumination of Elizabeth Hunter is a matter of contingency.

'She speculated no more than vaguely on the possibility of it, because she was still too weak from the great joy she had experienced when released from her body and all the contingencies in the eye of the storm.'

That enlightenment is also subject to contingency adds an important dimension to the reading of White. For the illuminati have often been presented in critical studies as the chosen few, whose eccentricities in the leading of their fictional lives have been rewarded by enlightenment. While White can, occasionally, be judgemental on smaller issues, he has avoided the pitfall

II. E.S., p.428.
of preaching. In making enlightenment a matter of contingency, White extends the structure of experience to its logical conclusion. What he presents are the structures of experience of certain characters who reach enlightenment. It is an important distinction. At no point in any narrative is enlightenment a logical or necessary conclusion. Indeed, as is pointed out elsewhere, in a separate discussion, enlightenment does not always occur. Nor is contingency a factor easily absorbed by the central characters no more than by human experience in the ordinary world. There is a tension in the novels between contingency, on one hand, and the desire for order and permanence on the other. That balance is maintained until mid-way in the last novel, *The Twyborn Affair*, when for Eddie Twyborn 'contingency was no longer a threat.'\textsuperscript{12} This acceptance of contingency is more possible for Eddie Twyborn because, of all the central characters, he alone dies a 'muddled human being astray in the general confusion of life'.\textsuperscript{13} Of all the novels too, *The Twyborn Affair* is the one where the leading of several lives is explicitly developed and forms the central theme. To insist on the

\textsuperscript{12} T.A., p.211.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.403.
same unchanging persona through all experience is to refuse contingency. For, if the persona is to remain the same through experience, then only those kinds of experience which permit the persona to remain unchanged are acceptable. So the leading of several lives, in this sense, becomes dependent on contingency. It is because of what happens that Twyborn changes identity and not the other way round. Opacity is a condition which arises from the intervention of contingency because often the happenings of a contingent world are incomprehensible. In *The Twyborn Affair*, the confusion in which Eddie Twyborn dies is not clarified, and at no subsequent stage does the narrative offer any explanation. Opacity in this novel is at its most dense. Elsewhere opaqueness also remains.

'Yet, it seemed to Laura Trevelyan, those moments of her life which had been of most importance where both indistinct and ugly.'

What is distinctive about the role of contingency in the novels is always its positive nature. It is never portrayed as an enemy, or in terms of a malignant force, or as a mishap. Even for the muddled Eddie Twyborn contingency, if difficult, was a central feature and a means of exploring experience. The meaning of the

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central characters' lives is that they were lived in that way and not another.

'All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful chance - until the creative will says to it: "But I willed it thus!"'  

'Life can only be lived forward and understood backward'.

Kierkegaard.
Memory as an essential aid in human development has been eclipsed by the developments of the twentieth century if not earlier. Notebooks and electronic devices are now relied upon as the custodians of memory. It is not that we do not use our memories any longer, it is more that we no longer rely upon them in ways that once the human race had to do. In the days before writing, when each day passed unrecorded, memory and the cultivation of memory were prerequisites. In the world prior to printing, memory too was of primary importance, for it was through memory that man could learn. Through memory experience was ordered, preserved and, ultimately, made meaningful.

In the present age, memory is no longer depended upon, in absolute terms, to either order or preserve experience. A bad memory need not be a disability, a life does not collapse into chaos or oblivion because a memory is poor. Appointment books, diaries, photographs and tape recorders can reconstruct past events. In this light, it is interesting that the laws of some states in America have been changed to admit tape recordings as evidence in trials of crime where violence has been a factor. In this instance the electronic device can challenge, if not overrule the human act of memory.

Even the other traditional role of memory, that
of memorizing, is no longer prevalent. We are no longer required to learn by rote. In the age of telecommunications, when all kinds of information are readily and easily gathered together, stored and easily accessible, we are not required to carry the information in our heads. Books and machines now do that job.

Yet I do not mean to imply that memory has become redundant; only that some of its traditional functions have been taken over, to a large degree, by technological developments. We all possess a memory, memory is still a process with which we are all familiar. We use it in different ways and for different purposes. It is sometimes a source of pleasure and sometimes an occasion of pain and sometimes a matter of inconvenience, particularly between the sexes since popular tradition would have it that women's memories are 'longer' than men's.

'... women remember; men act, and are.'

Much capital has been made, particularly in comedy, out of this tradition. However, Patrick White is a writer who usually avoids either the traditional or popular grounds of sexual conflict. This is, perhaps, because he sees that

I. R.C., p.234.
'The difference between the sexes is no worse than their appalling similarity.'

Memory, nonetheless, plays an important role in some of the novels and is referred to in others. It may be a matter of coincidence only that the one novel in which memory is absolutely central, is the story of a woman: Elizabeth Hunter. Of far greater relevance is the fact that the use of memory is essential in characters for whom experience has been a matter of contingency. Contingent events cannot be anticipated or predicted, therefore they cannot be prepared for, in the sense that they cannot be absorbed in advance. Accordingly, for those who are aware of the contingent world in which they act, their life, as Kierkegaard put it, can only be 'understood backward'; that is, if learning from experience is desired and knowledge is a goal, as both are in the novels.

"I feel", she said slowly, and was already frightened at what she was about to admit, "that the life I am to live is already utterly beyond my control." 

In coming to terms with contingency, with what has happened, what has already passed, over which there was no control, which incidentally describes the narrative

structure of *The Eye Of The Storm*, it is the characters' memory which is relied upon, since nothing external to the characters, neither notebooks nor electronic devices or, indeed, neither divine nor other human intervention, play a part in the novels. It is through memory that the past is recalled and the event presented for thought and examination.

Both Aristotle and Augustine agreed that the processes of memory are neither under the control of intellect or of will. ⁴ For Aristotle, memory could have no place in intellect because intellect cannot make itself dependent on phantasms or involve itself in time. Memory is, obviously, involved in time and was, moreover, seen as belonging to the same part of the soul as imagination, and imagination was not deemed a reliable indicator of reality. As a result, both Aristotle and Augustine considered, in connection with memory, states of madness and conditions of confusion between what is real and imaginary. ⁵ In using memory as a device in the novels, it would appear that, yet again, emphasis is being laid upon manners of knowledge which are neither intellectual nor rational. It is also noteworthy, in the light of Aristotle's and Augustine's preoccupation with

5. *De Memoria*. I, 450 b 3., *De Trinitate* ibid.
distortion, that no such confusion between what is real and what is imagined occurs in those episodes which are presented through memory. In The Aunt's Story, for example, where confusion between what is real and what is imagined does occur, it takes place in the present time of the novel, in the section named 'Jardin Exotique.'

The first section, Meroë, is recounted through memory and is, in comparison with the second section, narrated with pristine clarity and simplicity.

The use of memory in this way operates in The Aunt's Story and The Tree of Man. Both novels begin in a similar manner. The present time of the novel is sketched and then the past is recalled. Meroë is, of course, recalled at far greater length than Willow Creek, forming a substantial first section in the novel. This kind of narrative device is commonly used in the novel in general and, to some extent, in the short story. What is important to notice here is the particular use of memory it represents. The narrative episodes of Willow Creek and Meroë occur at a later time, which recalls and remembers the past in its own timing. The past is represented exactly as it was perceived in that past. The kind of memory corresponds with the classical analysis of how memory should work, where the process of remembering was seen as corresponding to an eikon of the event remembered.
'....memory.... needs to be in accordance, not merely with a past object of perception, but with the past perceiving of it.'

This, however, defines only one way in which memory works. Meroe and Willow Creek are presented as they were perceived in their own time. More complex processes of memory also occur in the novels.

'Stan Parker found a dragonfly, as long as his finger, which he brought to show his wife, it was trembling on a yellow mulberry leaf. "Why, that is beautiful, Stan," she said. She was pleased but detached, humouring him as if he were a little boy. She was kneading dough at the time. "Put it on the sill", she said, "and perhaps it will fly". After delivering it from his hands, from which the skin had been knocked in one or two places, there were scabs on them, he went out, and afterwards remembered the incident as one that had been insufficient.'

What Stan Parker 'afterwards remembered' about the incident was that it was 'insufficient'. His act of remembering reveals a process which is not, at first, immediately obvious. There are two times involved, the time in which the act took place and the later time of remembering. In the time of remembering, Stan's coming to a decision involves a process of osmosis between the

past time of the incident and the later time of remembering it. At the time of the incident, however, a similar process of osmosis was not at work. No knowledge or decision accrued from an interaction between the time of the act and the preceding narrative past. Stan is presented, therefore, as a character who does not come to a decision about an act at the same time in which it occurs; or if he does, then, his decision is not recognized. And so, knowledge, it would appear, which comes from action, must wait to be discovered, since its temporal aspect is one of the present, waiting on a future, in which it will be recognized. This particular example concerns an incident which can hardly be said to be central to the novel. In *The Living and the Dead*, however, a very similar instance of memory occurs, in which the subject matter is of much greater relevance.

'Conversation with the Spaniard returned to him, the evening in the street after the party at Adelaide's and his own retreat from what had been too pertinent. As if the Spaniard were presenting the choice of two ways, of the living or of the dead. You wanted instinctively to close the eyes, like Adelaide and Gerald, like Muriel, or the ranks of red suburban houses, smothered in a plush complacency. Because the alternative to recognize the pulse beyond the membrane, the sick heartbeat, or the gangrenous growth, this was too much, even at the risk of sacrificing awareness, and the other moments, the drunken, disorderly passions of existence, that created but at the same time consumed.'

8. L.D., p.305.
Both memories, that of Stan's and Elyot's do not correspond with their perceptions of the events as they happened in the past. It is through memory that both events are clarified. So that remembering can give a meaning to the past which the past did not have, in the case of Stan, or which was not faced, as in the case of Elyot. This is a common experience in ordinary life. If, for example, a child is sent out to school and fails to later return home, memory will play on the last incidents and details: how he was dressed, how goodbyes were said etc., giving these details a significance they did not have at the actual time of his departure. However, since we cannot remember what did not happen, since memory cannot recall something that was not present, the recognitions of Stan and Elyot through memory were possible because the knowledge was either present at the time of the act, potentially present, or a presence which was unrecognized. To remember what has not happened is, as Aristotle and Augustine said, to enter the realm of imagination or fantasy.

Postponement is another narrative device used in the novels, most notably in *The Vivisector*. By postponement I mean that a time lapse occurs between the time of the event and the speaking of it by the character involved. This is a different kind of time lapse to that of Stan in *The Tree of Man* and Elyot in
The Living and the Dead, where the time lapse facilitated and enabled recognition to take place. In the instances of postponement of which I am thinking, what happens in one case is that the event is narrated as it occurs and later retold by Hurtle from an entirely different perspective, and, in the other case, the event is not described when it happened but is later narrated by Hurtle. Both events concern death, those of Nance and Hero, and the retelling is brought about by encounters which Hurtle has with two strangers; Cutbush and Mothersole. Nance's death, at which Hurtle was present, is fully narrated, but Hurtle does not speak of it until later. Hero's death is not narrated, nor alluded to, at the time it happened, and the reader is made aware of her death only when, later, Hurtle speaks of it. Both episodes are similar in that the retellings share a common purpose, which is an attempt by Hurtle to come to terms with their deaths. About Nance's he says:

"I don't know, and shall never know".  

Of Hero he concludes that

"I didn't kill her, as her husband said. She died of cancer ... Or does one really know what sows the seed? Is cancer entirely a physical disease? Did I help kill by failing her?"


10. Ibid., p.403.
What is illustrated by these examples is that not only does the memory of the event fail to correspond with how it was first perceived, nor does the present perception even modify or alter the past, but memory utterly fails, in the present, to complete what was obviously incomplete in the past. So the present time of remembering is also incomplete. Memory, in this instance, preserves incompleteness. What was unresolved in the time of the event in the past, remains unresolved in the later time of remembering. Unlike the narrative episodes of Meroe and Willow Creek, unlike, too, the instances of Elyot and Stan, where memory contributes to the past by completing it, the past of Hurtle Duffield, in these instances, remains incomplete.

There is also another kind of memory in which remembering brings into focus both the past and the present, just as a failure of memory also brings the past into focus with the present. We have all experienced instances of forgetfulness where what is forgotten is searched for in our minds with an acuteness which overwhelms the present. If remembering is a common device in the novels, its obverse, forgetting, is uncommon. Forgetfulness does, however, occur in one novel and, interestingly enough, it is forgetfulness not of the past but of the present.
'Theodora remembered she was in America and going home.'

What is obviously implied is that Theodora had forgotten she was in America. Forgetfulness of the present involves a withdrawal from the present which means that the present is not important or significant; which is how instances of forgetfulness are usually interpreted. What is insignificant can easily be forgotten, what is not in the foreground of consciousness can also be easily forgotten. That Theodora's instance of forgetfulness occurs in the third section of the novel is appropriate because Theodora has, at this stage, withdrawn from her surroundings and is no longer present to the real world as it is portrayed in the novel. Theodora can forget all that is external to herself for, by the end of the novel, she is content to pursue her own inner reality. The concluding lines of the novel reinforce Theodora's detachment.

"Here", said Mrs. Johnson. "I brought your hat, that you forgot". So Theodora Goodman took her hat and put it on her head, as it was suggested she should do.'

However, if Theodora's forgetfulness of present time is

II. A.S., p.256.
I2. Ibid., p.287.
consistent with the state of mind she had reached, there is no forgetfulness of the past either in this or in other novels. The central characters all struggle toward their enlightenment. When the past is invoked it is invoked for what can be remembered, for what proves to be of significance. Forgetfulness of the past has no part to play in the lives of those who search for meaning.

As was mentioned briefly at the beginning of the chapter, memory can reveal contingency most clearly because it shows the actual place that decisions have when made. Decisions take place within a contingent world as memory can so demonstrate. This becomes particularly obvious in The Eye Of The Storm, which is largely a novel of memory. The action which occurs in the present time of the novel, concerning Elizabeth Hunter, is constituted by visits to her bedroom. If the narrative suggests that some of these visits are being awaited with expectation it is not from these encounters in the present, but from encounters with the past, that any expectations are met. With her 'eyes closed listening to her house, her thoughts, her life', [13] Elizabeth Hunter can return to 'the waking dreams of which her life was constituted.' [14]

[14] Ibid., p.23.
'Mrs. Hunter fell into a snooze trying to remember something else she had discovered, not in any hairy embrace, or under threat by wet kissing females, or children's butterfly-flickers alternating with denunciations. Falling into her light snooze she would have liked to experience a state of mind she knew existed, but which was too subtle to enter except by special grace.'  

All the events in Elizabeth Hunter's life, her marriage with Alfred whom she subsequently discovered that she didn't or couldn't love enough, her motherhood, and her affairs are clarified through memory. As she lies in her bed, she wonders, 'was Arnold Wyburd necessary?' In reviewing her life, she sees herself as a woman of 'voracious' appetites, who is also painfully aware of her own imperfections. Even while she pursued love, money, position, and possessions 'an inkling persisted, sometimes even a certainty descended: of a calm in which the self had been stripped, if painfully, of its human imperfection.' But, as was also quoted in the last chapter, Elizabeth Hunter comes to learn that 'she must expect her answers outside boxes, in the colder contingencies preparing for her.' In her experience of the eye of the storm, the state of calmness, which she aspires to, is achieved; but this too is a matter of contingency over which she has no control.

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15. Ibid., pp.15 - 16.  
16. Ibid., p.35.  
17. Ibid., p.29.  
18. Ibid., p.102.
'All else was dissolved by this lustrous moment made visible in the eye of the storm, and would have remained so, if she had been allowed to choose.'

She is not allowed to choose. Between her experience of this event and her death she 'relives and relives' it through memory. Even her ultimate insight, which allows her to die, is also presented as a matter of contingency.

'Now the real business in hand was not to withdraw her will, as she had once foreseen, but to will enough strength into her body to put her feet on the ground and walk steadily towards the water. There was the question of how much time she would have before the eye must concentrate on other, greater contingencies, leaving her to chaos.'

What memory reveals about contingency in the life of Elizabeth Hunter is that all of the decisions made and actions undertaken had a coherence. The death of Elizabeth Hunter has a quality of inevitability which is not only to do with the fact that she died, but also the manner in which she died. So that the contingent quality of Elizabeth Hunter's life, which memory clearly displays, ends in her returning to the special state she so craved. Inevitability, in this novel, which is brought about by contingency, has both coherence and a purpose.

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In the last novel to date, memory also plays a part but in quite a different manner.

'He was left with this house, in which the owners had gone on living without his assistance. He wondered what part he had played in their lives during his absence, perhaps no more than they in his own unwilling memory: a series of painful washed-out flickers. Unless those who lead what are considered real lives see the past as an achieved composite of fragments, like a jig-saw from which only some of the details are missing, or cannot be fitted.' 21

The incompletion, which was a feature of those episodes concerning death in HurtleDuffield's life, reappears in The Twyborn Affair as a major factor in the life of Eddie Twyborn. In this novel memory fails to put anything together for the central character. Nothing composite emerges from the lives of Eddie Twyborn, and memory serves only to reinforce his sense of incompletion. His life does not amount to a whole, or a totality, even with a few pieces missing. He remains fragmented and diagnoses that:

' "Remembering is a kind of disease I suffer from".
"Hardly a disease", the Judge muttered through a mouthful.
"Useful, I'd say, if you're to any degree selective".
"No, a disease", Eddie Twyborn heard himself persisting. "I don't know, but suspect that those who can't recall, act more positively than those who are bogged down in memory". ' 22

22. Ibid., p.158.
The implication is that, for those who get 'bogged down' by memory, positive action becomes difficult. In this instance, memory, it would seem, not only prevails but, because of its nature, also hinders action. The Aristotelian concept of memory involved image making, in that an image was used as the location of memory. Images were selected for their association with the object or event to be remembered, through similarity, dissimilarity or contiguity. The conditions for memory involved in Aristotle's definition are:

'... one who remembers must regard his image as a copy and must say in his soul that he encountered something before.'

