USE OF THESES

This copy is supplied for purposes of private study and research only. Passages from the thesis may not be copied or closely paraphrased without the written consent of the author.
FINDING A PLACE: LANDSCAPE AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF PATRICK WHITE

Yasue Arimitsu

A thesis submitted for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

at the

Australian National University

December 1985
Except where acknowledgement is made, this thesis is my own work.

Yasue Arimitsu
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are due to many people, without whose assistance this work would have proved more difficult. These include Dr Livio Dobrez and Dr Susan McKer­nan, whose patience was unfailing; Dr Bob Brissenden, who provided initial encourage­ment; Mr Graham Cullum, for advice and assistance; Professor Ian Donaldson, for his valuable comments; and Jean Marshall, for her kind and practical support.

Special thanks must be given to the typist, Norma Chin, who has worked hard and efficiently, despite many pressures. My gratitude is also extended to my many fellow post-graduates, who over the years have sustained, helped and inspired me. These in­clude especially Loretta Ravera Chion, Anne Hopkins, David Jans, Andrew Kulemeka, Ann McCulloch, Robert Merchant, Julia Robinson, Leonie Rutherford and Terry Wat­son.

Lastly I would like to thank the Australia-Japan Foundation, whose generous financial support made this work possible and whose unending concern and warmth proved most encouraging indeed.
DEDICATION

For my parents and for Vivienne Foster, who in their own ways have contributed.
ABSTRACT

Patrick White's first five novels reveal much of the writer's personal struggle to resolve the dilemma of his dichotomous perception of self. This dichotomy is founded on circumstances of his life which placed him in a situation of cultural conflict. Having spent his formative years in Australia, White then received the bulk of his formal education in England, and this seems to have had a profound effect on his sense of identity. Consequently, his early novels show signs of this difficulty, as if they were written mainly for the purposes of understanding and resolving it.

That is the view expressed in this thesis, which traces White's progress from an uncertain sense of self to the point at which he embraces his Australian identity as a wholly acceptable fact. This progression can be seen most clearly in the treatment of landscape exhibited in his five novels. Landscape seems a particularly important source of inspiration to Patrick White, since he uses it not merely as a means of expressing his feelings about a place, especially about Australia, but as a sounding board for the entangled, disparate emotions of his many characters. Through landscape, White explores such human responses to life as alienation, capitulation, indifference, receptiveness and acceptance.

In addition, he uses the same point of reference to examine the relationship between man and God. The author's quest for a sense of place is paralleled by his equally personal search for some religious faith. His characters progress from exhibiting subliminal desires to look beyond the concrete realities of life, for an indefinable presence they only suspect exists, to the point of acknowledging the existence of God in everything they see.

Yet this twofold preoccupation, with a sense of national identity and a sense of God, does not end there. In the last of these novels, Voss, White synthesizes his views of man's place in things and man's relationship with God in a final statement that evidences strong feelings towards both. For White, it would seem, the end of a personal quest can only be proclaimed by the adoption of a stringent code of beliefs.
ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

In the text, the titles of the books are abbreviated as follows:

- *Happy Valley* \( HV \)
- *The Living and the Dead* \( LD \)
- *The Aunt’s Story* \( AS \)
- *The Tree of Man* \( TM \)
- *The Flaws in the Glass* \( FG \)

In each chapter, page references to the novel are included, after the first footnote, in parentheses within the text. Where the novel cited is not the main novel under discussion in a chapter, page references in the text are prefixed by the relevant abbreviated title.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. HAPPY VALLEY AND THE LIVING AND THE DEAD: ALIENATED CHARACTERS</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. THE AUNT'S STORY: LANDSCAPE AND SELF-DISCOVERY</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4. THE TREE OF MAN: THE UNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND LANDSCAPE</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5. VOSS: IMPRINTS IN THE SAND</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Every earnest glance we give the realities around us, with intent to learn, proceeds from a holy impulse, and is really songs of praise.¹

The above quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on Nature is an apt epigraph to this study of Patrick White for several reasons. The underlying argument of this thesis is that White for many years felt at odds with his native land of Australia. During these years he drifted between Australia, Europe and America as though uncertain of his eventual destination. These were not unproductive years, for in that time he produced his first three novels. In these novels, Happy Valley, The Living and the Dead and The Aunt's Story, he has used the landscape as a sounding board for his disorientated responses to Australia and for his search for a sense of place. It was D.H. Lawrence who said: "Men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away",² and it was Judith Wright who pointed out that: "The writer must be at peace with his landscape before he can turn confidently to its human figures".³ These words are central to the idea of a sense of place and equally central to this thesis, the core argument of which is that Patrick White feels it necessary to come to terms with Australia itself. Consequently, the landscape features dramatically in the first five published novels, to be discussed in this study, in such a way as to suggest a gradual evolution of the writer's perception of his homeland to the point of acceptance and reconciliation.