In this kind of memory, images, or pictures, are copies which represent or invoke previous experience. It is a straightforward process whereby the past experience, or event, resurfaces into the foreground of consciousness. There is no process of ordering, sifting or sorting at work. In this way, the past events and experience in Eddie Twyborn's life resurface just as they were experienced in the past. This is the kind of memory which was discussed first in this chapter, where the narratives of Meroe and Willow Creek accord with the way in which they were perceived in the past. And so it is

with Eddie Twyborn, the major difference being that his past perception did not yield understanding or give meaning to his experience. In addition, the present does not help either, as nothing is discovered in the present about the past. So that the other instances of memory discussed, in which perception in the present contributes to an understanding of the past, do not occur either in this novel. Like *The Eye of the Storm*, *The Twyborn Affair* is a novel where action and events are contingent. Memory as it operates in both novels also demonstrates this, but, in the former, memory also reveals a coherence in the life of Elizabeth Hunter. This is not so for Eddie Twyborn. Both the past and the present fail to reveal any coherence in the life of the central character. He dies as he/she lived.

'...she could have cried, in fact she did let out a yelp or two, for the actuality she had been grasping at all her life without ever coming to terms with it.'

The presentation of incoherence in memory, and in the present time of the novel, is deliberate. The narrative of Eddie Twyborn is one where nothing comes together. He is like a sponge which absorbs all experience, can recall all experience, and which just gets heavier and

heavier, for he is never released from the cumulative experience, never gets a fresh start. Neither his own hand, nor any other, squeezes the sponge. In one sense, he is a logical extension of White's central characters who never refuse to undertake any experience that crosses their path. He is different in the sense only that he gets bogged down. His, of all the novels, is the most painful portrayal of human experience. For it is the story of a life in which incompleteness is a constant factor, is a constant nightmare. The Twyborn Affair is a story about time; more precisely it is a story about there being not enough time.

'... time itself is a wound that will not heal up.'

Neither does Eddie Twyborn.

'You cannot build bridges between the wandering Islands; The mind has no neighbours, and the unteachable heart Announces its armistice time after time, but spends Its love to draw them closer and closer apart!' 

A.D. Hope.
The solitude of the individual is commonplace in modern literature. The barriers that exist between people, or between the individual and his environment, have been exhaustively explored to produce the fertile themes of loneliness, isolation, and alienation.

'... Nobody ever gets to know nobody! We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life! ... we're under a lifelong sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth.'

The novels of Patrick White also reflect this preoccupation:

'Some way behind the advance party would come the spare horses and the pack-mules driven by Le Mesurier and Palfreyman. These two exchanged all manner of kindesses and sympathy, but not their thoughts. Palfreyman was not sure which god Le Mesurier worshipped. Le Mesurier would address Palfreyman very distinctly, and smile encouragingly out of his dark lips, as if the ornithologist had been a foreigner. Well, he was, too, in that he was another man.'

I feel, however, that some of the characteristics of isolation in White's work, as indeed in other Australian writing, reveal a distinctiveness which is essentially Australian in nature and origin. Geographically, for example, the size and space of Australia bewilders


the European mind, whose spatial consciousness, in many cases, is first determined by the parochial. Within the continent of Europe, too, there are very few regions which are unpopulated, whereas, in Australia, as has been pointed out, the greater population still clings to the coast.

"A pity that you huddle", said the German. "Your country is of great subtlety". 3

Physical distance is a recurring theme in early Australian Literature. The stories of the bush by Henry Lawson, for example, centre on social microcosms divided not only from a larger society but also, often, from themselves; as "The Drover's Wife" illustrates. The coping with physical and social isolation, and the kinds of human contact that occur within this isolation, became two major themes, which are known as the Australian legend and 'mateship' respectively. Whether these fictional representations ever corresponded to the realities of life in earlier Australia is quite beside the point, for they now form a considerable part of the Australian consciousness and culture.

Physical distance forms the background against which most of White's novels are set. A direct connection then emerges between distance and the undertaking of journeys.

3. Ibid., p.II.
Voss, of course, is the one novel where the journey assumes epic and pioneering proportions. In all but one of the novels the central characters move from one place to another. The Tree of Man, for example, begins in this way. Even in The Solid Mandala, the one novel which is an exception to the rule, local trips take place by car and train. So that the pattern of distance and journeys is firmly established. 4 There is no doubt that the device of distance and journey is used to reflect the inner journeys which the central characters make:

'From then on, how his dreams jolted him as he followed the rivers towards their source. In this journeying, it could not be said that he was ever alone, for his outer man was accompanied by his dedicated spirit, until, on a morning of antipodean summer, it was suggested the official destination had been reached.'

Nevertheless, the use of distance as a literary device is also, appropriately, Australian. 'You are so vast and ugly', Laura says to Voss that:

'I can imagine some desert .... You are fascinated by the prospect of desert places, in which you will find your own situation taken for granted.'

4. It is interesting, too, that the significance of journeys extends even to White's own memoirs where they form a separate chapter.

5. R.C., p.194.

Distance, as a factor, moves from the specificity of geography and terrain to enter the realm of relationships in the novels.

'Theodora looked down through the distances that separate even in love. If I could put out my hand she said, but I cannot. And already the moment, the moments, the disappearing afternoon, had increased the distance that separates.' 7

And again:

'Yet, although the two figures were joined together at the hand, and were crowding through the doorway abreast, bumping at the doorposts with their awkward formation, as if to widen the hole, each could only feel that the other was probably entering a different tunnel.' 8

Lives, in all of White's work, touch but do not join. The personal isolation and loneliness, which result from such social distance, are accepted by the central characters 'because there were also the moments of insight.' 9 The compensation for distance is 'the strength of absence' which the central characters share and which permit them to stay beyond the reach of troublesome social demands.

8. R.C., p.329.
Independence is another factor which contributes to social distance.

'"It is not as if you wasn't independent before", she reminded and smiled. "We could hardly call ourselves Australians - could we? - if we was not independent."'  

Historically, independence is highly valued in Australian culture; necessary for men and desirable for women. Undoubtedly, this virtue, whereby a girl can apply herself "at a pinch, to mend a fuse, paint a home, or tackle jobs of carpentry", is being treated here somewhat ironically. Nevertheless, it is stated elsewhere, and with more seriousness, that

...'no man is strong who depends upon others. And as he went inside, he thought of the contempt he bore Palfreyman.'

While it is true that by the end of the novel Voss learns humility, it is not clear that his education in humility includes the acceptance of dependence. Furthermore, the fact that it is Palfreyman with whom dependence is associated compounds the difficulty. For Palfreyman, despite his virtues, is presented essentially as a

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10. R.C., p.71.
dishonest man who, having deserted a sister, embraces the desert in an effort to atone. His 'Christianity', by the standard of the elite, is of a questionable kind. So that the ambiguity surrounding the question of independence versus dependence remains and, in fact, continues unresolved throughout all of White's work. For example, love, which is discussed later in the context of The Twyborn Affair, must involve, at least implicitly, the notion of dependence. That dependence remains ambiguous may be a contributing factor to the inconclusive way that love is treated.

A related subject, which receives cursory mention, is the prospect of friendship.

"Friendship is two knives", said Miss Hare. "They will sharpen each other when rubbed together, but often one of them will slip and slice off a thumb".12

The choice of a knife as a basic image of friendship reveals an attitude which is already prejudicial. For, however favourable, or good, the intentions of friendship, it is the function of knives to cut; and, at their worst, knives can inflict serious injury. Moreover, friendship is depersonalized by the use of an image in terms of

12. R.C., p.82.
objects, thus the detachment of human beings from one another is further established. So, the central characters are set in a background of independence and detachment which, to a large extent, makes them invulnerable. Independence is, in some sense, no more than an attempt to achieve invulnerability. They are, accordingly, placed outside the control or pressures which the larger community could, otherwise, bring to bear.

As a result of the importance which is ascribed to the fact that lives touch, if not join, a question is raised concerning the nature of reciprocity in the novels. A study of reciprocation is interesting for the manner in which it reveals its presence and, equally, for those relationships from which it is absent. For example,

"The worst thing about love between human beings", the voice was directed at her from the bed, "when you're prepared to love them they don't want it; when they do, it's you who can't bear the idea."  

Reciprocity is, obviously, a matter of the coincidence of timings, for the latter is a precondition of the former. In addition, there has to be a coincidence between time and act, for if this does not occur in love, or indeed many other activities, unfulfilment is the result. Love in the novels, is not only non-reciprocal but, in addition, seems to end up as a matter of unfulfilment.

I3. E.S., p.II.
'Thus cornered, Greg Lushington bleated, not unlike one of his own stud rams, "I expect it’s about love - that’s where everything seems to lead - in some form or another. Unfulfilled love."'

On the subject of love, Roland Barthes has written a provocative and witty book called *A Lover's Discourse*. The central argument concerns itself with desire and how desire influences both the lover's discourse and actions. Barthes maintains that, once the act of mutual recognition occurs between prospective lovers, the lover then sets the beloved in his own interior world where the dramatizations, interpretations, and communications all take place. The lover's discourse, therefore, essentially takes place between the lover and himself. It is an interesting study for the light it throws on White, where such matters are alluded to but never fully developed or explained. So that what is laconically rejected in White is partially illuminated by Barthes.

*The Living and the Dead*, White's earliest novel currently in print, is largely a work about failed relationships. It is the only novel which offers explicit lengthy discussions about the business of people living together, their motivations, desires and the nature of their communications

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15. cf. *E.S.*, p.378: 'she wondered at the law which decrees that almost everybody shall desire some other human being.'
both verbal and physical. The narrative episode, concerning Elyot and Hildegard, clearly defines the expectations and limitations of relationships. The resolution of their affair involves both dishonesty and disgust, a connection which becomes a leitmotif in the following novels wherever sex or love appear. The most explicit description of a sexual encounter is also included in this novel:

'She took off her clothes. It was stupid to be naive, she felt. But she trembled, the so many flags of flesh, the uncontrolled flapping of the body. If she could ignore what she felt, in his body the gratitude of Maynard. Even when she closed her eyes on the visible Maynard there was still this, that she must offset with something of her own, something more than the chafing of the flesh, the mouth on mouth. But it froze upon her mouth. She reached out through years upon her back, through the leaves of the trees, and the sound of still, basking water, to the state of physical perfection. Then her hands touched sheets. This then was sex, the rumpled bed, the sense of aching nausea, the dead weight.'

It is implied in this passage that, while Maynard reaches his climax, Eden is entirely absent as she relives through her past a moment of perfection. The dichotomy between their juxtaposed moments of 'physical perfection' is extreme. Not only, it appears, is there no possibility of reciprocity in love but it seems to be absent also from

the physical intimacy of sexuality. In the absence of any context, in terms of either love or reciprocity, sexuality acquires a distinct identity which endures throughout White's work. This identity is lust.

In almost every novel there is, to some extent, mention of lust: Amy Parker and Leo in *The Tree of Man*, Eden, Elyot, Joe and Muriel in *The Living and the Dead*, Frank Parrot and Theodora in *The Aunt's Story*, Hurtle, Nance and Hero in *The Vivisector*, Ellen Gluyas in *A Fringe of Leaves*, and Elizabeth and Alfred, among others, in *The Eye Of The Storm*. Lust is also a major preoccupation in *The Twyborn Affair* and is discussed in that context in a later chapter. Lust is nearly always presented in the same terms:

'And they struggled together, not heroically, but to bruise each other's bodies, and she swallowed down any suspicion of repulsion that rose in her throat to oppose her lust.' 17

Several novels later,

'Lust and disgust are one, she suspected, the same shooting pain in both mind and body.'

I would suggest that, according to this portrayal, lust is no more than a name given to an act where

18. *E.S.*, p.405.
desire and relief of desire are the primary objectives. The sexual intimacies, that occur between all of the characters mentioned above, are presented in terms of sexual desire and relief. Massage parlours and prostitution could be seen as consequences of such needs in the ordinary world.

It is noteworthy that while reciprocity is absent in relationships where normally it might be assumed, there is a form of reciprocity present in acts where it is usually considered absent.

'Strangely, it did not occur to Aristide Pelletier that the emotions the swimmer aroused in him might have been occasioned by lust, not even taking into account the trickle of sperm still moist on the groin of his thigh. Whether the swimmer were the young wife of the crazy Greek or some unknown woman or youth, neither physical passion, nor even a burst of lust, could enter into a relationship which presented itself as a tremulous abstraction, and which must remain remote from his actual life. As the swimmer, as the light, as the colour returned, what could have remained a sordid ejaculation became a triumphant leap into the world of light and colour.'

Thus, the 'sordid ejaculation' of Aristide Pelletier, in front of his shop, becomes a bridge to a 'world of light and colour'. Masturbation, which is usually conceived of in terms of frustration and relief, is here attributed a fulfilment such as he had never experienced with any of

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the women who had shared his lust. The clue to this rather idiosyncratic viewpoint can be found, I would suggest, in the fact that solitude is recurrently stressed throughout the novels, not at all as a deprivation but more in terms of a strength.

"Something I found out", she panted, "on that island after you had all run away - nothing will kill me before I am intended to die". If you could describe your storm, but you could not. You can never convey in words the utmost in experience. Whatever is given to you to live, you alone can live, and re-live, and re-live, till it is gasped out of you."

It is in this aloneness that a reciprocity between self and event can take place. This kind of reciprocity produces a fulfilment which is felt by Aristide Pelletier. Furthermore, the illumination, concerning aloneness, which Elizabeth Hunter receives, makes possible the coincidence of her preparation and the event of her death. "Nothing will kill me before I am intended to die". Reciprocity is, therefore, very much present in her death.

One novel in which a relationship between a man and a woman is presented as reciprocal is Voss. It is, I think, significant that this relationship is asexual, in the sense that their relationship is never expressed in terms of physical intimacy. That we call certain acts

20. E.S., p.414.
sexual in relationships which otherwise, it is implied, are not, is anomalous. This anomaly is, no doubt, the consequence of the opposition between body and soul which has been a prevailing influence in European culture. Yet, we are also our bodies, in much the same way as thought and language are indivisible. Nevertheless, sex has been attributed to the 'strange dictatorship of the body' while our souls, it was considered, remain disassociated from such affairs. It is, I think, strange that, while we conceive of our relationships as being different, our expectations of sexual behaviour are repeated in identical patterns while the relationships themselves are not. Nor has White escaped the opposition between body and soul. He presents relationships in this tradition and it is, perhaps, the only tradition of thought in European culture that he has neither overset nor come to terms with. His presentations of love and sex are not at all well developed.

The relationship between Laura and Voss, as I have already mentioned, is 'asexual' and, therefore, escapes the usual problems of sex which White's characters encounter. However, it is of importance in that the relationship is reciprocal and, more importantly, is so acknowledged by both characters. The nature of their reciprocity is of a very

specific kind.

'Since she had begun to prise the other's close soul, she herself was opening stiffly.'  

This sentence occurs early in the novel. By the end, their souls have opened both for themselves and each other.

'Mutual. It is all mutual.'

Such relationships in White's novels are the exception rather than the rule. The rareness of such an occurrence is, perhaps, partially explained by the following.

'Indeed, the pleasure he promised himself in learning to understand Judd did seem illusory, for rock cannot know rock, stone cannot come together with stone, except in conflict.'

Judd and Voss are alike, they are both 'monoliths'; and like cannot 'know' like, or so it is suggested. In this way, for example, Holstius is not a separate character in The Aunt's Story but is more a manifestation of Theodora's inner voice.

Of much greater frequency is the relationship of harmony between the central characters and nature. Stan Parker, Theodora, Voss, Judd, Mary Hare, Arthur and Eddie Twyborn are all presented in relationships of harmony.

22. Voss, p.76.
23. Ibid., p.188.
24. Ibid., p.136.
with their environments.

There is a convention in European culture in which genuineness is associated with the 'simple' person. The man of the land, who is in touch with the rhythms and seasons of nature, is a figure of trust, while the more complex and sophisticated rootless city-dweller is more a figure of suspicion. Yet, the variety of characters that White presents in harmony with nature breaks this convention. For, while characters like Arthur and Mary Hare are figures of simplicity, and Stan Parker and Judd are men of the land, the changing personae of Eddie Twyborn belong to Nice, London, France and also Bogong. So that Twyborn achieves his harmony with a landscape 'which had engaged his feelings' 25 by struggle. Voss, no less than Twyborn, is also engaged in a struggle if for different reasons. Theirs is not the easy harmony of man and nature as portrayed, for example, by Wordsworth and Yeats. If, by the end of the Bogong episode, Eddie has experienced the relationship which 'was waiting to develop between himself, the huggermugger buildings, even a bitter landscape' 26 it was achieved by toil, sweat and blood. The struggle which Voss has to undergo is of a much different nature. For Voss is under the illusion that the country can be possessed.

26. Ibid., p.179.
'at that hour fulfillment did appear to prevail, in the dry river, with its recurring potholes of greenish-brown water, in the drifts of white flood grass tinkling on bushes, in the ugly, thumping lizards and modest birds. Through the marriage of light and shadow, in the infinite distances of that dun country of which he was taking possession, all, finally, would be resolved.

And, of course, all is 'resolved', but not in the way Voss expected. Judd does not share the same illusion as Voss. "It is not mine", he said of the country. Yet again the notion of possession presents itself as an obstacle and a barrier. That he cannot possess the land is one of the lessons Voss must learn. At the end of the novel, when all the lessons have been learned, then his harmony with nature becomes complete.

"He is still there .... he is there in the country, and always will be ..... if you live and suffer long enough in a place, you do not leave it altogether. Your spirit is still there." 29

The harmony that exists between many of the central characters and nature contributes to the learning processes necessary for enlightenment, with one exception, Eddie Twyborn. Nevertheless, of all his relationships, that with nature is the only one which Twyborn manages to enter into and

27. Voss, p.190.
28. Ibid., p.149.
29. Ibid., p.443.
complete as a 'live affair'. Interpersonal relationships, on the other hand, with the exception of Laura and Voss, contribute very little and are, overall, dismissed as a means of enlightenment. The illuminati remain at a distance socially and set about their individual solitary journeys. The emphasis on the contribution of nature is not, I would suggest, a replacement or substitute for personal relationships. It is, in some sense, more fundamental and basic than that, forming part of an overall design. Michael Dufrenne said it succinctly.

'Art deconstructs nature in order to rediscover naturing.'

'Transcendental reflection had shifted its foundation from the existence of a science of nature to the possibility for man to conceive of himself as that not-known from which he is perpetually summoned toward self-knowledge'.

M. Foucault.

'This is indeed very remarkable, that it does not yet know itself, and it already knows how beautiful it is to know itself. But where does it know its own knowing if it does not know itself? For it knows itself as seeking and not knowing, while it seeks to know itself.'

Augustine.
With the exception of *The Twyborn Affair*, enlightenment is a central event in all of White's novels. From *The Aunt's Story* on, until *The Eye Of The Storm*, enlightenment is something that takes place within the action of the novel. It is presented as the point to which the central characters are moving.

'Human behaviour is a series of lunges, of which, it is sometimes sensed, the direction is inevitable'.

The structure of *The Eye Of The Storm* differs, however, in that while enlightenment is still central, it occurs as a remembered event. Elizabeth Hunter's experience is slowly revealed by memory. Through memory the significance of her experience emerges gradually until the stage is reached when the character feels she is ready to die. While the central characters are presented as in search of illumination, the nature of that illumination is also presented as being unclear. So that there is room for ambiguity, in the sense that the novels deal, in part, with characters failing to discover what might be expected and, instead, discovering that which they did not expect. *The Tree of Man* is one such example. In the opening pages of the novel, the narrator says of Stan:

'One morning early, while the dew was still cold outside his boots, he got up and left, in search, if he had known it, of permanence'.

Stan Parker does not know what it is he is in search of. His unrecognized quest spans three quarters of the novel. During this period, he experiences marriage, parenthood, floods, fire, war, and the cumulative acts which characterize his working life on the farm. He is middle aged when he recognizes what has been the nature of his search.

'Stan Parker, sitting at the small, cold table, had by this time achieved permanence of a kind ... But his permanence was not worth having, he knew. All things of importance ... are withheld or past'.

The moment of recognition is also the moment of knowledge. In his discussions on the nature of drama, based on Aristotle's *Poetics*, Gadamer states:

In the representation of play, what is emerges ... The pleasure offered in the spectacle ... is the joy of knowledge'.

3. Ibid., p.328.
Gadamer defines the element of knowledge, in the presentation of a play, as recognition. The connection that he makes between knowledge and recognition could equally apply to the act that is Stan Parker's.

'The joy of recognition is rather that more becomes known than is already known. In recognition what we know emerges, as if through an illumination, from all the chance and variable circumstances that condition it and is grasped in its essence. It is known as something'.

For the remainder of the novel, Stan consciously fixes his attention on the 'things of importance that are withheld or past'. In the last section of the novel, he turns his face toward his future and what he seeks of the future is enlightenment.

'He was waiting, listening, looking at some fixed point, quite feverishly. It is not possible, he considered, that I shall not eventually receive a glimpse'.

One of the rhetorical devices used to emphasize the ambiguous nature of the quest is the use of the 'if' construction. At certain intervals throughout the novel there occur sentences which are built around a clause

5. Ibid., p.102.
containing the word 'if'. These sentences serve to underline the divided consciousness in the novel which permits the central character's unawareness of the true nature of his quest. For example:

'This made him chew the little stub of pencil, and would have undoubtedly resulted in something final, if it was to have been given to him to express himself in this life. But it was not'.

This statement implies two functions. One is that Stan Parker's proper fulfilment lies in that which has been withheld from him, namely the ability to express himself. The implications here follow the customary usage of this sentence structure. For example, if I say, 'If only I had the money I would travel around the world', I am implying that in what I cannot, or am not permitted to, do lies my fulfilment. The second function suggests that this withholding of articulacy has been a deliberate act of fate. That this sentence belongs to the narrative voice attributes to the narrator an omniscience which obviously contrasts with the unknowing state of Stan. In all instances of this 'if' construction the narrator knows what Stan does not. Ordinarily, loss would accrue to whoever was without the extra knowledge. However, in this case, the opposite appears to be true. Had Stan

Parker, for example, recognised, simultaneously with the narrator, that he was in search of permanence, the possibility is that this quest would never have been transcended. Knowing from the beginning what his quest involved, would have constituted a limit. Or so the narrative suggests. Not only does Stan Parker not know that he is in search of permanence, but when this quest is eventually identified he can, because of the lapse in time between the experience and its recognition, also recognise that it is not desirable.

We have seen that Stan Parker's thoughts would, no doubt, 'have resulted in something final' if it had been given to him 'to express himself in this life'. That language has been withheld from Stan Parker involves some irony. For Stan Parker is finally enlightened and, in our culture, as has been pointed out before, language had traditionally been regarded as the medium of learning and illumination. But Stan Parker is, perhaps, along with Mary Hare, the most inarticulate of all the illuminati; and the fact of his enlightenment is a heavily underlined comment on a language which has lost its function as a means of illumination. Stan Parker's inarticulacy ends in fulfilment, which, had he shared the narrator's omniscience, would have been concealed from him. The 'if' construction ironically reveals, by posing articulacy as the desirable alternative, the
inarticulate condition within which Stan Parker achieves his enlightenment. There are, of course, the further ironies, not acknowledged by the text, which involve the fact that this comment on the inadequacy of language is made in language, and it is this same language which provides the reader with whatever illumination the novels afford. However, the concern with the limitations of language is a genuine and valid preoccupation, shared by many modern writers, and is, in turn, only part of a much broader argument concerning those values which are seen as limiting experience.

In several of the novels the image used for the act of illumination is, quite logically, strong light. In other words, enlightenment occurs through the agency of light. As we have seen, it is also a logical development of the role of light in the novels.

'If fellowship with Himmelfarb and Mrs. Godbold, and perhaps her brief communion with a certain blackfellow, would confirm rather than expound a mystery, the reason could be that, in the last light, illumination is synonymous with blinding'.

And again:

'If he no longer felt moved to take down a book, it was because in the end knowledge had come to him, not through words, but by lightning'

What is interesting about the novels in which these passages occur, and this is also true of *The Aunt's Story* and *The Tree of Man*, is that while a preoccupation with this kind of enlightenment is central, no attempt is made to include an enlightener. There is no character, either explicit or hidden, conferring enlightenment. Enlightenment is very much about what some people may learn but not through the intervention of any other being either human or supernatural. The texts, particularly in this set of novels, do not themselves raise the question of divine providence. It is, I think, important to emphasise this point, since I feel that those critics who speak of these novels in terms of 'God', or 'Providence', are less interpreting the text on hand as offering a theological judgement about its content. It is easy to see how this happens, for, in our ordinary lives, providence is understood as living in a world of many possibilities, where God is a powerful actor, who might send events our way. Moreover, given that we

also live in a contingent world, where events, successes, and failures are also a matter of contingency, providence is then a name given to our non-understanding of the mind of God. Therefore, the happening of an event in our contingent lives may be deemed providential while we do not or cannot understand what providence is, except, perhaps, in terms of religious faith. And so this same modus operandi is sometimes applied to White's fiction. Nevertheless, at this point in White's development, his attention is concentrated, not on who or what confers enlightenment, but on those few who can or do attain it and, equally importantly, on how it is achieved.

'Every man has a genius, though it is not always discoverable'

Most of the preceding chapters have contained discussion of how enlightenment is to be pursued, according to the novels; in other words, how White's particular view of genius can be discovered by those characters interested enough to do so. The characters, themselves, are presented as having a very specific nature:

10. Voss, p.35.
'Few people of attainments take easily to a plan of self-improvement. Some discover very easily their perfection cannot endure the insult. Others find their intellectual pleasure lies in the theory, not the practice. Only a few stubborn ones will blunder on, painfully, out of the luxuriant world of their pretensions into the desert of mortification and reward.'

While the central characters are of both sexes, different classes and types, varying backgrounds and occupations, they all possess this stubbornness, this will to trek across the desert of mortification.

This ability to endure, and their vision, are the two common factors which connect all the illuminati.

'For he was racked by his persistent longing to exceed the bounds of reason: to gather up the sparks, visible intermittently inside the thick shell of human faces; to break through to the sparks of light imprisoned in the forms of wood and stone. Imperfection in himself had enabled him to recognize the fragmentary nature of things'...

While stressing the strengths and distinctive qualities of the central characters, the narratives are at equal pains to point out their weaknesses. A careful detour is made around any possibility of prototype, stereotype hero, saint or martyr. Like Himmelfarb, all of the central characters are aware of their imperfections:

II. Ibid., p.74.
I2. R.C., pp.140-141.
'Womanly: that's it. Elizabeth Hunter was never womanly enough, her flaws too perfectly disguised under appearances: enormous, gaping, at times agonizing flaws. Even so, perhaps you are reserved, through these same flaws, for other ends.'

and one novel, at least, Voss, is based on the central character's quest which ends not in its intended goal but in the overcoming of his major flaw. While of the epic design Voss, in the end, is one of the more local novels, in the sense of being concerned with a very personal issue. Elizabeth Hunter's characterization is more exaggerated, in terms of vices and failings, than such characters as Stan Parker, Theodora, Mary Hare, Himmelfarb et al. Yet, when it is asked:

'But could anything of a transcendental nature have illuminated a mind so sensual, mendacious, materialistic, superficial as Elizabeth Hunter's?' I4

that is precisely the point. Illumination could and did happen to just such a persona as Elizabeth Hunter.

Enlightenment happens only when the characters have reached a point of readiness and the necessary preparations have been made. How these preparations have been made, and the point of readiness reached, is what constitutes the greater part of the narratives. Intuition is the most

I3. E.S., p.334.
I4. Ibid., p.589.
active agent at play in the receiving of enlightenment, for it is intuition which has been presented, in the novels, as a traveller into areas where the mind refuses to go. While individual enlightenments vary, the content of enlightenment, in at least four novels, has something to do with the oppositions between permanence and transience, death and creation, acceptance and rejection. For Stan Parker, illumination takes the following form:

'I believe, he said, in the cracks in the path. On which ants were massing, struggling up over an escarpment. But struggling. But joyful. So much so, he was trembling. The sky was blurred now. As he stood waiting for the flesh to be loosened on him, he prayed for greater clarity, and it became obvious as a hand. It was clear that One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums'. I5

The unity and comprehensiveness of the figure 'One' recurs in a much later novel,

'Only yourself and de Santis are real. Only de Santis realizes that the splinters of a mind make a whole piece' I6

but in The Eye Of The Storm this realization is taken a step further:

I6. E.S., p.93.
'... even de Santis can't see that, only yourself: not see, but know yourself to be a detail of the greater splintering.'

Meanwhile, in the novels that occur in between, illuminations are sketched with varying degrees of specificity. One of the most detailed is that experienced by Dubbo.

'Because he was as solitary in the crowd as the man they had crucified, it was again the abo who saw most. All that he had ever suffered, all that he had ever failed to understand, rose to the surface in Dubbo. Instinct and the white man's teaching no longer trampled on each other ... 

... So he understood the concept of the blood, which was sometimes the sick, brown stain on his own pillow, sometimes the clear crimson of redemption. He was blinded now. Choking now. Physically feebler for the revelation that knowledge would never cut the cords which bound the Saviour to the tree. Not that it was asked. Nothing was asked. So he began also to understand acceptance.'

The message of acceptance, whether of the incomprehensible, or of suffering, or of the fact that knowledge will 'never cut the cords which bound the Saviour to the tree', is one which Theodora Goodman also receives.

I7. Ibid.
"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". 

It is not merely acceptance in the face of inevitability, or accepting that which cannot be avoided, which is being suggested because neither the prevention nor the avoidance of experience is asked. The argument for acceptance is based on the fact that nothing is asked. So acceptance of experience becomes a more positive act than indifference or rejection.

Himmelfarb's enlightenment prefigures that of Mrs. Godbold.

'Pressure of time would not allow him to stop, to piece together, to communicate, although he was expected, he was expected to know. And did, of course, now. He knew all the possible permutations and combinations.'

What Himmelfarb knows is that all the permutations and combinations are possible. What is recognized and accepted is the math of multiplication; or, in other words, a mathematic of perpetual becoming.

'Finally the woman sitting alone in front of the deserted shed would sense how she had shot her six arrows at the face of darkness, and halted it. And wherever her arrows struck, she saw other arrows breed. And out of those arrows, others still would split off, from the straight white shafts.

20. R.C., p.437.
So her arrows would continue to be aimed at the forms of darkness, and she herself was, in fact, the infinite quiver. "Multiplication!" Mrs. Goodbold loudly declared, and blushed, for the nonsense it must have sounded, there on the road to Xanadu.  

This passage illustrates how continuity of being occurs. No single life, it is implied, has the possibility of permanence. Permanence is a matter of propagation, the propagation of insight, perception, ideas and illumination from which other insights, perceptions and ideas stem, ad infinitum. 'True permanence', as Holstius says to Theodora, 'is a state of multiplication and division'. So, a life does not end with its death; any and all lives being, instead, a link in the chain of being. This notion of the continuity of being is a result, in some sense, of the recognition of the finite nature of a human life. In taking fright at finiteness, men build houses, erect monuments, assume control, 'lunging in (their) madness after love, money, position and possessions'. We are told, elsewhere, that these activities constitute the 'trivialities of daily existence'. In taking fright at finiteness man is trapped by illusions of permanence.

21. Ibid., p.489.
22. A.S., p.284.
23. E.S., p.29.
24. Voss., p.35.
'Ah, here, the sun said, and the persistent flies, is the peace of permanence; all the shapes are known, act opens out of act, the days are continuous'.

This 'sense of permanence is perverted'. In recognising the finite nature of human life, man is unhampered by such false conceptions and is free to explore the true nature of being.

As has been mentioned, death usually follows illumination. The 'putting away' of Theodora and Arthur is yet another form of death in that the characters have concluded their quests and the novels end. The nature of the connection between illumination and death, why the latter appears to necessarily follow the former, is made more explicit by the following passage.

'Oh dear, this is what I must keep in mind, at all times: the light, the movement of birds. Climbing the path, the princess knew she was giving herself a piece of hopeless advice: as if you can possess the moment of perfection; as if conception and death don't take place simultaneously'.

26. E.S., p.221.
For the illuminati to live on in a state of enlightenment would be to present them in possession of enlightenment. After a life of being possessionless, the illuminati would finally be possessors. This would involve a serious contradiction in the vision of the world as presented by the narrative. It is consistent, therefore, with this vision to conceive of fulfilment as also being outside the realm of possession. Otherwise, the argument would become a question of relativity: that some things may be ignored so that others, of more value, can be possessed. The moments of perfection, like enlightenment and fulfilment, happen and then vanish, eluding the grasp of possession.

In the thoughts of the dying Elizabeth Hunter, one of the more articulate expressions on death is found.

'She hadn’t been praying for you, surely? For that thing your soul; or an easy death. Extraordinary the number of people who insist that death must be painless and easy when it ought to be the highest, the most difficult peak of all: that is its whole point.'

There is a sense in which, it is suggested, death is an act that is performed by the self. It is not seen as a

27. Ibid., p.190.
punishment or as an event which either a benign or malevolent God, depending on the point of view, sends our way. It is not something that happens in spite of us, it is the inevitable end to which we journey. Death is presented as the final experience to be undertaken. It is the self which must scale the peak. This attitude to death is possible because the central characters do not share the fear and image of death that is, for example, attributed to Lottie Lippmann.

"In spite of a broadminded attitude to life and contact with death on a grand scale, the housekeeper dreaded IT as an end; she could not see beyond the handful of ashes." 28

That death is not an end and that there is something beyond the handful of ashes are both implied. It can, also, be safely assumed that these implications form an alternative vision which the illuminati share. For the central characters the prospect of death holds no fear:

"Dying is creation. The body creates fresh forms, the soul inspires by its manner of leaving the body, and passes into other souls." 29

28. Ibid., p.169.
Death is not an end, it is a creation. Yet again the opposition between permanence and transience reappears. For life is normally conceived of in terms of transience, but, according to the narrative, permanence lies in the recurring cycle of creativity which is also life and death. In the creation of death the continuity of being is assured.

Within the novels the continuity of being, while a general principle, also takes a specific form:

'Faces inherit features. Thought and experience are bequeathed'.

In *The Aunt's Story* Theodora's bequest is made to the young boy Zack with whom she experienced 'all the triumph of rare alliances'.

In *The Vivisector*, Hurtle Duffield finds in Kathy 'his spiritual child of infinite possibilities'. Because Kathy is introduced at a much earlier stage in this novel and, accordingly, develops and grows in the course of the narrative, the specific nature of their relationship is something that Kathy can later perceive and acknowledge:

31. Ibid., p.268.
32. Viv., p.422.
..'I prefer to think of you as the father of anything praiseworthy that will ever come out of me.'

For Stan Parker, it is his young grandson to whom his 'thought and experience are bequeathed'. At the end of the novel the young boy could 'write a poem ... of all life, of what he did not know, but knew.'

None of the illuminati are defeated by death. The finite quality of one life is transcended by the continuity of being:

'So that in the end there were the trees. The boy walking through them with his head drooping as he increased in stature. Putting out shoots of green thought. So that in the end, there was no end.'

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34. *T.M.*, p.480.
'Our character is our fate'.

Heraclitus.
It is appropriate, at this point, to take one novel and discuss it in the light of the preceding chapters, that is, to examine the way in which the strands of knowledge, time and experience, which have been discussed so far with general reference to the body of White's writing, come together within the confines of one novel. *A Fringe of Leaves* is an interesting novel for it clearly marks, in White's development, the end of one kind of novel and the beginning of another. It is a genuine bridge between the stories of Elizabeth Hunter and Eddie Twyborn. It is not, at all, that *The Twyborn Affair* differs radically from *The Eye Of The Storm* either in terms of preoccupation or theme, but more that a dramatic shift in focus has occurred. *A Fringe of Leaves*, in its own quiet way, reflects the shifting of focus.