To state that White was exclusively concerned with the quest for reconciliation with Australia, however, would be to limit the scope of his perceived interests to a degree that would preclude some of the deeper issues of his novels, issues that in many ways cannot be ignored. Principal among these is the search for some meaningful point of spiritual reference, a search that brought White to accept the existence of God. There are, then, two themes to this thesis, the first relating to White's apparent need to be

wholly conciliated with Australia and the second concerns his search for religious faith. In both instances the landscape is used as a source of inspiration and the means by which the author can explore his interests through the responses of his characters to their surroundings. This thesis will not only analyse the use of landscape in relation to White’s quests for faith and a sense of belonging, but will also seek to demonstrate the evolutionary nature of these quests.

The roots of White’s ambivalence regarding his identity as an Australian lie in the circumstances of his life. Prior to his decision to settle in Australia in 1948, at the age of thirty-six, he had spent twenty-one years elsewhere, principally in England. He was in fact born in England in 1912 and returned to Australia for the first time at the age of six months. He grew up in Australia but was sent to Cheltenham College, England, at the age of thirteen to complete his secondary school education. After a stay in Australia of approximately three years, he returned to England to attend Cambridge University. The emphasis on an education that was clearly weighted in favour of the English perception has influenced White in many ways. Something of this Anglicized or Europeanized vision of the world can be seen in Voss, for example, where the English Laura Trevelyan and the German Voss come into direct conflict with the Australian landscape.

It was, however, at a more personal level that the English connection asserted itself most strongly. In his early years, White records that he had no sense of belonging either to Australia or to England. He remarks: "In spite of feeling an Australian in England, I was surprised to find upon my return that I had become anglicized"; and: "... at school in England I was accused of being a cockney or colonial, back in Australia, 'a bloody Pom'". Accordingly, White felt isolated in and alienated from both Australia and England and this might account for his apparent rootlessness prior to his return to Australia in 1948. The dilemmas incumbent upon this rôle of the unsettled outsider, together with the fact that he was unable to dismiss images of the Australian landscape from his mind, provided him with much of the impetus to write HV. This was the first of five novels in which White attempted to pacify the warring elements of his consciousness and to solve the problem of his identity. Predictably, all of these novels bear strong relationships to each other in that they employ landscape consistently as a point of reference in the search for identity and belief.

In the last two novels, *The Tree of Man* and *Voss*, there is evidence to suggest that White reaches the end of his quest with *TM* representing the act of culmination and *Voss* the act of consolidation. Landscape is again variously used in these novels as the means through which the main characters' sense of disharmony, their responses, growth and fulfilment are measured or achieved.

In *HV* the landscape is represented as harsh and inhospitable, a sterile backdrop to the alienation and frustration that pervades the characters' lives. Throughout there is a sense of great disharmony between the characters themselves and this disharmony is enacted in a natural world that seems to function independently of man. Only Oliver Halliday appears to even consider the possibility that the landscape can provide some point of reference to life, but this consideration is subliminal.

*HV* was written in England, and Patrick White was only twenty-seven when it was published. In many ways it displays a kind of cynicism towards Australia that suggests its author was engaged in a serious flirtation with the possibility of becoming an expatriate. White endeavoured to withdraw the book from publication, though, which may also indicate a change of heart, but there is no evidence to support these speculations. *LD*, however, seems to add weight to the former suggestion since it is set entirely in England as though White were seeking a sense of place in London's urban landscape. This landscape is presented as a series of almost disconnected images, many of which represent interiors, together with references to city noise and faceless crowds of people. These are indicators that Elyot and Eden Standish have the potential to gain some degree of spiritual nourishment from the natural landscape, to which they were evacuated during the Blitz. It is only Elyot, however, who seems destined at the end to pursue some scheme of self-fulfilment. Once again this second novel represents only a premature step in the depiction of self-fulfilment, as the author remarks:

The war forced out prematurely a book which should have remained several more years in my head. Because the times were disjointed, my personal life unsatisfactory, and the future totally unpredictable, I have never liked *The Living and the Dead*. Perhaps it should not have been written (*FG*, p.77).