From a narrative point of view, the novel is exceedingly well put together, in that its structure is very tight. For example, it opens with a short chapter in which, by using a simple device, the background of both central characters and place is unfolded. This economical device is simply one of a conversation between three characters: Mr and Mrs Merivale and Miss Scrimshaw. Through their conversation, we learn of Ellen's proclivity to silence, that she is 'something
of a mystery', that she is like 'a clean sheet of paper which might disclose an invisible writing - if breathed upon' and quite prophetically that:

"...Mrs. Roxburg could feel life has cheated her out of some ultimate in experience. For which she would be prepared to suffer, if need be."

From their conversation too we learn about Australia, which will be the chief backdrop to Ellen's 'suffering'. Matters of colonization and social structure, of the time in which the novel is set, are raised. The reader is made aware of the distinction between respectable settlers, convicts and emancipists and all of the consequent snobberies and social barriers. Through the brief appearance of the emancipist Delaney, an allusion is made to Moreton Bay, through a story he tells of two settlers who fell foul of the natives there. So the future locale of Ellen's experience, and acts of violence committed in its vicinity, are established at this early point in the novel. The vastness of the continent and inhospitable nature of the country are also sketched. Forecasting events through conversation is a device which recurs in the novel. In chapter four,

I. F.L., p.17.
2. Ibid., p.20.
3. Ibid., p.21.
for example, in an encounter between Austin Roxburgh and Pilcher, the matter of 'bolters', escaped convicts who take to the bush, is briefly but graphically presented.

'It was about the country beyond', he was forced to admit, "beyond the known settlements. Prisoners", he positively drove himself, "will sometimes escape. And wander for years in the interior. Supporting themselves off the land. Suffering terrible hardships. But as a life it is more bearable than the one they have bolted from'.

Thus, Jack Chance and his particular history of misery and torture as a convict, as opposed to his life of deprivation in the bush, is prefigured.

The opposition between different kinds of knowledge is dramatized in the marriage between Ellen and Austin. Of Ellen we learn early that she is a creature of instinct:

'It shall only ever know what my instinct tells me'.

whereas, for Austin, we see that books held more than the life around him. While Austin Roxburgh is portrayed as a man whose life is, at the same time, 'empty' and

4. Ibid., p.154.
5. Ibid., p.35.
'complicated' and whose learning amounts to no more than a dust of 'dictionary words and useless knowledge', his portrait is, nevertheless, a more painstaking exploration, than that hitherto accorded the kind of character he represents in other novels. In this novel, some attempt is made to flesh out the man of reason and rationality, even if the consequent limitations predominate. Austin Roxburgh is not typecast and his difference to Ellen is presented more as just a difference, and less as a focus of conflict, as is characteristic of earlier novels. While the opposition between different approaches to knowledge is entirely consistent with earlier work, Austin is drawn with more sympathy and even his limitations are highlighted with an element of humour:

"...it is thought, not action, Ellen, which makes an eventful life."  

While Austin's intentions, like his hypochondria, may be harmless, and in Ellen's eyes he is always a good and honourable man, nevertheless, the ineffectualness and aridity of his values are clearly displayed:

6. Ibid., p.57.
7. Ibid., p.176.
'Mr. Roxburgi was fully exposed. In advancing towards the land's end, he felt the trappings of wealth and station, the pride in ethical and intellectual aspirations, stripped from him with a ruthlessness reserved for those who accept their importance or who have remained unaware of their pretentiousness. Now he even suspected, not without a horrid qualm, that his devoted wife was dispensable, and their unborn child no more than a footnote or nonentity. So the solitary explorer gritted his teeth, sucked on the boisterous air with caution, and visibly sweated. He might have been suffering from a toothache rather than the moment when self-esteem is confronted with what may be pure being - or nothingness.'

In contrast to the self-esteem and self-importance of Austin Roxburgh, who never questions his own worth, is the way in which Ellen sees herself. All that Ellen knows about herself is that she is a 'lost soul' and, perhaps, a miscreant.

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

Overstepping 'the bounds' could be said, in some sense, to constitute a large part of the action in this novel. That this kind of exploration is possible and by Ellen, but not by her husband, illustrates yet again how

8. Ibid., p. 208.
9. Ibid., p. 89.
Austin's attitude to knowledge is limiting. Neither will the overstepping of the bounds reveal Ellen as a miscreant in expected ways. Yet again, one's preconceived attitudes, in this instance to morality in the broadest sense of human experience, are overset by the narrative. It will not be for her act of cannibalism, to cite a more extreme act for example, or for her indifference to death, or disgust at a sick child that Ellen will later blame herself. As ever, the appearances of things are explored in this novel with unexpected results. Just as the appearance of Ellen does not reflect her being:

'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 whom she suspected must exist none the less.'

In the end, knowledge for Ellen, which amounts to self-knowledge, will not be a matter of pride or something to be displayed. She undergoes, in the course of the novel, much suffering and experience to realize that 'self-knowledge must remain a source of embarrassment, even danger.'

10. Ibid., p.92.
II. Ibid., p.341.
It is remarked upon twice that it is 'difficult for a woman to acquire the habit of making important decisions'.\textsuperscript{12} It is an interesting comment, not because it reveals any chauvinism or discrimination against women in the narrative, but because it describes the foundation on which Ellen leads her life. There is, in the ordinary sense of the term, a lot of action in \textit{A Fringe of Leaves}. The motif of the journey is present as an image of Ellen's internal journey. Vast distances are covered by the geographical voyages, both on ocean and by foot. Shipwreck, seduction, birth, murder, slavery and death occur. All of these events either happen to, or are witnessed by, Ellen; which is rather a lot in any one life. It is important, therefore, to distinguish the manner in which Ellen faces this spectrum of experience. At an early point in the narrative, we are told of Ellen that:

'Perhaps her most luxurious indulgence was a self-conducted tour through the backwaters of experience.' \textsuperscript{13}

While Ellen is presented as unlearned and unformed, a country girl who loved the farm and whose greatest

\textsuperscript{12. Ibid., p.134.}  
\textsuperscript{13. Ibid., p.27.}
ambition is to see Tintagel, an unambitious ambition since it is on her doorstep, she is, nevertheless, both curious and open to experience. All that happens to Ellen is not, however, of her making. She does not actively pursue any of the situations in which she later finds herself. She marries Austin Roxburgh, but that is revealed as an instance in which she had no other choice, not even an alternative.

'Swept onward by the wind, her skirt blown in a tumult before her, she tries to persuade herself that her husband, like the tree which had offered sanctuary, supported a belief in her own free will. Yet she had been blown as passively against the one as against the other. The tree happened to be standing in her path, just as a crude, bewildered girl, alone and bereaved on a moor, could hardly have rejected Mr. Roxburgh's offer.'

Her meeting with Garnet is dreaded because of her instinct about its probable outcome. Twice, within a short space, this reluctance is underlined.

'If she shuddered once or twice, and chafed the gooseflesh out of her arms, it was because she knew she would be led deeper than she would have chosen, and inevitably trapped in what she most loathed.'

I4. Ibid., p. 134
I5. Ibid., p. 79.
Meeting Garnet does result in their committing adultery, which for Ellen is an experience of lust and sensuality. While Ellen did not willingly venture forth on such an escapade, neither does she blame Garnet for its occurrence.

'However painful her ankle, and ungainly her movements, she must hobble as far as possible beyond physical contact with the one who was less her seducer than the instrument she had chosen for measuring depths she was tempted to explore.'

If the terminology used in the above passage suggests an ambivalence, it is less an ambivalence concerning behaviour and more an ambivalence about the quality of passivity in Ellen. A Fringe of Leaves, no more than any of the novels, is not about a series of trials and tribulations which are unleashed upon the head of some misfortunate victim. Nor are the events and happenings of the novels conceived of in terms of the interventions of either a cruel fate, or whimsical God. The subject matter of White's novels does not resemble tragedy, melodrama or the antics of Greek mythology. All of White's central characters, including Ellen, are presented as those for whom life is a series of blunders and lunges but who aspire to knowledge from such experience.

While it is given to Ellen to go 'dredging the sewers' she, nonetheless, does not actively seek such encounters, nor collude in bringing them about. Whatever experience presents itself she undertakes, but there is no preconceived plan of action, no self-designed experiments. So that the horizon of Ellen's action is passion, is suffering and learning through experience, in the terms in which passion was discussed previously.

"In her dispiritment and acceptance of her fate, she was glad that her discovery absolved her from making an attempt to escape by following the coast to Moreton Bay. She was immured, not only in the blacks' island stronghold, but in the female passivity wished upon her at birth and reinforced by marriage with her poor dear Mr. Roxburgh."

If the penultimate quotation suggested an active and aggressive Ellen, which was potentially confusing, this passage gives rise to equal confusion by the manner in which it swings to the opposite pole. While it has been stated that Ellen is neither the instigator nor initiator of all that befalls her, neither is she browbeaten, docile or forced into submission, as her act of adultery with Garnet clearly demonstrates. Her compliance is not a weakness but a strength:

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17. Ibid., p.338.
18. Ibid., p.265.
'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.' 

As stated in the previous quotation, Ellen accepts what happens and, whenever possible, learns from her experience. When what happens involves extreme deprivation and suffering, her capacity to endure these enables her survival. Towards the end of the novel, in an instance of dry humour, Ellen is likened to inanimate objects.

"He received her standing in the centre of a room which might have impressed had she been more impressionable, and had she not suffered the same fate as the furniture, of covering great distances and ending up battered, scratched, dusty, though still with a hint of having enjoyed more pretentious circumstances."

The element that is missing is, of course, the human. The distances that Ellen covered were not only geographical. This is a novel too which demonstrates not only the role of passion in experience but also that silence is the language of passion. From early in the novel, silence is associated with Ellen. People speak, we are later told, 'for the most part to fill in the silences'.

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19. Ibid., p.75.
20. Ibid., p.361.
This is a result of silence being conceived of as nothing more than a failure to speak. It is also a result of the notion that language can convey all experience. Neither of these assumptions, however, is held by Ellen. That silence is the language of passion is more clearly revealed when the limitations of language are being defined. It is emphasized that none of Ellen's major concerns have ever been adequately expressed, not her shame, nor love, nor gratitude. As in the other novels, it is implied that the most fundamental experiences can never be expressed or conveyed in language. Most importantly, when it comes to a question of Ellen's passion, of all that she has been through and suffered, this too retreats from the grasp of language.

"There, dear! You are here. Nobody will want to know what 'apppened till you're ready to"tell." .... she thought she might never want to tell". (you cannot tell about fortitude, or death, or love, still less about your own inconstancy).

That the reader has been told about all of this in language is an irony which was discussed earlier. It is, I think, sufficient to point out here that, in terms

22. Ibid., p.334.
of the novel, Ellen does not 'tell'. Her accounts of her experience, toward the end of the narrative, restrict themselves to a bare chronicle of events, such as 'this happened and then that happened and then I went there', etcetera. At no point, does she try to convey in words the greater part of her experience. So that silence is, for Ellen, truly the language of her passion. The point that is being made in this, as in other novels, is that, just as reason, for example, cannot account for human behaviour, language cannot describe all that there is in human experience. And it very much has to do with experience of 'the living' as opposed to 'the dead', to hark back to an early image used by White, which is of concern to Ellen, since we are told quite early in the novel of how she recoiled from a 'premonition of a complacent, cosseted middle-age.' 23 Her preference for life, as opposed to a cosseted middle-age, caused her to experience extremes of deprivation and hardship which would have been unimaginable. Whatever her expectations, and these remain vague and undefined:

'...my instincts hanker after something deeper, which I may not experience this side of death.' 24

the experiences that she has to undergo are calculated

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23. Ibid., p.97
24. Ibid., p.104.
to strain endurance. Her commitment to life, however, remains steadfast. Even in the face of the most appalling experience, Ellen does not want to die.

'Such an indisputable reason and barely modified rebuke might have hurt if strength were not returning to her sodden limbs, not through divine forbearance, as some might have seen it, but because she realized, she was born a Gluyas. The rain had stopped; life is to be lived.'

Ellen's commitment to life is a commitment to nothing more than experience. It is, moreover, experience which is undertaken for no greater purpose than its own sake. It is a commitment which keeps her alive.

The significance of Ellen being a Gluyas underlines her relationship with nature. There is always a harmony between the central characters in the novels and nature, and Ellen is no exception. When she becomes Ellen Roxburgh, an attempt is made to distance her from her origins, to remove her not only bodily but mentally from the stony hillside, moorland and cliffs of her homefarm. Instead of the chores and leisures enjoyed in her youth in Cornwall, she adopts the dress, habits and practices of polite Cheltenham society, to which she is removed after her marriage. Instead of curling up on a rock, as she once used to do, she takes

up sewing, an occupation she detests. On their visit to Van Diemen's Land, it is Ellen who takes an interest in the country, vegetation and landscape, and while stranded without a wind on the Bristol Maid in Sydney harbour, it is again Ellen who is fascinated by glimpses of the landscape. Austin Roxburgh is totally uninterested in such matters. Ellen's relationship with nature is reaffirmed at a later point in the narrative. It becomes obvious that this reaffirmation is necessary, in that the harmony that exists between Ellen and nature is instrumental in her survival.

'She stepped forward at last over the legs of the rowers and closed the scaly lids when the eyes were no longer looking at her and folded the hands on the wesket before hurrying up the road for help. Had she been left to mature naturally she had inherited that same chapped skin. Looking at her hands, Mrs. Roxburgh noticed that she was returning, and not by a slow degree, to nature.'

Stripped by circumstances of the trappings and comforts of a 'civilized' life, Ellen quickly rediscovers both her affinity with nature and natural capabilities. The latter, for example, is her means of adjustment to slavery in an aboriginal camp, where the women not only work extremely hard but where the conditions of life are incredibly harsh and food is always in short supply.

26. Ibid., pp.194-5.
Of the many experiences which befall Ellen, sexuality, in its narrower terms of physical intimacy, is the one which is given a full history. There is, to begin with, her marriage to Austin Roxburgh, the sexual aspect of which is described, as follows, with a resonance of humour.

'Just as she was to learn that death was for Mr Roxburgh a "literary conceit", so she found that his approach to passion had its formal limits. For her part, she had longed to, but never dared, storm those limits and carry him off instead of submitting to his hesitant though loving rectitude. "Tup" was a word she remembered out of a past she had all but forgotten, in which her own passive ewes submitted .... 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.'

We are aware of the fact that Ellen possesses a sensual and passionate nature so that her exploration of sensuality with Garnet hardly comes as a shock. Her pleasure in the experience for which she has 'awaited all her life' is, however, brief. 'She could only have admitted to carrying away a cold, consummated lust'.

27. Ibid., p.76.
29. Ibid., p.117.
The business of lust is familiar in White's novels, rearing its head as it does with reliable frequency. In this instance, as indeed in all others with one notable exception in *The Twyborn Affair*, the occasion of lust does not satisfy the sensual need. So it is neither by repression nor lust that Ellen is to find sensual fulfilment. There remains her relationship with Jack Chance.

'By daylight she could hardly think what manner of pact they had made during the hours of darkness. Had love been offered truthfully by either party? Or were they but clinging to a raft in the sea of their common misery? 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. She also remembered, if she dared admit, that which was engraved upon her mind in illuminated letters: *Can you love me Ellen?* Did he truly wish for love? Or had he made use of her body as part payment of a debt?'

Love in White's novels, when it occurs between human beings, is always complicated, ever that 'great ambivalence'. When the loving relationship also includes sexual intimacy, the whole thing seems to go awry. This subject is discussed at length in the following chapter. In this novel, Ellen loves Austin Roxburgh with whom she does not enjoy a sensual relationship and also loves Jack Chance.

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30. This is a notable exception in more than one way as it is masturbation rather than a coupling that is involved.

with whom she does. Whether Jack Chance loves her is left unresolved, but any ambivalence concerning Ellen's love for him is finally dispelled. 'It was love, whether selfless or sensual.' What complicates the issue of love in this novel is the issue of trust which the narrative interconnects. Trust is presented as a related issue of major importance. One of the reasons why Ellen is so repelled by Garnet Roxburgh is the fact that she can't trust him. It is on the premise of trust that the sexual relationship between Ellen and Jack is founded.

"If I am to trust you, Ellen, you should trust me. Two bodies that trust can't do hurt to each other."  

However, for Ellen, trust becomes a matter of difficulty. She discovers that, not only does she not trust anybody else, but she does not even trust herself. The necessary trust is absent, and so, at the point when Jack and Ellen reach the settlement at Moreton Bay, Jack leaves Ellen to return to the bush, despite the fact that she had promised to secure him a pardon.

"I am the one who has committed the crime. I think he could not believe in me. For that reason, he ran back." 

32. Ibid., p.316.  
33. Ibid., p.298.  
34. Ibid., p.343.
As a consequence of the breakdown in trust, Ellen's sense of guilt is very strong; calling into question and throwing into confusion not the possibility of love which, at some sort of level, this novel affirms, but the quality of love. The tentative steps taken in this novel to explore the area of love are coloured by its failure.

'If she could have stayed her tears, but over those she had no control, as she sat re-living the betrayal of her earthly loves.' 35

The subject of love and sexuality is not a central preoccupation of this novel; as in other novels, it is raised but it is not until the next and, so far, last novel that Patrick White turns his full attention to it.

Morality, however, is a question which is present throughout the course of the text. At the beginning of the narrative we learn, for example, that

'Until now, far removed from the fat pastures of Van Diemen's land, leading her husband over the stony ground of this other, more forbidding landscape, Mrs. Roxburgh could only bitterly admit that she had failed in her resolve, and that the moral strength for which she prayed constantly eluded her.' 36

The references to Ellen's moral strength, and there are several, are, I feel, double-edged, for the meaning of

35. Ibid., p.390.  
36. Ibid., p. 33.
morality as such, is not defined within the text. We may, therefore, assume that it means one of two things. Either the moral strength which Ellen craves is related to the code of behaviour prevalent at the time, that is, the 'morals' of the community, or else we may take it to refer to morality in the broader sense of experience; since morality can be seen as just another term for human experience. If it is moral strength of the former kind that Ellen craves, then the reference becomes ironic, since she possesses in abundance moral strength of the latter sort. There is, moreover, a certain amount of evidence which suggests that the references are intended to be ironic. In conversations between Ellen and Jack, the debate about morality continues.