Perhaps the first significant step towards fulfilment, both for the author and his characters, can be seen in *AS*, where the return to an Australian setting in Part One of the novel hints a rekindled interest in that landscape. Although Meroë, the country around Theodora Goodman's home, is portrayed in the somewhat forbidding colours of black and yellow, there is no apparent sense of disharmony between this character and the landscape. Indeed, Theodora seems to be at one with nature in a way that her predecessors cannot be. This unity with the natural world is not, however, destined to last, for Theodora leaves Australia in middle age and never physically returns. Confronted by the alien and apparently unresponsive landscape of Europe, the fabric of
Theodora's always precarious sense of self gradually disintegrates until in America she experiences an almost total collapse. It is only in apparent madness that Theodora can re-establish something of her earlier intimacy with the landscape of Meroë and so, through delusion, partially recapture the essence of her former self.

In AS it is as though Patrick White is attempting to compare the landscape of Europe and Australia in order to make a final choice between them. Since he completed this novel on his way back to Australia it is clear what choice he made. By the last pages of AS a clear progression of attitudes towards nature or landscape has emerged. White has moved from an alienated perspective in HV, to a strangely unified perception of the natural world in AS, where the main character can so identify with the country as to be almost in a state of physical harmony with it. Neither of these views of rural Australia is realistic, however, for land is neither friend nor foe. White seems to appreciate this fact, because he significantly continues to portray the natural environment in TM principally as a place in which one simply lives. That it also assumes symbolic importance as the novel progresses is a signal of a slight shift in the author's preoccupations, as he begins to pursue the meaning of life through a spiritual dimension.

TM marks the turning point of White's life where he comes to accept Australia as his home. It is a positive turning point in other ways also, as the author remarks:

If I say I had no religious tendencies between adolescence and The Tree of Man, it's because I was sufficiently vain and egotistical to feel one can ignore certain realities. (I think the turning-point came during a season of unending rain at Castle Hill when I fell flat on my back one day in the mud and started cursing a God I had convinced myself didn't exist. My personal scheme of things till then at once seemed too foolish to continue holding.)

This renewed acceptance of a personal God is interpreted in the novel by the culmination of Stan Parker's search for meaning. As an old man, Stan comes to realize that God is in all the world and God's presence is affirmed by even the smallest of creatures. Stan's sense of place and belonging is symbolically portrayed by the circle of trees around his home. Here White is recording the essence of his own faith and sense of harmony with his country. We are at one with God, he seems to be saying, when we can accept the landscape in which we live and the endless cycle of natural life. Death must follow birth in the interest of regeneration and it is this that Stan comes to see at the end of a life spent on the land.

There is a sense of wholeness in TM that Theodora Goodman, of AS, only begins to appreciate when in a state of madness. In terms of the author's life, this would seem

to suggest that he experienced a particularly turbulent state of mind prior to deciding to return to Australia. That this turbulence ceased, once he had settled at Castle Hill, is apparent by the ease with which Stan Parker of *TM* functions in his relationship with the landscape. From this it can be concluded that White finally, at this point, reached a stage of reconciliation with Australia and with his god. The landscape imagery in *Voss* suggests that White's intention here is to draw together a variety of responses towards and perceptions of the natural world. Many of the dimensions of this novel relate to previous works, as if the whole of *Voss* was a synthesis of former thoughts and feelings that are being reviewed for the purposes of reaffirmation. It is as though, having made a significant personal decision, White is seeking some evidence that this decision is right for him.

The last observation is equally pertinent on the spiritual or religious level as on that of landscape, for the attitudes of various characters towards God's place in their lives also come under review. For this reason *Voss* is in many ways the most complex of the five novels to be discussed in this study. Landscape features most dramatically in *Voss*, since this novel is based on the theme of exploration of the Australian continent. But it is the exploration of the inner continent of the human mind, as it searches for self-affirmation, that features predominantly. Consequently, it is this aspect of the novel that will be emphasized, with reference to landscape being made as the means by which the psychological and spiritual quest can be assessed.