' "If we considered only what's moral we'd go 'ungry, wouldn't we? an' curl up an' die. There's too much thinkin' - an' not enough. Would men go with women, or women with men, if they started thinkin' of the trouble - the deceit and treachery they might run into?" '  

Ellen replies by saying that not all men and women are treacherous and deceitful, and admits of herself that she was deceitful only once. Jack responds by laughing:

' "Praps none of us thinks 'ard enough to remember what we done or was." '  

37. Ibid., p.294.
38. Ibid., p.295.
It would seem that Ellen's notion of morality is based on community values and norms, and that her feelings of lacking moral strength stem from her inability to live up to social precepts. Accordingly, *A Fringe of Leaves* can be said to be about Ellen's discovery of morality, which is not the morality she lacks but the morality she has. An example of this is the instance of cannibalism. On finding a human thigh-bone, dropped by one of the natives, her first reaction is one of disgust. Yet instead of kicking it away as she had intended, she finds herself picking it up and devouring the remaining flesh. She throws away the bone only when it is clean; and is 'less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed by the fact that she had been moved to do it.' 39

Cannibalism, in most societies, is a taboo, which makes it a more powerful inhibition than either a social transgression or religious sin. Yet it is not the breaking of a taboo, no more than her failure to live up to social precepts, that concerns Ellen in the end. When Ellen returns to 'civilization', some interesting oppositions emerge concerning larger 'moral' issues, such as freedom as opposed to imprisonment, for example.

Moreton Bay is, at this point in the story, spoken of as a 'prison', and Ellen is described as a 'prisoner' by the

narrative voice. Contrary to all expectations, Ellen is not restored to freedom from slavery in the bush. There is an obvious sense in which this can be interpreted as conceiving of life in a settled and 'civilized' community in terms of confinement. Neither is this a new image in terms of Patrick White's novels; however, while partially relevant in this instance, this is not all that is involved. For we are also told that 'only the condemned survive'. Only Ellen and Pilcher, a character of questionable rectitude, in conventional moral terms, survive the shipwreck. That Pilcher was the other survivor was predictable, although both Ellen and the reader are kept in suspense about his identity for some time by the narrative voice. Pilcher is the character who coerced Ellen into parting with her garnet ring, who commits other small misdemeanours and the larger one of cutting the rope between the seaworthy pinnace and the damaged long-boat thereby leaving both long-boat and passengers to their fate. In the light of two such 'condemned survivors' the following passage takes on an interesting meaning.

"It does concern me - why the good and the bad are in the same boat - and the difference between killing and murder. Until we know, we shan't have justice - only God's mutton for Sunday dinner - those of us who are lucky enough"

40. Ibid., p.342.
That there is no justice would seem to be one of the novel's themes. A lot of attention was paid to historical detail in setting out the lives and inhuman conditions of the penal settlements, while, at the same time, emphasizing repeatedly the moral culpability of all human beings. In speaking of the interior and those who inhabit it, the following passage occurs.

"Only dirty blacks," he added, "and a few poor beggars in stripes who've bolted from one hell to another. The criminals they found out about! That's th'injustice of it. How many of us was never found out?"

These two injustices remain present side by side, the penal settlements on one hand and, on the other, the arbitrary nature of detection.

Experience, in the novel, does not lead to one clarifying insight in the same manner as happens in previous novels. Ellen is not a 'better' character at the end of the novel, she is not 'moral' in that sense. Her knowledge takes two forms; she knows herself in a way that she did not know before. This knowledge, or 'enlightenment' is brought about by her experience of two very different worlds.

4I. Ibid., p.151.
'...it saddened her to think she might never become acceptable to either of the two incompatible worlds even as they might never accept to merge.'

Her other knowledge relates both to herself, her own being in the world, and to truth. An an early point in the novel, it is said that:

'She had been encouraged early to tell the truth, but found that truth did not always match what she was taught by precept or in church: it was both simpler and more complicated.'

Truth in Ellen's experience does not become any simpler. After all that she experiences, truth remains opaque. This is very clearly demonstrated by the episode concerning Pilcher and the severing of the cord between the pinnace and the long-boat. When this episode is narrated, Pilcher is clearly visible 'taking an axe and hacking at the hawser on which they depended.'

Pilcher reaches Moreton Bay before Ellen, tells of the wreck of the Bristol Maid and explains the separation of the pinnace from the long-boat in terms of a storm. The reader is then left wondering whether Ellen will dispute this version of events. When finally Ellen and Pilcher meet, we discover that she will not. They are speaking of Jack when the following dialogue occurs.

42. Ibid., p.371.
43. Ibid., p. 74.
44. Ibid., p.225.
"He became frightened. That - I hope - was his only reason for running away. Though the truth is often many-sided, and difficult to see from every angle. You will appreciate that, Mr. Pilcher, having experienced the storm which separated the pinnace from the long-boat."

It is entirely consistent that Ellen does not challenge Pilcher's version of events with her own, in an attempt to 'unmask' him. For to 'unmask' Pilcher would be to pass judgement within the limits of a system that has already been revealed as unjust, and from experience of a world in which everyone is guilty of some crime or another. All that, in the end, concerns this novel is what Ellen Roxburgh learns about herself; not through the intervention of anybody else, or fate, or providence, except in the sense when any of these, or all three, bring about an experience which she must undergo.

This novel, like many others by Patrick White, suggests a game of chess where there is only one player. The player makes a move, but other moves are made by other people, and these are the manifestations of contingency, even if it is that the moves made by other people are deliberate. In the earlier part of the novel, we see that Ellen would like to think of herself as a 'solid core in a largely incomprehensible world'.

45. Ibid., p.378.
46. Ibid., p.107.
At this point, the narrative would seem to suggest that there is a sense in which Ellen relies on herself as a solid core to endure and survive the incomprehensible world. It is clear that she recognizes the contingent nature of the world:

'Almost every contingency had become by now acceptable.'

Elsewhere, the world is compared to a 'clueless maze', the cause and reason for which lies outside human understanding. Experience works on Ellen Roxburgh to the extent that any 'original plan was long since lost and the future become indecipherable.' It is not, however, until the novel is reaching its end that any question is raised about the effects of contingency on the individual life.

'...would you not say that life is a series of blunders rather than any clear design, from which we may come out whole if we are lucky?'

This is the first time that any noticeable shift occurs from the image of Ellen as a 'solid core'. For, it is not only a question of the contingent nature of the world,

47. Ibid., p.204.
49. Ibid., p.352.
50. Ibid., p.392.
and the contingent nature of events, that is a major preoccupation in White's novels, but also the effect that encountering such contingent events has upon the central characters. As was pointed out, in an earlier chapter, any expectations of being in control of experience are confined to the sets of 'limited' characters who are prepared to do and see only the expected. To be interested in experience, as Ellen is, is to be prepared for contingency, which she also is. To be prepared for contingent events, equally involves the necessity of being changed by the experience gained from those events. To insist on a persona which is not prepared to be so changed, is to refuse any lessons learned and, therefore, ultimately to deny the experience. That Ellen is prepared for contingency, and does not ever deny her experience, is the progression which brings about the change in her self-image.

Consistent with the recognition of contingency by Ellen, throughout the course of the novel, is the paradoxical desire for order, which is also present in other novels. This desire for order, in the face of a contingent world, is not only a true reflection of the human predicament, but may also be the expression of a desire to make contingency comprehensible. The shipwreck not only reduces Ellen's physical world to disorder but also her spiritual one.
'Mentally she was still too exhausted to sort out the wreckage, and recoiled moreover, from a possibility that she might never restore order to a spiritual cupboard which had not been kept as neat as it looked.'

That the desire for order is equivalent to a desire to comprehend contingency is, in some way, substantiated by the following:

'What she longed to sense in the behaviour of these human beings was evidence of a spiritual design, but that she could not, any more than she could believe a merciful power shaping her own destiny.'

The more extreme Ellen's experience, the greater the incomprehensibility. Contingency is not of man's making; man has no control over contingency. As was mentioned in an earlier chapter, in making contingency acceptable, if not comprehensible, man has turned to God, or providence, among others. The central characters in White's novels do not so turn. Their boundaries are those of human experience and what can be humanly achieved. The last lines in the novel are also about order.

51. Ibid., p.175.
52. Ibid., p.247.
'... she was too engrossed ... shooting down possible doubts; for 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.'

They are not about Ellen.

53. Ibid., p.405.
'Lacking flamboyance, cursed with reserve, 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.'

'Only love redeems.'

Patrick White.
The Twyborn Affair, Patrick White's most recent fiction, returns to two preoccupations which first appeared in his earliest work. These are the notion of 'several lives', which was originally posed in *The Aunt's Story*, and the thornier question of love. In his second novel, *The Living and The Dead*, White consciously explored the area of relationships, and presented a text which firmly rejected love as a means of individual enlightenment. Since that point, 'relationships', by which I mean interpersonal loving sexual relations, are often peripheral and always fail.

'Physical love, ....was an exhilarating, steeple-chase in which almost every rider ended up disqualified for some dishonesty or another' I

It was, I thought, courageous of the novelist, toward the end of his distinguished career, to turn his attention to a subject which he had dismissed so long ago in his writing career. It is, I feel, too, a measure of his honesty and integrity that he was willing to expose himself, through his work, to the judgement of a detached public who might be ready to misunderstand what, in the end, he has to offer on this most personal and contentious

I. Viv., p.321.
of issues. Overall, The Twyborn Affair was not well received. Many reviewers found it easy to poke fun at the more bizarre episodes in the novel. But if, by choosing to write this kind of novel, White invited this sort of reaction, he also, because of his bravery and sincerity, invited our tolerance and admiration.

The Twyborn Affair, while it conforms to type in that it explores recognizable terrain, differs in focus from the mainstream of White's fiction. It does not, for example, concern itself with the possibility of enlightenment. There is little of the visionary in Eddie/Eadith Twyborn. There is, of course, a quest, but the journeys undertaken are restricted to more local terrain. Eddie/Eadith Twyborn goes in search of identity, and tries to penetrate more personal mysteries than his predecessors. These mysteries are presented as two knots which Twyborn attempts to untie, that of several lives and love. The two remain interconnected throughout the narrative.

The narrative is divided into three parts. The central character assumes a different persona in each section. So that there is an explicit demonstration of his several lives as Eudoxia, the hetaira of part one, Eddie the soldier and jackeroo of part two, and Eadith Trist the bawd of the final section who reverts to Eddie to die. But also, there is an implicit exposure of the leading of
several lives.

'Nothing is mine except for the coaxing I've put into it. For that matter, nothing of me is mine, not even the body I was given to inhabit, nor the disguises chosen for it - A. decides on these, seldom without my agreement. The real E. has not yet been discovered, and perhaps never will be.'

In his search for the real E, Twyborn adopts many roles but is never himself convinced by the role that he has adopted.

'On his visit to the Lushingtons, one of whom he hardly knew, the other not at all, he would have every opportunity for impressing strangers with the self which, he felt sure, was in process of being born, and which was the reason he had chosen a manner of life on the whole distasteful to him. Till the image of Dot Norton was inserted into his mind to start his conviction wobbling.'

The persona of Eadith Trist, the dedicated and capable bawd, also lacks conviction.

'In the glass a ravaged mess, a travesty no amount of lipstick and powder and posturing would ever disguise to her own satisfaction. A "woman of character" to her clients and her girls, she continued swimming out of mirrors and consciousness, her elasticity her only strength, like a cat which refuses to drown.'

2. T.A., p.79.
3. Ibid., p.211.
4. Ibid., p.351.
Nothing convinces, neither the mirrors which reflect appearance, nor the sets of credulous characters which gather around his successive personae. Though the different roles are explored with commitment, none approximate to his sense of self.

'In his own experience, in whichever sexual role he had been playing, self-searching had never led more than briefly to self-acceptance.' 5

Quite apart from the more dramatic changes of role, it is suggested that certain actions within a role indicate change. Experience as a persona enlarges and changes the role. For example, in part two, Eddie Twyborn is raped.

'Eddie Twyborn was breathing chaff, sobbing back, not for the indignity to which he was being subjected, but finally for his acceptance of it .......
The victim lay awhile, wholly exhausted by the switch to this other role.' 6

The role playing, which Eddie Twyborn undertakes in all its permutations, does not follow any preconceived ideas or images, nor does he adopt a static or theatrical pose. The mental elasticity is enormous, and the bond between ego and image slack. There is a certain degree of stereotyping, for example, when as Eddie Twyborn he

5. Ibid., p.223.
'fucks' Marcia Lushington for he does not see it as 'making love'. As Eudoxia he beds Angelos, but, mercifully, apart from three well-defined minor incidents, the changing of sex and consequent exploits are not developed in the tradition of bedroom farce. The kind of persona that Eddie/Eudoxia/Eadith is, and which expands to absorb all experience and eventuality, has recognizable facets from earlier compositions. There is, for instance, the familiar dichotomy between doing and being.

'He had hardly sat down after Eadie's exit when the Judge began.
"What do you think of doing Eddie?"
You could hardly answer. Nothing; surely being is enough? Looking, smelling, listening, touching.'

Another familiar theme is the opposition between choosing and being chosen. White's central characters are never presented as exercising control over the directions they take; or as making conscious decisions about the shape their lives will take.

'I didn't get myself into it. I was nudged at first, then pushed, the way one is. Certainly I could have resisted but oh well, I didn't. We go along with the times, don't we? If that's the way the current is flowing, most of us are carried.'

7. Ibid., p.160.
8. Ibid., pp. 327-328.
"I do admire you", Ursula said after nibbling for propriety's sake at a corner of her bread-and-butter, "for your originality and independence - in choosing the life you wanted to lead". "In choosing? I'd like to think it, but never feel anything but chosen".

Contrary to the expectations of those who conceive life as rational and controlled, the flexibility which is a feature of those whose life is chosen for them, is presented as a strength rather than a weakness. Responsibility is not abandoned, fate is not reviled. What is, is. What happens, happens. White's central characters never play the victims and never blame either a god or providence for what happens to them.

'He was powerless to choose; Eddie it seemed had always been chosen, whirled out into the figures of the dance, whether by Marian, Angelos, Marcia, Mrs. E. Boyd, Joanie Golson; even his afflicted parents had attempted an unconscious twirl or two.'

As was previously discussed, passivity in the novels has a distinctive meaning, taking its nuances from the Greek concept of passion: pathei mathet, through suffering, through experience, we learn. It is a very positive presence throughout the entire body of White's work. Passion, for all of the central characters including

9. Ibid., p.358.
10. Ibid., p.235.
Eddie Twyborn, is an intrinsic feature of their experience and accounts for the way in which they lead their lives.

A sense of incompletion is acutely experienced by Eddie Twyborn through the course of his several lives. It would appear that, in The Twyborn Affair, incompletion replaces the quest for enlightenment, characteristic of the other novels, as the source of energy on which the character draws. Not knowing who he is always lies in the foreground of Eddie Twyborn’s mind, colouring his disposition and influencing his perspective.

The possibility of enlightenment keeps Theodora, Voss, Duffield, and the others going. For Twyborn, the motivating force would seem to be incompletion.

"He could not remember ever having felt happier. At the same time he wondered whether he could really exist without the sources of unhappiness. Half-dozing, half-waking to the tune of his horse's regular cropping, and in his half-sleep what sounded like a pricking of early frost or needling by stars, he knew that his body and his mind craved the everlasting torments."

Characteristically, within the novel, similarities and contrasts between Twyborn and minor characters are drawn. This is an old device which White uses in most of his work. The character of Greg Lushington, for example, is drawn in direct contrast to the concept of 'several lives'.

II. Ibid., p.272.
"I like to think I've been the same person", Mr. Lushington said, "every hour of my life". After smacking her naughty dog, Mrs. Lushington was again disposed for laughter. "I know you do," she said. "That's what makes you adorable".

Unlike other novels, the character used for purposes of contrast here is not conceived of as an enemy. Greg Lushington is portrayed as an honest, honourable and lovable man, if a little 'stingy'. If a note of scorn creeps in, it is reserved more for one of the characters who is mildly aware of the possibility of leading several lives. Joanie Golson is one of the characters who reflects, in a much more muted way, the dilemma of Eddie Twyborn.

'As she stood by the wall watching the scene through the open window, the tears were streaming down her cheeks, for joy, from the music she was hearing, and out of frustration from the life she had led and, it seemed, would always lead, except for the brief unsatisfactory sorties she had make into that other life with Eadie Twyborn; probably never again, since Eadie had been aged by her tragedy.'

Perhaps the scorn is reserved for Joanie and, to a more ambivalent extent, Eadie Twyborn, the mother of Eddie/Eadith, because they were amateurs. Their forays 'into that other life' are restricted to their own affair, and the dressing

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12. Ibid., p.215.
13. Ibid., p.18.
up with corked-on moustache for a night in the Australia ballroom. But, for Eddie Twyborn, transformation is effected. He convinces a French town that he is the wife of the elderly Greek Angelos Vatatzes; he convinced Marcia Lushington that she was his mistress, a brothel that he was a bawd and Gravenor that he was a woman; it is only himself that he cannot convince.

Setting and locale are important to the roles undertaken. As often happens in White's novels, a special empathy between action and place is specified. The crimson cottage of part one mirrors the refuge that Angelos and Eudoxia find in one another. Bogong, of part two, the property where Eddie Twyborn finds himself as an apprentice jackaroo, offers the only satisfactory affair that Eddie experiences in the course of the novel.

'He suspected that salvation most likely lay in the natural phenomena surrounding those unable to rise to the spiritual heights of a religious faith: in his present situation the shabby hills, their contours practically breathing as the light embraced them, stars fulfilled by their logical drowsing, the river never so supple as at daybreak, as dappled as the trout it camouflaged, the whole ambience finally united by the harsh but healing epiphany of cockcrow.'

I4. Ibid., p.223.
Whereas, the London in which 'Mrs. Trist reached the apogee of her career or fate', I5 is one of 'war, death and sex.' I6

'Most of those who patronised her outwardly discreet house were to some extent lusting to be consumed. In the age in which they were living it had become the equivalent of consummation.' I7

Event and action in Patrick White's novels are always matched with locale, and place plays a part in bringing about the event. There is, in White, always a sense of time, before which the action could not happen and be recognized, and a well defined place with which the action is intimately linked.

These are the well-used landmarks in the writings of a novelist who prefers to avoid speaking of God.

While Twyborn pursues the real E, through his several different lives, he is, nevertheless, fashioned from the same clay as other central characters in White. At one point, he very much recalls Elizabeth Hunter:-

'I'm not ungrateful, only resentful of certain aspects of life which must remain withheld from me, though I try to persuade myself I can experience all by efforts of will or imagination.' I8

I5. Ibid., p.403.
I7. Ibid., P.332.
While, at another point, he vividly suggests Theodora.

'Mrs. Golson was glad she could not see the eyes; they troubled memory, and with it most of the certainties of life.'

In the living of his several lives, there is nothing of the schizophrenic in Eddie Twyborn, there is no split personality, no two faces of Eve. The Twyborn Affair is not a more contemporary version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Twyborn, for example, is not a victim of repression acting out and exploring consciously, or unconsciously, forbidden personae, as in the case of Jekyll and Hyde. There is nothing of a covert or secret nature about his personae. His roles are not oscillations between one that is socially or personally acceptable and another that is not. This is, I think, an important distinction between the way in which Twyborn's personae change from one role to another, and other transformations of character presented in other fictions. Nor is it suggested that there is any continuity or progression in the different personae that Twyborn adopts. Eudoxia, for example, does not intrude on the jackaroo.

19. Ibid., p. 57.
'How Eudoxia might have reacted, whether she would have approved of, improved on, or cynically dismissed his sentiments, he did not stop to consider, ...!'  

and the jackaroo is left behind in the wake of Eadith Trist.

Towards the beginning of part two, Twyborn says of himself

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

By the time another two hundred and sixty pages have passed, at the novel's conclusion, the narrative voice will speak of Eadith Trist thus:-

'Experience in her several lives had left her with few illusions. She was sceptical of history, except at a ground-floor level. She could not believe in heroes, or legendary actors, or brilliant courtesans, or flawless beauties, for being herself a muddled human being astray in the general confusion of life'.

In the end, much may have been learned, much more experienced, but nothing solved. There are partial solutions, for example

20. Ibid. , p.235.  
21. Ibid. , P.143.  
22. Ibid. , p.403.
there is the unexpected reconciliation between Eadith and her mother. There is some form of reciprocal relationship between Eadith and Gravenor. 'Despair running in the right direction' earned Eddie Twyborn a medal in the first war. Despair running in the wrong direction kills him on a London Street in the Second World War. That Eddie dies 'by an act of God and not from the wounds of human love', he had, himself predicted.

This brings me to the second subject of this chapter. For, if the leading of several lives supplies the formal structure to this novel, the question of love supplies the major theme. The various aspects and realities of love are explored in all their possible permutations.

For example, the impossibility of expressing love is suggested from the very beginning of the novel.

'We have seldom been closer than when seated together on a large porous stone at the roadside: grains of sand have become as enormous as pebbles, fern fronds were never more intricate, a single tender cyclamen is clinging by a crimson thread to the cleft in a rock. These, more than inadequate words, are our comfort, the embodiment and expression of our love.'

23. Ibid., p. 323.
This conviction recurs in parts two and three, where the impossibility of conveying affection is reiterated. This recalls similar convictions in other novels, where it is argued that what is being sought, for example enlightenment, is, in the end, outside the realm of verbal communication. This, if an obstacle for the writer, is a conundrum with which the reader must live. In his own inimitable fashion, having identified the central preoccupation, White proceeds by distinguishing what it is not. At a certain point in her development, Eudoxia writes in her diary:

'I find to my astonishment that the minutiae are what makes life bearable. Love is overrated. Not affection - affection is to love what the minutiae are to living. Oh yes, you've got to have passion, give way to lust, provided no one is destroyed by them. Passion and lust are as necessary as a square meal, whether it's only a loaf you tear into, or devour a dish of beans, with a goose's thigh, a chunk of bacon, buried in them.'

Sex plays a major role in the relationship between characters in The Twyborn Affair. In the end, the relationship between Eudoxia and Angelos is reduced to lust. Eddie Twyborn surprises himself by lusting after Marcia Lushington, as Marcia had once lusted for Don Prouse, as Joanie Golson lusted for Eudoxia. By the beginning of part three Eadith Trist:

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25. Ibid., p.77.
'...was too disgusted with herself and human beings in general, ever to want to dabble in sex again, let alone aspire to that great ambivalence, love.'

26

It is, obviously, not without an intentional irony that Eadith Trist soon finds herself running a sophisticated brothel. If seemingly contradictory there is, nevertheless, a consistency of intention:-

'She would have liked to believe that, even if it did not purify, lust might burn itself out, and at the same time cauterise that infected part of the self, which from her own experience, persists like the core of a permanent boil.'

27

The role of sexuality in love is spoken of with the authority of the narrative voice but remains a hypothesis:

'She could have loved and respected Gravenor in spite of his flaws, which she understood for their being to a great extent her own. She envied those in a position to love without reservation of any kind. Probably there were few such loves. At the heart of most marriages, even spiritual attachments lurks the whore nun or the nun whore.'

28

Predictably, the questions of morality, as opposed to immorality, that arise from the establishment of a brothel are dealt with in an unexpected fashion.

26. Ibid., p.311.
27. Ibid., p.329.
28. Ibid., p.328.
"What I want to say ... was that I'd like your help in establishing myself in a large house, for purposes the world considers immoral, but which can be aesthetic - oh yes, and immoral, we know - but no more so than morality can often be. Better to burn than to suppurate.'

Yet again, the values of the 'settled' community are turned upside down by the perspective of White's central characters. Assumptions implicit in traditional morality are questioned and conventional values discarded.

"Do you think a brothel will corrupt those who're already corrupted - or who'll corrupt themselves somewhere else - or in their own homes - in a dark street - if overtaken by lust, in a parked car, or corner of a public park? All of us - even those you consider corrupt - I'd like to think of as human beings."

This capacity for seeing through the obvious, for evoking and presenting a common bond of humanity in what are normally conceived of as the sinners and outcasts of society, is one of the distinguishing features in Patrick White's work. Such characterizations of prostitutes, simpletons, the deformed and the fanatic provide memorable backgrounds in many of the novels.

There is yet another troublesome paradox, posed in the first section of the novel, concerning the question

29. Ibid., p.317.
30. Ibid., p.334.
of love. In the subsequent sections, love will be alluded to, striven for, admired, pursued. Yet, there remains this ambivalence:

'Instead, I am alone. Everything important, alas, can only be experienced alone.'

This belief in solitude, in separation, follows in the main tradition of White's central characters; Stan Parker, above all, being most forcibly recalled. But, just as the role of sex in a loving relationship is never resolved, neither is this paradox. They remain matters for hypothesis.

'She would have had to admit she had not existed in any of her several lives, unless in relationship with innocents often only servants of ignoble masters, or for those who believed themselves her parents or lovers. She was accepted as real, or so it appeared, by the girls she farmed out for love, and who, if she were to be honest, amounted to fragments of a single image. Yet whatever form she took, or whatever the illusion temporarily possessing her, the reality of love, which is the core of reality itself, had eluded her, and perhaps always would.'

It was, I must confess, with disappointment that I discovered Eadith's suspicions to be confirmed.

31. Ibid., p.80.
32. Ibid., p.336.
'The mist, the monochrome, warnings in her bronchial tubes, reminded her of failures. Failed love in particular. Her every attempt at love had been a failure. Perhaps she was fated never to enter the lives of others, except vicariously. To enter, or to be entered; that surely was the question in most lives.'

Eddie Twyborn does not reach 'the core of reality itself.' The reader is not told why he failed, only that he does. The ambivalences remain, and linger as matters of speculation: the paradox of isolation, the unresolved role of sex.

Eadith's relationship with Gravenor is the only one which offers possibility.

'If she had been true to her deepest feelings she would have stopped the car, dragged him behind a hedge - and demolished their relationship.'

Yet, it is from Gravenor that Eadith receives her final benediction before she dies.

'"Love" is an exhausted word, and God has been expelled by those who know better, but I offer you the one as proof that the other still exists.'

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33. Ibid., p.374.
34. Ibid., p.408.
35. Ibid., p.426.
After this point, Eadith 'renounces the world of fragmentation and despair', departs from the brothel as Eddie to be killed on a London Street 'by an act of God'.

I would see that Twyborn's failure to live is, somehow, connected with the leading of several lives.

'She must struggle back to the lover she had failed, and would continue failing, because of the importance his illusions hold for both of them.'

Whether it is that the leading of several lives precludes love, or that love precludes the leading of several lives, is not clear. Perhaps it is neither. The connection is not made more explicit. And it is hardly that the discovery of Eadith Trist's biological sex precludes love. The reasons remain opaque. And so the novel concludes.

Most characters in fiction are presented as being of a fixed perspective which allows the action to unfold. This is also how we often regard others in ordinary life. Lives, as they are presented in fiction, and as we perceive them in ordinary life, have the feature of completion. It is, I would suggest, this image and

36. Ibid., p.411.
notion of completion that White is writing against. In as early a novel as *The Aunt's Story*, Theodora Goodman is herself aware of her several lives.\textsuperscript{37} In *The Twyborn Affair*, this preoccupation reaches its climax. The notion of several lives is the breaking down of order and a recognition of incoherence. Order is conceived of as a barrier, a restraint. Incoherence is conceived of as the possibility of freedom. More importantly, incoherence is presented as a source of learning. The absence of coherence in the lives of the central characters is not seen as a failure or breakdown. It is recognized, rather, as a source of possibility; gaining in importance until it becomes, in many novels, the ground of enlightenment. Enlightenment in White's novels reverses order. At the end of *Voss*, for example, the one exception to the rule, in that Voss is the only central character to insist on order and coherence, Voss discovers humility. This is a recognition that the obsessive coherence by which he held himself together is not only an illusion but also a limitation.

*The Twyborn Affair* is a chronicle of explorations of the characters of which Eddie Twyborn discovers himself to be composed. That there are more which he did not

\textsuperscript{37} cf. *A.S.*, pp.71, 166, and 284.
discover, remains a possibility. His voyages are charted and that is that. Appropriately, perhaps, the incompletions remain incomplete. The ambivalences remain ambivalent, the paradoxes stay paradoxical. And, if the 'core of reality', love, eluded Eddie Tyborn, Eudoxia, Eadith Trist and Eddie Twyborn, it should, I suggest, be seen as an honourable 'failure'.
In addition to his novels, Patrick White published two collections of short stories, and the short story is a very distinct genre, as opposed to the novel, any reader may be excused for approaching the shorter works in a different expectation from those with which he is more familiar with the novel. A survey of White's short stories is interesting principally for the differences it fails to reveal between the short story and the novel. They conform structurally to the principles of short stories, they are neither incomplete nor condensed novels. They conform to the principles of short stories, to which I refer the narrative detail is pressed down to allow one aspect, one point of view and one episode to clearly emerge. The exceptions are two stories from The Chinese Wall, 'A Woman's Hand' and 'The Right of the Provisor', which could more properly be described as 'shorter novels', in accordance with the subtitle 'Dead Nexus'. From The Burnt Cane is, also, more a shorter novel. These shorter novels go beyond the confines of the short story, their plots are more complex, with multiple themes, points of view, and more detailed characterization and development of character. One other point of interest structurally is that, also.

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In addition to his novels, Patrick White published two collections of short stories. Given that the short story is a very distinct genre, as opposed to the novel, any reader may be excused for approaching the shorter works in prose with different expectations from those with which he might approach the novel. A survey of White's short stories is interesting principally for the differences it fails to reveal between the short stories and the novels. In most cases the short stories are structurally short stories, that is they are neither incomplete nor condensed novels. They conform structurally to the principles of short story writing; by which I mean the narrative detail is pared down to allow one aspect, one point of view and one episode to clearly emerge. The exceptions are two stories from *The Cockatoos*, 'A Woman's Hand' and 'The Night the Prowler', which could more properly be described as 'shorter novels', in accordance with the subtitle. 'Dead Roses', from *The Burnt Ones* is, also, more a shorter novel. These shorter novels go beyond the confines of the short story, their plots are more complex, with multiple themes, points of view, and more detailed characterization and development of character. One other point of interest structurally is that, when 'The Night the Prowler' was presented as a film
script, the text, apart from some minor changes which introduced a few extra peripheral scenes and minor characters, remained unchanged. The burden of change, therefore, from short story to film script was borne largely by the insertions of visual description and directions to the camera. Lines, written originally as the text of a story to be read, were reproduced almost exactly as dialogue. The absence of major textual change suggests that White's attitude to language remains the same despite any change in genre.

The difference, which a survey fails to reveal, between the short stories and the novels is in terms of subject matter. The same preoccupations re-appear in the short stories as in the novels. The oppositions between appearances and reality, cruelty and kindness, passion and action recur, so too do the familiar themes of love and lust, and lives which are confined, and those which are not, by social constraints. Only the focus sometimes differs, so that some stories concentrate on the other side of the oppositions, on those who are 'limited', or are afraid of experience, or who comfort themselves with appearances and possessions, or who are unkind. These stories narrate the lives and characters of those who, in the novels, play only the minor roles.

The image of the cockatoos, from a story of the same name, can, in one sense, be said to represent all of
the short stories. These birds descend in a flock on a neighbourhood to the delight of almost all the inhabitants. Their arrivals and departures cannot be controlled or even understood, so that their advent comes to be seen almost as an act of grace. Those to whom the birds become of tremendous importance include the Davorens, who have not spoken to each other for seven years; he would have preferred to die in the war, and she has lost the art of touch and music. Busby Le Cornu, a creature of habit, is another who awaits the cockatoos, as is Tim Goodenough, a nine year old boy who lives in a world of his own inside the normal one. This group of diverse characters is united by its reverence of the cockatoos. Of greater significance is the dual nature which the cockatoos are presented as having. Several long passages are devoted to describing these birds. They are portrayed as both clumsy and beautiful, heartless and kind, brutal in the way that they hurt each other, human in the way that they menace one another.

"Have you ever seen a mob of wild cockatoos? A bit what you'd call slapdash in flight. But real dazzlers of birds! I'd say heartless, from the way they slash at one another. Kind too, when they want to be. They have a kind eye. And still. You see um settun in a tree and the tree isn't stiller than the cockatoos."'
This image, which has a special reverence, is one to which the contraries of human nature are also attributed. It is not an image of undiluted goodness or unalloyed virtue. Neither is the darker side of nature venerated, the image is not one of protest or rebellion, nor are devils transformed into saints. Vice is not presented as virtue. The image of the cockatoos is an image of the human, a delicate balance between good and evil, the graceful and the graceless, cruelty and kindness, not exclusive of either but including both contraries. It is, moreover, an image which creates most wonder in stillness. The quality of stillness in a flock of cockatoos motionless on a tree recalls the predilection in White's novels for 'passion' and silence.

Stories which deal with the duality of human nature, focusing more on the vices as opposed to the virtues, include 'A Cheery Soul', 'Being Kind to Titina', 'Down at the Dump', and 'The Full Belly'. The last is a story of sacrifice and greed. Hunger is the motivating source and this story is a good illustration of a line Saul Bellow once wrote 'hunger pains put out grief.' The behaviour of human nature, when cut off from its customary and habitual means of survival, is the theme of 'The Full Belly'. Faced with hunger and deprivation, one character, Maro, chooses to die of
starvation while two others, her sister and nephew, fight over her food. Their descent into moral degradation and insensitivity is presented, at the end of the story, as unnecessary when meat ironically appears in the household. The point of the story, however, is presumably that their descent was inevitable. 'A Cheery Soul' and 'Being Kind to Titina' are both stories about kindness or, more precisely, the lack of kindness. In the former, Miss Docker, the cheery soul of the title, is presented as a professional 'do-gooder' who harasses and bullies the victims of her 'generosity'. This story is largely a comment on those kinds of activities undertaken by certain sorts of people where the charitable nature of their undertakings is questionable. 'Being Kind to Titina', while perhaps not as good a story, deals less with a stereotyped character. In this story, those characters who are supposed to be kind are, of course, not, while Titina, the recipient of their supposed kindness, is. 'Down at the Dump', while similar, is a more elaborate development on the theme of kindness. Daise like Titina is a character whose sexual behaviour is frowned upon by her neighbours; but who is presented by the narrative as being truly kind, truly compassionate, with an ability to aid and comfort the sort of character that society normally rejects. Daise and her sister Mrs
Hogben are presented as opposites. Mrs Hogben is one of those characters for whom everything should conform and be in order and who cries 'for anything she might not be able to control'. Daise, on the other hand, persists in her appeal:

'I will comfort you. If you let me. Do you understand.'

In the short story itself, there is an observer watching the two opposite ways of life as portrayed by Daise and Mrs Hogben. This is Meg, daughter of the latter, niece of the former. At the dump, Meg meets Lum Whalley, whose family are also social outcasts; they visit the dump on excursions in the same manner as other families go to the coast or to the country. In this place, the dump, Meg finally transcends the world of her mother, following the direction that her Aunt Daise had taken. If the themes of this story are familiar, it is, nevertheless, a powerful and compact piece which presents for contemplation two sets of oppositions connected together by the narrative.

Other familiar themes which reappear include the business of love and lust. This aspect of human

3. Ibid., p.311.
experience is never fully solved in the novels and remains, despite all efforts in The Twyborn Affair, inconclusive. It is, in fact, the only issue throughout White's work which lingers on in the nature of unfinished business. Several short stories present arid and sterile portrayals of marriage. These include 'Five-Twenty', 'Sicilian Vespers' and 'The Woman who wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats'. In the latter, one marriage is portrayed as follows:

'Alone, she asked as so many times before, for what reason had she married her husband, and concluded, as always, she needed him to keep her company as she stood on the edge of life.'