This approach suggests itself because of the nature of the novel and its perceived purpose. *Voss* is a novel that places its principal protagonist in direct confrontation with God and the natural world. The character Voss is a German Romantic whose notion of man's place in nature hinges on the belief that it is man who must ultimately dictate to nature, and not the other way round. Voss strives to open up the heart of the Australian continent to man's exploitation because for him the natural landscape is made most meaningful when it bears the marks of established human presence. He is also testing his will power to its limits and his reasons for this are based on his perception of the human being's relationship with God. He believes that neither atheism nor the willingness to worship God is a true reflection of man's ordained place in things, since man is the natural heir to the world, if not God Himself.

Such a plot as this might be termed a statement of intent, for in Western terms, at least, the man who would be God is destined for defeat. Similarly, one who seeks to deny God solely on the basis of intellectual assertion will also come to grief. By creating the character of Laura Trevelyon, White seeks to challenge the assumption that through the exercise of intelligence alone life can be rendered meaningful, and by creating that of Voss, he strives to reaffirm the innate limitations of us all. One of the statements of this
book, therefore, seems to be that man is not God, nor is he above God and this is emphasized by the penalty the landscape comes to exact from Voss. Equally nature asserts itself over Laura Trevelyan, through a combination of her passion for Voss, which is greater than her intellectual capacity to control it, and a period of physical debility.

In terms of landscape and attitudes to landscape, the main objective seems to be that both Voss and Laura must come to terms with it in the end. This will not be an easy process for either of them, however, since both are ambivalent in their responses to the world around them. This ambivalence is illustrated by the manner in which White portrays the landscape in relation to his characters, generally, as a place where they can both derive spiritual nourishment and meet physical death. It is also a thing to be repelled by, attracted to or feel indifferent towards, on a level that is only touched upon in the previous novels. Laura’s initial alienation from the Australian countryside is reminiscent of Alys Browne’s response in HV, though, and her gradual progression towards the state of accepting the landscape in many ways reflects the change in treatment White accords the natural world in these novels. It is as a functionary of God, however, that the landscape operates most actively in this novel, for it is through “its responses” that Voss is destined to be brought to an understanding of the relationship between man and God, and nature and man, at the end of his life. In Voss the natural world presents physical, psychological and spiritual challenges to the characters in a very active way and White has never treated the landscape in quite this manner before. This treatment is suggestive of the author’s ability to accept his country wholly in a way he has never quite accepted it before. It is for this reason that Voss stands out. In a strange way, it is the final punctuation mark at the end of a lengthy, private discourse. White is home at last, and he is at home in full awareness of the terms in which he is accepted there: terms imposed by his country and not by himself.

Because of the religious aspect of Voss, this novel is particularly intriguing for people whose cultural and religious background provides them with a vision of the world which is very different from that which seems to be held by those of European origin. In addition, the attitudes towards nature that White explores in all five novels are fascinating, as the Australian landscape itself is fascinating.

The impact of Australia as a topographical entity on an individual whose experiences of landscapes are confined to an appreciation of the more populated Asiatic or European regions of the world, is stunning. It is through such personal responses that White’s dilemmas, in relation to his identity and his feelings of alienation towards Australia, are perceived.

Consequently, a study of Patrick White’s novels, particularly as they appear so
intimately to reflect their author's conscious struggles to come to terms with his national identity, proves to be both intensely challenging and rewarding. It is challenging to experience, through White, the progressive evolution of the dilemma of alienation or estrangement from one's own country, because it is from such experiences that insights into this dimension of the human condition can be gained. To have to struggle to come to terms with one's country is to have to struggle with oneself as well, and it is through the conflict with self that reconciliation is reached. Perhaps that is what Emerson meant when he spoke of "songs of praise".
CHAPTER 2
HAPPY VALLEY AND THE LIVING AND THE DEAD: ALIENATED CHARACTERS

The relation of man to his natural environment is the major theme of Patrick White's first five novels. Throughout these books, White develops the view that spiritual fulfilment can be reached by coming to terms with one's homeland and its landscape.

_Happy Valley_ examines the alienation of the novel's characters from the landscape that surrounds them. Most of the inhabitants of this fictional landscape are failures in their attempts to settle into Happy Valley. Seeking after a better life, they desire to escape to somewhere else, but they never implement their plan. They are trapped in Happy Valley, merely existing from day to day, without any real prospect for fulfilment in their future lives. They do not "see" anything significant in the landscape and they fail to derive any spiritual meaning from it. As a result they are dissatisfied with their lives. In order to illustrate the state of mind of the characters who live in Happy Valley, the author uses the landscape in a symbolic way: it is as its inhabitants fail to come to terms with it that the valley is depicted as being a harsh and inhospitable place.

Conversely, the setting of _The Living and the Dead_ is completely unrelated to the Australian landscape. It deals instead with English society, and in particular with the decay of the intellectual middle classes. The main characters display their rootlessness by a perpetual struggle for fulfilment in life. They do not reach any concrete resolution at the end of the novel, being blocked within the desolate city, nor are they given any chance to open their eyes to the natural environment and discover serenity in it. Indeed, their sterile states of mind are also symbolically portrayed by the wasteland of London during the war.

The recurring motif of _HV_ is escapism. This theme is developed by continual references to the landscape and this, together with the rejection of an Australian setting in _LD_, shows something of the author's problem in relation to Australia. White's first two novels were written overseas, and one senses that, given his later development, he had not yet evolved a particular set of philosophical ideas at this stage. He appears to have been struggling to set himself free from some negative forces which ruled his life.
and in so doing seems to have decided to divorce himself from any entirely realistic image of Australia. Only in his later novels does one feel that he has found a new courage with which he, as an artist and a human being, can confront the land of his birth and acknowledge his spiritual commitment to it.

The name of the town, "Happy Valley", is perhaps in part an allusion to Johnson's "happy valley" in Rasselas. Both writers are concerned with depicting fundamental states of human life, and hence their valleys are not intended to be realistic portraits of nature. In Rasselas, for example, the valley is depicted as a kind of Eden where the Serpent "boredom" is kept at bay by the generosity of its "emperour" and the inventive notions of its inhabitants:

The valley, wide and fruitful, supplied its inhabitants with the necessaries of life, and all delights and superfluities were added at the annual visit which the emperour paid his children, when the iron gate was opened to the sound of musick; and during eight days every one that resided in the valley was required to propose whatever might contribute to make seclusion pleasant, to fill up the vacancies of attention, and lessen the tediousness of time. 1

Johnson's theme is really that man's continuing dissatisfaction emanates from the lack of challenge in life and is the root of his unhappiness. 2 In his depiction of "the happy valley" Johnson creates the "perfect" environment for human life, but the fantastic, artificial nature of his Utopian setting is directly contrasted with the impossibility of attaining human fulfilment within it. The story tells us, in fact, that perfect external surroundings are not enough to guarantee happiness.

Although the concept of Patrick White's Happy Valley has some basis in reality -- the setting of the novel is reminiscent of a bleak station at Adaminaby, where White spent his time as a jackeroo -- the Valley is "unreal, removing itself into a world of allegory, of which the dominating motif [is] pain". 3 It is not depicted in realistic fashion:

Happy Valley extends more or less from Moorang to Kambala, where originally there was gold, and it received its name from the men who came in search of gold, the prospectors who left the train at Moorang and rode out with small equipment and a fund of expectation. They called the place Happy Valley, sometimes with affection, more often in irony. But in time, when the gold at Kambala was exhausted, the name applied, precisely speaking, more to the township than to the valley itself. It is here that we have left the hawk coasting above the grey streets. There is not much activity in the streets. They are silent and not very prepossessing in their grey slush (pp.9-10).

2. Ibid., p.27.
3. Patrick White, *Happy Valley* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1939), p.77. All further references to this work are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text after the quotations.
Happy Valley is a deserted town. There is no prosperity and no apparent possibility of any in the future. The town was more appropriately called "Happy Valley" long ago when there was gold in that area -- but all the good things finished, and the fruitful seasons of the place have gone. The town is now dead. The depiction of the landscape only emphasizes this feature of the town and its inhabitants: "At Happy Valley man was by inclination static .... Because there you will find that static quality I'm trying to suggest, I mean, the trousers hanging on, but only just" (p.115). The people "just live" without any design for the "unconscious ... but more unavoidable" (p.29) future, they eat and sleep and dust and cook and hang out the washing on Monday morning (p.29). Nothing happens beyond the daily routine.