In the other marriage in this story, passion in the woman is directed at her cats. None of these stories explore the background or reasons for this state of affairs, they simply portray. This is true also of the stories concerning lust and sexual behaviour. Among this number are 'Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight', in which an adulterous episode is replayed on tape which otherwise has recorded the calls and songs of birds, and 'Miss Slattery and her Demon Lover', which charts the sexual education of an Australian girl by

4. Ibid., p.283.
an older Hungarian immigrant. In this story, as in the others, sexual encounters take place outside the context of a loving relationship. It is sexual experience for its own sake and is presented as yet another aspect of human experience to be explored in its own right. They are stories of human impulses and supposed 'aberrations', carrying no resonances of judgement or disdain.

Yet another familiar preoccupation to appear is memory. One of the shorter stories which is both elegantly conceived and delicately written is 'A Glass of Tea'. This is an account of a man's life, the duration of which corresponds to the life span of twelve Russian tea glasses. At the point where the story begins, the central character is old and only one tea glass remains. The story concerns the past and is recounted through memory, which reconstructs the marriage and experience of Philippides. A cumulative picture of the life and nature of Philippides' wife Constantia emerges, so that the reader, like the listener Malliakas, impatiently awaits the return of the absent wife. When she does return, it is not Constantia the first wife, but the second wife, Aglaia, who appears. Constantia, it is implied, was not successful in preserving the glasses, and, thus, the life of Philippides. Aglaia, a former servant and peasant is less likely to break. "You will never break."
Never. You must never! "5 The fragility of the character is associated with the fragility of the glasses. Constantia died by falling and breaking. In this story, recounted by memory, there is an interesting comment on memory; it is in fact the only comment of its kind anywhere in White's work. It occurs in a letter Constantia once wrote, which recalls shades of Elizabeth Hunter.

'Whenever you are aware I am able to re-live the past without any of the interferences—none of those jagged incidents which continue to strew the present! You may say: What about the jagged incidents of the past? Well, one is no longer cut by them.'

That memory does not cut suggests in this instance that memory is of the kind where the past is complete. Reliving the past does not hurt, the jagged edges of the experience have been smoothed by time. It is not that the past events no longer matter, or have become irrelevant, since the story is totally preoccupied with that past, it is more that incidents which once gave pain and caused turmoil were, in a later time, comprehended, the jig-saw pieces put together. This is a mode of memory particularly appropriate to the

5. Ibid., p.112.
6. Ibid., p.105.
short story, as the nature of completeness enables the incidents to be clearly displayed by the narrative.

In 'A Woman's Hand' the preoccupation with the opposition between action and passion reappears. This is the story of a marriage between Evelyn and Harold, a friendship between Harold and Clem, and another marriage between Clem and Nesta, the latter is also a friend of Evelyn's. Initially, Evelyn and Harold represent those for whom life is a sequence of necessary activities, being occupied, having things to do and places to go. Clem, on the other hand, represents those characters whose attitude to experience is one of passion, of suffering and learning through experience.

"He probably hasn't lived a life of any interest himself. But absorbs - and reflects - experience".

Evelyn and Harold meet Clem for the second time, in the story, by accident on a beach where Clem lives in an isolated simple house. Clem's reappearance in Evelyn's and Harold's lives causes reverberations in their marriage, since Harold has some sympathy and understanding of Clem's attitude to experience. Clem's

7. Cock., p.42.
house 'moved Harold and filled him with a longing for something he could never accomplish.' The gradual change in Harold from action to passion, horrifies Evelyn, for whom the non-conforming aspects of life are matters of suspicion.

'Evelyn didn't resist. She was too terrified. Not to recognize her husband. She had never known Harold.'

If Clem's reappearance in Evelyn's and Harold's life changes their marriage, so also does Evelyn change Clem's life. It is at this point that the shifting categories of action and passion take an unusual turn. Evelyn's reaction to Clem's manner of existence is somewhat stereotyped, his house and life she decides 'lack a woman's hand'. She connives in bringing about a meeting between Clem and Nesta which results in their marriage. However, Nesta, who has spent the greater part of her life as a companion to wealthy and self-indulgent women, is also a character of 'passion', recalling Theodora Goodman. The marriage between Clem and Nesta does not work, Nesta ends her days in an asylum and Clem is killed when he 'stumbles' under a bus. The precise nature of Clem's death remains

9. Ibid., p.89.
ambiguous. There is no other novel or short story in which two figures of passion are joined in marriage. This story is of interest not only because this happens but also because of the reasons offered for its failure. Clem's justification for the failure of the marriage rests on the fact that he and Nesta were too alike, they both lived at the same level and were shocked by the discovery that there was someone who could read their thoughts.

"Two silences, you know, can cut each other in the end."  

Nesta's account of the marriage is equally interesting and, moreover, further develops Clem's account, giving their failure a coherence which it otherwise might lack.

'Neither of us says much, which makes our relationship a strange one: I have lived with peacocks all my life! Most people do not know the peacock also redeems.'

There are a few implications here. Through the introduction of the peacock, which is an image for the sort of people with whom Nesta lived before: bright, capricious, self-indulgent, beautiful and wealthy, it becomes obvious that the redemption of which Nesta

10. Ibid., p.73.
11. Ibid., p.70.
speaks is not the singular province of characters such as Clem and Nesta. The peacock, Nesta asserts, also redeems. So that redemption, or enlightenment as it is more usually called in the novels, is not necessarily a property of a specific sort of character. One immediately recalls Elizabeth Hunter, the archetypal peacock who nevertheless, flaws notwithstanding, experienced her eye of the storm. If any doubts lingered about certain conditions of character being imposed on the elite, this story must dispel them. There is no set mode of character. It is obvious that more of the central characters resemble Theodora than Elizabeth Hunter, but it is also true that peacocks can redeem and be redeemed.

The final category of interest involves a group of stories which illustrate aspects of the same theme. The character who doesn't fit into society is an obvious feature of most of the novels. Sons or daughters who don't fit in with their families are also a feature of some of the novels. In the short stories, there are four which concentrate specifically on the latter theme. 'Clay' and 'The Letters' are two very similar pieces which deal with two sons and their mothers. Only the social backgrounds of the two families differ, and in the case of Clay, he goes on to marry a girl who resembles his mother. Both mothers in the stories are women who dread something they might not be capable of
understanding. In both cases, ironically, this turns out to be their only child, their son. His mother says of Clay:

"On top of everything else I never ever thought I'd have a freak".  

Clay, we are told, is 'different', his behaviour, interests and preoccupations are uncommon, he, therefore, prefers his own company and is, throughout his life, a figure of solitude. 'He was born with inward-looking eyes.' Charles is also out of alignment with the ordinary world. Both sons try to do what is required of them by their mothers and the world they represent. Charles stays at home and goes into the business of his mother's choosing, just as Clay did; attends the functions and performs the duties required of him. Both men in their extreme isolation suffer mental breakdowns, which for Clay is followed by death. Of Charles' mother it is said that,

'As soon as he began to nuzzle at her, Mrs. Polkinghorn threw him off. How did she deserve? Ever! Her beastly, her unnatural child! '

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I2. B.O., p.117.

I3. Ibid., p.121.

I4. Ibid., p.241.
The point of the two stories is, of course, to throw doubt on what, and who, is natural. Both mothers and Clay's wife cannot accept anything other than their own assumptions and preconceptions, avoiding the reality of who and what their sons are. 'Because everyone knows that what isn't isn't, even when it is'. I5

There is also a pair of stories about two daughters. In this case, one story is about a girl who doesn't fit in with her family and the other story is about a girl who tries to so fit. Yet again, there are dominating and possessive mothers who attempt to force a mould upon the shape of their daughter's lives. Both daughters also have ambiguous attitudes towards their fathers with whom they fail to establish any close relationship. Anthea Scudamore of 'Dead Roses' and Felicity Bannister of 'The Night the Prowler' are basically similar but their stories are told at different stages of development. They are stories of protest by girls at the set way of life into which their mothers energetically push them. Anthea is a character who early in the story 'withdrew her hand, finally, out of the reach of further experience.' I6 Docile, she rejects experience and settles for the pattern of

I5. Ibid., p.135.
life set out by her mother. Her story, therefore, is one which explores her discovery of how sterile her life becomes. She grows to hate the husband she had chosen in an attempt to reflect the order and apparent happiness of her own mother's life. Eventually, Anthea withers to become the dead rose; her protest came too late. If 'Dead Roses' ends with protest, 'The Night the Prowler' begins with it. This story opens with an incident which allows Felicity Bannister to break away from the orderly life created for her by her parents. The incident of the prowler reveals to Felicity the contingent nature of events. She subsequently terminates her engagement explaining her decision so:

"I don't think it was anything that happened between us - only the fact that it happened. And I had had no part in it".

The fact that events can happen without any collusion in bringing them about enables Felicity 'to expend, by acts of violence, the passive self others had created for her'. She abandons her fiance, changes her image, her job, her friends and lovers. Her release, however, does not end in fulfilment. From discovering that she need not be the record her mother liked to


I8. Ibid., p.158.
play, she discovers herself. This discovery of self, like Theodora, Mrs. Godbold and Elizabeth Hunter, is not a discovery of a fixed self, of something that is and will continue so. In this story, the message arrived at, through experiences of a more bizarre kind, returns to earlier novels. It is the message of multiplication and division, of being as becoming.

...' she knew herself, in solitariness, in desolation, as well as in what would seem to be the dizzy course of perpetual becoming.'

The terrain, content and characterization in the short stories are, accordingly, familiar. The manner in which lives are lived, the forces and influences which shape existence, the nature of relationships, incidents of memory, instances of lust and attitudes to experience, all appear. In one sense, this thematic consistency, which extends from the novels to the short stories, can be said to be a measure of the depth of White's preoccupation with such questions. However, in his short stories, White takes the opportunity to present versions of these themes. There is, in many stories, a slight shift in focus while, in others, the focus shifts

radically. This shift of focus is significant. For, within the confines of the short story, the reader is presented with a different emphasis. For example, in the novel, people of 'action' are presented in opposition to characters of 'passion'. The opposition is a device used to throw more light on the characters of 'passion' in terms of what they are not. In the novels, the reader's attention is always being directed toward the central characters. Because the short stories are an entirely different genre, conflict of this nature does not occur. Characters of 'action' are displayed and described in their own right and for their own sake; and are not represented for the purposes of device. In their stories they are equally figures of importance as characters of passion. Their predicament is described in detail, with sympathy and without prejudice. So the image of the cockatoos prevails. The duality of human nature is portrayed in an even balance: the graceful and the graceless, the brave and the fearful, the kind and the heartless, the harmless and the harmful. In this way, the short stories also display the capacity of Patrick White to write about what he writes. By this I mean that a central message in the novels is one of acceptance. Theodora is the first to be told that she must accept the 'irreconcilable halves' of human nature, as Alf Dubbo, among others, will also learn. The short
stories offer substantial evidence that Patrick White can write about his own particular vision of the 'irreconcilable halves'. In other words, much of what he disputes and argues against in the novels, in his own idiosyncratic manner, appears in the short stories, unaccompanied by overtones of judgement or condemnation. Accordingly, the relationship between the novels and the short stories is close by reason of their inclusive nature. As a result, they are not only of interest but also helpful, since the stories balance the oppositions of the novels by presenting, as valid versions of human experience, those aspects of life which were formerly seen as negative forces.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

STYLE

'When we do not understand what we are, we tell a story.'

Garrett Barden.
The question of Patrick White's style has long been a matter of critical dispute. In 1956 A.D. Hope provoked a well known minor scandal by describing White's prose as 'pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge', While the comment still lingers in critical repertory, its context has been forgotten as A.D. Hope explains.

'It was not Patrick White's style in general that I referred to so rudely but to a common and persistent blemish on his style. If the whole book had been written in the way I objected to, I could not have praised it in the way I did and I did praise it.'

John Colmer, while finding much to admire in White's novels, feels that White's prose is not always adequate to the archetypal structure of his novels. He continues thus.

'To say this is not to point to a minor stylistic infelicity but to a radical difference between willed affirmation and achieved vision, evident in many of the climactic passages.'

2. Ibid., unpublished letter, dated the 13-II-1980.
There are, however, critics who have unequivocally approved of White's style. These include Geoffrey Dutton and John Rorke. Geoffrey Dutton had this to say:

'White's style is anything but thin, being as rich and robust as delicate, but like such a membrane it records with unerring sensitivity both experience and intuition. This style, without being excessively idiosyncratic, is unmistakable in all his work, and considered organically, as it must be, it is one of White's greatest achievements, forged slowly and painfully and owing no particular thing to any other writer.'

Harry Heseltine was one of the first critics to examine White's style in terms of its imagery. A more recent study was also done using this same approach by Mike Cotter. Harry Heseltine, for example, argues that White's greatness lies precisely in his style, and that it is the 'fund of images, metaphors and verbal motifs, which is at the basis, not only of his sensibility, but of his style.' Mr. Heseltine concludes his article


by saying that White's 'style is the very linchpin of what he has to say.' The dispute, however, continues. Recently, in a thoughtful and provocative assessment of White, Adrian Mitchell consistently points to what he considers to be narrative flaws. He speaks of the word consciousness, stylized dialogue and deliberately literary narratives.

'His fiction continues to call attention to itself as a richly textured construct, to insist on itself as self-conscious art, patterned meaning.'

Of White's first two novels we are told that 'White has begun not with an idea of character, but with a theory about moral and spiritual nature.' Of Voss it is said that his 'apotheosis ....is essentially an effect of language'. In The Vivisector, where words must substitute for paint, language is seen 'as inventing rather than invoking the vision'. Whether

8. Ibid., p.149
9. Ibid., p.152
10. Ibid., p.153.
describing the paintings of Hurtle Duffield or the mystical experience of Elizabeth Hunter, we are told that 'White fails to persuade us that the vision is more than a product of words.' Mr. Mitchell's criticisms concentrate on two areas, characterization and language. His comments on both characterization and language may be seen at source in an earlier paper, where the point was made that White's characters encounter one another 'rather than developing a relationship.' In his discussion of characterization it was clear that Mr Mitchell was disappointed that the portrayals of character in White's fiction do not correspond to the more admired norm; that they do not develop and grow in the manner of other novelists. 'We expect to discover a maturing of character, as in say Jane Austen, but White's characters do not in that sense mature.' His points on character may be summarized as follows.

II. Ibid.


I3. Ibid., p.7.
'Character is a "given", it is fixed right from the beginning. There isn't change in character itself, but change in understanding. The protagonist discovers by painful experience something about the nature and extent of his spiritual resources. Let us agree that some process of revelation is under way. Man, as friable stone or doubting onion, discards the outer layers of himself and attempts to locate and understand what his spiritual and moral centre is. A process is implied here, its necessity for the protagonist assured. But the character of the protagonist does not in itself change.'

From these observations it is concluded that 'White has a rather flat notion of character.' Mr Mitchell pursues his criticisms of White's writing until he ultimately arrives at the question of language.

'The vision of the novelist, and the vision of the characters, lies as it were between the words. The vision is essentially a verbal structure, it lodges there; and the real mysticism of Patrick White is a mysticism of words.'

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I4. Ibid., p.6.
I5. Ibid., p.7.
I have dwelt at some length on Mr Mitchell's two articles for several reasons. Besides being a perceptive and articulate critic with an ability for incisively probing the narrative structures and devices of White's fiction, he is, as both articles testify ultimately investigating the question of White's language. Questions of language are also questions of style. It is hard to disagree with some of Mr Mitchell's verdicts, for example, the narrative style of White's novels is unusual and highly distinctive. There are passages that strain and laboriously wind their way to a full stop. The syntax succumbs periodically and idiosyncratic constructions provide obstacle courses for even the most devoted reader. Nevertheless, one can take issue with Mr Mitchell, not necessarily on the basis of the criticisms themselves, but on two accounts. The first is the assumption on which these remarks are sometimes made, and secondly the ultimate conclusions which the nature of his criticisms force him to draw. In his discussion on character, for example, by citing the differences in characterization between White and Jane Austen, Mr Mitchell is not demonstrating an indubitable failing on the part of White but merely his own preference. Alternative methods of characterization, in which the 'maturing of character does not figure' abound in the modern novel,
yet the modern novel is not deemed insufficient on that account. If White's characterization is indeed flawed, an analysis of these failings based on a more objective critical criterion would be of greater help. The genuine value of Mr Mitchell's insights are diminished by the basis of his reasoning. This is even more powerfully illustrated by his discussion on language. Mr Mitchell's examination of White's word consciousness, stylized dialogue and deliberately literary narrative is both seminal and illuminating, yet the conclusions drawn are paradoxical. What can the 'apotheosis of Voss' be other than 'essentially an effect of language.' If the 'real mystician of Patrick White is a mysticism of words,' is that inappropriate to a novelist? If 'White fails to persuade us that the vision is more than a product of words', does the fault lie with the novelist or with the expectations of Mr Mitchell? Patrick White has never claimed to be anything other than a writer of fiction. He may write of revelation, illumination and enlightenment but only as a novelist. He has never purported to be a mystic or agent of wisdom and truth. To expect more of his writing is to confuse life and art. The artist is censured for not being a prophet. To ultimately expect anything
of White's fiction beyond a construct of words and language is to penalize the novelist for his subject matter. Mr Mitchell's criticisms may well be valid but to decry a novelist's vision because it is, in the end, no more than a construct of language is paradoxical in the extreme. It is also to imply the old critical division between thought and language, a battle not only fought long ago but decisively won.

Patrick White has, of course, also been criticized for his thought. This criticism, which sometimes takes the form of overt attack, shares a common basis with Adrian Mitchell's analysis of language. This basis has to do with the question of how novels are read, which is still one of the unresolved issues in critical theory. The following are examples of critical reaction to novels by Patrick White, where the thought presented in the fiction occasions the response. Writing about Riders in the Chariot, Brian McFarlane had this to say.

'White's brutal discriminations are clearly bound up with his horrifying obsession with what is grotesque and maimed and disgusting about human life. It is not a matter of his accepting these as part of human experience; there is rather a zealous tracking down and savouring of every physical and moral wart the non-elect might display - and even the elect do not wholly this rabid hunt for the repelling detail.'