The seasonal cycle affects the town and its inhabitants too. There are two dominant seasons, winter and summer. Winter at Happy Valley is extremely cold and harsh; the town is completely trapped by heavy snow and the inhabitants lose the means of communication with one another. Therefore they do not co-operate: "... the people existed in spite of each other" (p.28). They are also cut off from the world outside because of the snow:

There is a general air of hibernation, of life suspended under the snow. Literally under, for in the winter the people of Kambala communicate with each other by channels or even tunnels carved through the snow. You seldom see any more than a streamer of smoke waving weakly from the arm of an iron chimney-pot or the eyelid of an eaves raised cautiously out of the snow (p.10). This atmosphere of "hibernation" in Happy Valley is a permanent influence on the inhabitants' state of mind. As Oliver Halliday conceives it, "[o]ver everything there [is] a hot air of dormant passion" (p.19). During the winter, the people are inactive "under" the snow and "the country [sleeps], inwardly intent on some secret war of passion ..." (p.28). All the characters passively contemplate escape: Oliver wants to get away from Hilda and grasp what he considers to be real life; Hilda wants to go to Queensland for a better life; Alys Browne would like to go to California for something different; Vic Moriarty wishes that her husband, Ernest, could get another job so they could both leave. However, nothing happens; the inhabitants endure the winter, repressing their desires and life at Happy Valley is suspended in the snow.

When spring comes and the frost begins to thaw, "the face" of Happy Valley is rapidly "seen through dust, those dust waves churned by a car passing down the main street" (p.116). Spring quickly passes: "... a transitory humour or exhalation that dried and evaporated, disappeared with the barley grass and the weaned lamb" (p.116). Even though the snow thaws, the behaviour of the inhabitants shows that they are not in harmony with the rhythm of the earth:

But all this was incidental, you felt, there was no reciprocation on the part of man, almost no connection with the earth, or else it took longer for the
corresponding tendency to penetrate and touch the instincts with which he is endowed (p.115).

The people merely "get by" in a perpetual state of psychological and spiritual sleep, having lost any significant contact with the cycle of nature.

Summer follows, as long and harsh as winter. The people suffer from the heat: "... it is miserable here in summer, that hot wind beating against the gauze with the hum of flies, and the dead bodies of flies bloated and obscene upon the window-sill" (p.117). The atmosphere is permeated with death and desolation; the town is seen as "a scab":

In summer when the slopes were a scurfy yellow and the body of the earth was very hot, lying there stretched out, the town, with its cottages of red and brown weatherboard, reminded you of an ugly scab somewhere on the body of the earth. It was so ephemeral. Some day it would drop off, leaving a pink, clean place underneath (p.28).

Summer is, however, the season when people who have been hibernating begin to move more, even if only, on the physical level. Consequently, Oliver Halliday and Alys Browne begin to express their love for one another as their concealed emotions come to the surface and Clem Hagan, who comes from New England, stirs up the dormant people of Happy Valley by having an affair with Vic Moriarty. However, this explosion of passion, which has been asleep during the winter, does not produce any positive result. The eruption does not throw up any new fertile volcanic soil -- no pink "flesh" is revealed underneath the "scab" and the possibilities for the future are not changed in any way:

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 (p.116).

Summer ends, having brought no growth or change. None of the people who desire to escape from Happy Valley are successful.

Autumn, like spring, is only a short period which exists as a preparation for winter, merely a pause which "[y]ou hardly [take] into account" (p.186). Winter comes and the town is once again dormant even after this unusual explosion of summer: "That sweep of the hill behind the town that had shimmered all summer was now static ..." (p.186). What life there had been in the passionate "eruptions" of summer is now gone and the town itself stands "high and dry, the landscape dead, removed" (p.291).
Thus, human life does not proceed in strict accordance with the progress of the seasonal cycle, there is no sense of human regeneration in Happy Valley, even though the natural world renews itself:

... one of the most noticeable features of Happy Valley was its apparent remoteness from the human element, or perhaps an ironical half-recognition, laying a trap in the shape of its own activities and then letting things slide (p.219).

The sterile and static portrayal of the town and its almost malignant, desolate setting is directly proportionate to the state of mind of Happy Valley’s inhabitants.