The subject matter of *The Twyborn Affair* was of a kind where a similar critical reaction could have been expected; by which I mean that the thoughts and themes presented in the novel could draw critical fire. If 'inhumanity' could be attributed to *Riders in the Chariot*, it was inevitable that 'indecency' be attributed to *The Twyborn Affair*. Professor Leonie Kramer, a critic who has not only written extensively on White but whose overview of his work is impressive, made these comments.

'This is indeed a "loveless social orgasm", described in language which constantly offends by its unrestrained probing of the repulsive and indecent.......
In Samuel Johnson's words "The reader feels his mind full, though he learns nothing"... If only, one feels, White could desert the circus animals....'  

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The reason why Brian McFarlane and Leonie Kramer reacted in the way that they did, and they are not alone in so doing, may be accounted for by the manner in which we read. Reading is a process which everyone takes for granted but few examine. Yet the very manner of our reading can predetermine the nature of our criticism. 'Mes pensees sont mes catins', Diderot said, my thoughts are my whores. The author's thoughts sleep with his readers without ceasing to belong to the author, and in that lies a source of possible confusion. When we open a book and begin to read, the private recesses of an entire world constructed by another human being open for our personal inspection. All readers are enchanted and beguiled by this intimacy. Moreover, thoughts which are part of a novel, and are the thoughts of the author, enter our head as though they were the subject of our thoughts. Though, in fact, we are thinking the thoughts of another, we think of them as our own. In this anomaly lies the source of beguilement or the source of rejection. If these thoughts, which seduce us into being their subject, are attractive we allow ourselves to be seduced; if they are unattractive we may not. Either way the author's thought becomes the reader's thought. If the thoughts, however, are so antipathetic to the reader that the reader refuses to be the subject of these thoughts, then critical reactions
like those of Leonie Kramer and Brian McFarlane may occur. It is not so much, I would suggest, that either Professor Kramer or Mr McFarlane, or any of the other critics who so react, wish to censor Patrick White, which their remarks sometimes imply, as that they find this process of transference unbearable. It is not, I believe, so much a rejection of what may pass in the mind of Patrick White, but what they perceive to be passing through the intimacy of their own minds as they read. As readers we invite this process of transference, we offer our minds to be taken and inhabited by the thoughts of the author. It is not Patrick White's fault if we regret the invitation.

To progress from the general debate to a specific discussion of White's style would, I think, be useful. When Adrian Mitchell remarked that 'the passionate intensities of felt experience are rarely conveyed in White's novels,' 21 he voiced a truism that must be felt by all White's readers. In so doing he signposted an important feature of Patrick White's style. The absence of 'intensities of felt experience' might perhaps be explained by a line from one of the novels.

'You can never convey in words the utmost in experience.'

22. E.S. p.414.
Certainly, on the evidence of the novels alone, there is little effort made to describe passionate intensity. Whenever the narrative arrives at a climatic point it concentrates on reiterating the inadequacy and paucity of language as a means of communicating the experience. There is a distance, therefore, consciously intervening between the writing and the action it presents. This distance is also manifested by the literary conventions which Patrick White adopts. The narratives are set in the past tense and take the impersonal form of the third person. This becomes a source of curiosity when one considers not only the time in which a novelist of the stature of Patrick White is writing but also the content of the novels themselves. The use of the narrative past supposes a world with a beginning, middle and end reduced to order and intelligibility. The confusion and impenetrability of reality is transformed into pure language, in which the incomprehensible is made clear, motive and intention are manifest, action is deliberate and character is revealed. The relationship between character and world assumes an ontological importance and cause and effect are conspicuous. Behind the impersonal form of the third person, the narrative voice lurks like a God who knows, sees and understands all things. It is a wonderful illusion. Life in the world of the narrative past is not derelict, sad perhaps, tragic often,
but never derelict. This form of novel writing flourished, appropriately, in the nineteenth century and lingers to the present day. The question is why a novelist of the stature of Patrick White, whose greater body of work has been written in the second half of the twentieth century, should always choose this form. It is an even more remarkable choice when one considers the nature of his subject matter. While choosing this form he, nevertheless, disregards its conventions. Life, in Patrick White's novels, is not transformed into destiny. The notion that order directs mens' lives is replaced by the intervention of contingency. Reality, as presented by the novels, is not clear, it is mysterious and impenetrable. Action is not predetermined, it is discovered. Motive and intention are not transparent but obscure. Relationships do not develop through interaction but are presented, rather, as a series of encounters. Characters are not bound by family or to society but are essentially alone. Finally, there is the question of language. The medium of the grand illusion is, in the case of Patrick White, constantly drawing attention to its limitations and constraints. The language is always pointing to what it cannot do and pining for those pinnacles it cannot reach. It is
not remarkable, then, that irony underlies much of
the narrative in many of the books. Given the fact that
tension exists between the form and content of the
novels, an explanation must, therefore, be sought,
since it is obvious that this chosen form is no
accident. Patrick White is too informed, thoughtful
and careful of his craft for such an assumption to be
justifiable. In common with many writers, artists
and philosophers, Patrick White suffers from the
modern condition of chronic reflection. His novels
mirror this reflection. The cruel, the absurd, the
trivial, the ugly, division, disharmony and materialism,
as well as their opposites, are present in his
fiction. Most of all the modern world, before which
ordinary men are sent sprawling, cribbed by a dense
reality and confined by multiplicity, is the starting
point for White’s novels. The conventional form
of the novels, therefore, confers on such material an
authority it otherwise might not have. The concatenation
of values and ideas, the oppositions, contraries and
many faceted truths, all familiar hallmarks of White’s
writing, are charted with the same unquestionable
authority as a list of Russian noblemen and their
family relationships. In his fiction the certainties
of life are presented uncertainly while the uncertainties
are presented with dogmatic certainty. This is a
fundamental feature of what may be termed Patrick White’s
For hundreds of years Western culture conceived of literature not as we do now, through analyses of works, authors and schools, but through one cohesive theory of language. This theory, rhetoric, came from antiquity and prevailed in Western culture for almost two thousand years. Nowadays, it is unfashionable to advert to rhetoric. Nevertheless rhetorical seems an appropriate description of Patrick White's style. According to Aristotle, the essence and end of rhetoric was persuasion. Attitude and action were seen as the two objects of persuasion. Literature, of course, is a more suitable vehicle for persuasion of attitude as Kenneth Burke points out.

...'the notion of persuasion to attitude would permit the application of rhetorical terms to purely poetic structures; the study of lyrical devices might be classed under the head of rhetoric, when these devices are considered for their power to induce or communicate states of mind to readers, even though the kinds of assent evoked have no overt, practical outcome.'

The readers 'assent' is asked for on all those matters which this study has previously outlined; that knowledge

is not of the domain of rationality, that action is not necessarily 'doing' but more often the attitude behind receiving, that silence can be more valuable than language, that contingency and not control shapes men's lives and that man is, ultimately, responsible for himself. In the world of Patrick White's fiction, out of the experience of 'cleavage and pain', reconciliation with a lost unity is deemed possible, as are harmony and fulfilment. This corresponds to the Platonic notion of 'the good'. In Plato, rhetoric is conceived of as a movement of expression towards a conclusion which is already known in terms of a desired good. In White's fiction the desired good is man's totality. It is also the function of rhetoric to eliminate options and alternatives that might make the desired good questionable. Patrick White also eliminates those options and alternatives, such as rationality, activity and materialism, which he sees as a threat to his image of totality. However, from the evidence of critical reaction and commentary, it cannot be argued that Patrick White is wholly successful in persuading his readers to admire what is praised, to fear what is criticized, in short, to identify with the world as portrayed in his fiction. A reason may lie in the fact that the art of rhetoric is declamatory and that declamation is not proper to the novel. In saying that all of White's work 'presents itself as fable'.

24. Leonie Kramer, (editor) op.cit, p.154.
it may well have been this declamatory aspect of White's writing that Adrian Mitchell had in mind. In philosophy, declamation gave way to the dialectic as the appropriate method of expression. Yet, while elements of the dialectical method are present in White's work, the oppositions and polarities for example, it is not a proper dialectic. Both Aristotle and Plato agreed that all sides of the argument in a proper dialectic must demonstrate values as well as their lack. In Patrick White's texts too many sides of the argument are present solely for the purpose of being shown to have no value. In the ordinary world, for example, a high value is placed on rational thought and behaviour, but in White's fiction rationality is present only to be repudiated. Hence, the balance of values is uneven. There is no genuine dialectic. The lineaments of reality are not followed as a genuine dialectic does. While the desired good in Patrick White, as in Plato, is beyond knowledge, certainly beyond specification, it is reached by rhetorical rather than dialectical means.

The material of Patrick White's novels is presented at a distance by the form which the narratives take. This is one feature of his style. In *Voss*, however, this distance is deliberately exaggerated.

'That strange, foreign men should come on
a Sunday when she herself had ventured on a headache was quite exasperating.'

So the narrative voice informs us on the opening page of the novel. It is a dry, ironic, mannered statement. The man who visits on a Sunday has the bad taste to be not only strange but foreign, 'when she herself had ventured on a headache'. Laura's heroic spirit, in sallying forth on such a mission instead of going to Church, is thereby illustrated. Exasperating indeed to be so inconvenienced. Apart from the rich irony which persists to the end of the novel:

'..."it is surprising that you have never contemplated matrimony, Laura. There is many a young fellow in the country would jump at the opportunity of union with such a respectable firm."' "I do not doubt it", said Laura, "but I would not care to be the reason for anybody's marrying a store".'


26. Ibid., p.402.
There is another purpose to the highly mannered statement of the opening page. The language, especially in many of the passages set around the Bonner household, appears deliberately tilted in an archaic cast. Voss is called Mr. Voss not only by the characters but also by the narrative voice. The archaic quality and mannered style would seem to suggest that an effort is being made within the narrative to recapture the time and place, Sydney of the 1840's, in which the novel is set.

'If she was a prig, she was not so far gone that she did not sometimes recognize it, and smart behind the eyes accordingly.' 27

This, as easily, could be Jane Austen's Emma. There are two kinds of port wine in the Bonner pantry and second best is good enough for unexpected visitors. Timing is everything. Bringing the refreshment at exactly the right moment, so that the chaos of multiple arrivals, the port wine and the Bonners, might be avoided. In this sense Patrick White's gift for detail is given additional scope in *Voss*. He shows equal skill at depicting the foibles and mannerisms of an earlier society as he does of his own.

One of the virtues attributed to Voss is his ability to observe 'all things as if for the first time.' This, of course, is a fundamental strength of White's style.

'Le Mesurier would address Palfreyman very distinctly, and smile encouragingly out of his dark lips, as if the ornithologist had been a foreigner. Well, he was, too, in that he was another man.'

More than a comment on Le Mesurier, this phrase outgrows its context to emphasize White's extraordinary ability to render the sense of uniqueness not only of men but also of objects. Consider the description of Tom Radclyffe.

'He was like a man in his sleep, who will lunge out at an actual mosquito, but return always to his more convincing dream.'

In one succinct sentence a life is sketched of a man not given to thought or contemplation who will spring

28. Ibid., p.124.
29. Ibid., p.242.
30. Ibid., p.104.
into action when threatened or disturbed, no matter how trivial the disturbance. In one devastating image the embodiment of masculine promise crumbles to dust. If there is any intensity in White's writing, it does not, as has already been discussed, manifest itself in 'felt experiences', it is found in the descriptions of people and places. Every so often the prose almost shivers with life, with the vibrancy and struggle of creative conveyance.

'This devilish country, flat at first, soon broke up into winding gullies, not particularly deep, but steep enough to wrench the backs of the animals that had to cross them, and to wear the bodies and nerves of the men by the frantic motion that it involved. There was no avoiding chaos by detour. The gullies had to be crossed, and on the far side there was always another tortuous gully. It was as if the whole landscape had been thrown up into great earthworks defending the distance.'

Not simply are the animals' pain, and agony of the men, under unbearable physical duress conveyed, but that massive movement of the final line is felt as well as seen. The scene leaps to the eye of the reader, the monumental gullies standing guard on the distance.

31. Ibid., p.336.
By any measure, this is forceful and superb writing. There are highly distinctive rhythms in White's prose which are yet another feature of his style. For example there are long sentences, deftly arranged into a series of subordinate clauses, which have a monolithic quality.

'The German, who had followed the ladies into the room, stood biting his lips, unconscious of the awkward, even embarrassing attitude of his body, listening, or so it appeared, as if the music propounded some idea above the level of its agreeable mediocrity.'

The absolute ease of such controlled, incisive and weighty sentences belies any suspicion that the writer's language is out of control, or that his thoughts have strayed. Such sentences, strewn as they are throughout the prose are often followed directly by a short sharp sentence, which is sudden and unexpected, like a punch. These aphoristic comments can be ironic, moral, mundane, or, as in the following passage, incongruous.

32. Ibid., p.92.
'About the same hour, Voss went to the mouth of the cave. If he was shivering, in spite of the grey blanket in which he had prudently wrapped himself, it was not through diffidence, but because each morning is, like the creative act, the first. So he cracked his finger-joints, and waited.'

The cracking of finger-joints is an incongruous sequel to the more metaphysical speculation on morning. Yet it is precisely this ability to present incongruities that gives the rhythm of the prose its drama. This drama is often the source of humour, be it satiric, ironic or bathetic. The sentence construction 'if', with which the longer sentence in the last passage begins, is also a curious feature of the narrative voice. It occurs repeatedly in all the novels. The following quotation is an example.

'He would have liked to give, what he was not sure, if he had been able, if he had not destroyed this himself with deliberate ruthlessness in the beginning.'

33. Ibid., p.282.

34. Ibid., p.92.
The 'if' construction is nearly always used by the narrative voice to point to its own omniscience. Voss is frustrated and unaware of what the narrative voice comprehends. The narrative voice supplies knowledge which the characters do not have, often in terms of motive or intention whether actual or probable. It offers insight sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely, which the characters would benefit from knowing. The 'if' construction is an occasion of conspiracy between the narrative voice and the reader in which intimacies are revealed by the former in its capacity as 'God'. While the narrative voice does not always present itself as 'God', it almost always delivers its pronouncements with an air of authority.

'She was perspiring. 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 suspect, after long and fruitless search for a better, without realizing that beauty is something others must surprise.'

This is an example of a rather subtle, if convoluted, movement on the part of the narrative voice. The

35. Ibid., pp. II0 - III.
construct would appear to be quite the opposite of a calculating effect in that Laura is presented in her grime and with a severe expression on her face. Laura, herself, the narrative voice suggests, has decided 'after long and fruitless search' that she is not beautiful; and so the readers might imply that she is neither dishonest nor vain. The perception of beauty is then ascribed to the eye of the beholder. The narrative voice, therefore, is the presenter of images for others to see and decide upon. Not only is this ambiguous, in that 'others' may refer either to other characters in the novel or to its readers, but is also paradoxical, since the narrative voice does present the images within the novel, yet it does not remain impartial. It is also possible that Laura is being mildly chastized for looking for beauty, and thus not innocent of vanity, while we the readers are left in no doubt of its presence. Ultimately, while the issue of Laura's beauty is presented as an open question, it is, in fact, closed.

Roland Barthes once remarked that 'the adoption of a real language is for the writer the most human act.' It cannot be said of Patrick White that the

language he adopts is a real language, in the sense of language that is commonly used in the ordinary world. One has to think only of his elaborate sentence constructions, his use of the narrative voice, his idiosyncratic grammar and syntax, and his extraordinary dialogue, to immediately perceive that the reproduction of natural language is not his concern. Neither do I feel that White's artistry is a deliberate invention, consciously nurtured by the writer for purposes of dazzling the literary world, as Adrian Mitchell, for example, implies. Patrick White has an obsession which is only likely to cease with death. His particular gift in fiction is his ability to heighten the reader's consciousness, whether it be of the life of an ant struggling in the cracks of the pavement, or notions of normality, or questions about what makes life purposeful. Voluntarily, or involuntarily, our horizons of knowledge are widened by White's concentration on the particular, so that its mystery and isolation are overcome. It becomes, therefore, a question of style; or, more properly critical dispute may be reduced to the issue of style. To balance Roland Barthes assertion about 'the adoption of a real language' being 'the most human act' a writer can perform, one can cite the provocative, if equally brilliant, Theodor
'A writer will find that the more precisely, conscientiously, appropriately he expresses himself, the more obscure the literary result is thought, whereas a loose and irresponsible formulation is at once rewarded with certain understanding ........ Regard for the object, rather than communication, is suspect in any expression: anything specific, not taken from pre-existed patterns, appears inconsiderate, a symptom of eccentricity, almost of confusion.'

The flow of natural speech, with its incompletions, ambiguities and vagueness, allows the reader to perceive what suits him and, thereby, confirm merely his own opinions. The struggle for precise, appropriate and pure expression, on the other hand, provokes resistance.

'Rigorous formulation demands unequivocal comprehension, conceptual effort, to which people are deliberately disencouraged, and imposes on them in advance of any content a suspicion of all received opinions, and thus an isolation, that they violently resist.'

Patrick White's style is not, I would argue, a matter of free choice made in the privacy of his study. His style

38. Ibid.
is not at his disposal, to be discarded when he so desires; as the unaltered nature of his style throughout his work illustrates, nor is it at the service of whatever literary ambitions he might harbour. A writer's style holds in thrall the readers' perception and insists that we view the world his way. Our attention is focused; it is also narrowed. The reader's attention is shepherded, we are not allowed to stray or see anything that is not a part of the writer's vision. Style, therefore, is not only the means by which our attention is focused but also the means by which distraction is avoided. In consequence, an interesting element of Patrick White's work is its silences. Patrick White's style is the result of his unique epistemological processes. It is as much his signature as the character of his handwriting. It is his interpretation both of how and what he perceives. His style reflects his values which shape and determine his fictional worlds. Most importantly, White's style is both a call for and a consequence of how and what he perceives. Of that, only, may we approve or disapprove, strew rose-petals in his path, or grow hoarse from dispute. To argue otherwise is to wish that this extraordinary novelist might not exist.
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