The characters are completely trapped by Happy Valley, they never find a way to escape from it and show "no sign of acceptance or of rejection", in fact "it [is] as if a surfeit of pain had effected, to its own loss, a kind of anaesthesia" (p.122) in them. They fail to find comfort in their natural surroundings because they are always contemplating a life somewhere else, and consequently they live for each day with no real thought of the future.

This atmosphere of sterility is established in the first scene of the novel in which Mrs Chalker bears a stillborn child:

The child was born dead. It was a red, motionless phenomenon that he picked up and handed to Mrs Steele, waiting to receive it in a folded towel .... You felt that Dr Halliday was responsible for the stillborn child (p.13).

Dr Oliver Halliday is depicted as a searcher in this novel, but he reveals himself to be a failure even at the beginning because he is unable to help Mrs Chalker deliver her baby. This feeling is illustrated by White with the following reference to landscape:

At the end of the tunnel the valley widened out into a long sweep of snow. He slid off on his skis, his bag, fastened with a cord, bumping against his back. How the air cut. It shaved the flesh off your face. It made you feel lean, leaner, almost non-existent, as you arrived with a rush at the bottom of the slope. He was a little out of breath, for physically he was thirty-four. But it did not feel like that, feel like anything (p.16).

His sense of failure reminds him of his thwarted ambitions to write poems or plays in his youth, when he was naïve enough to imagine "he could do anything" (p.16), and this memory forces him to acknowledge that he still hankers for something beyond the day-to-day facts of his life, something ambiguous. Thus he sees himself as "a kind of machine for doing [everything] altogether material" (p.123).

Oliver desires to become more than his social rôles dictate, and he struggles inside the "shell" (p.293), which White suggests forms a barrier between his spiritual life and his material existence. Feeling impotent, pursuing "an aura round the figure", he has no real contact with "empirical reality" (p.123). Indeed he is so alienated from the town of Happy Valley, he is not aware that he may find some spiritual consolation in the natural world around him.
Oliver, like White himself, had spent a little time in Europe, having participated in the War, but when he returned to Australia he found that "there was nothing there. Life was a toy, you rattle it" (p.19). Now, in Happy Valley, he is puzzled by the dormant atmosphere within the town and it is something he never comes to terms with, just as he cannot come to terms with the creative impulse that is within him. Again White uses landscape as the means of communicating Halliday’s frustrations:

A great boulder of black rock rose nakedly at the end of the whitened road. He stopped and kicked at it with his ski. The tangible. There is a stubborn, bitter ring if you kick at a piece of black rock (p.20).

Oliver does not fully understand the significance of "a great boulder of a black rock" save to see it as "something tangible". He does not realize that even this object has a place in the wider meaning of life and his failure to do so is commensurate with his failure to reach an understanding of his own spiritual desires. He tells himself that he does not write poems or plays because he does not know on what theme to write them; he does not see that Life itself is all the theme he needs; he simply feels trapped by his environment.

Oliver is not only trapped by Happy Valley but also by his own family life. His marriage to Hilda is unsatisfactory, for soon after their wedding he realized that he could not communicate with her. Thus he wants to escape even from his marriage, but he feels he cannot leave Hilda because of his fondness for her. Oliver is not strong enough to "grope behind the fondness and bring out something else" (p.73), and opts rather for something "passive and taken-for-granted" (p.73). Oliver and Hilda live together "like strangers standing on the railway station for the train to go" (p.78). They can never catch the same train, never reach the same destination. In this, their alienated relationship effectively foreshadows White's play *Signal Driver* (1983) in which a couple wait for the bus but never catch it.

Hilda Halliday is not portrayed as a searcher. For her, the most important thing in life is security, a feeling she gains only from tangible things. Having married, in the first place, only to protect herself within the framework of marriage, she is not looking for a profound relationship with Oliver. She merely clings on to him as his wife, but not as Hilda the individual. While Hilda’s life effectively comprises playing the rôles of wife and mother, rôles that satisfy her, Oliver still attempts to live as Oliver Halliday, at the age of sixteen (p.19), and continues to pursue his ideals:

Nothing could jostle a theory, it was cut and dried. Then you lost the labels in time, and you started again, or tried to start, and it was a case of order out of chaos, and you wanted to tip the whole lot overboard, only that was impossible, because Hilda and Rodney and George clung to the fragments ...

(p.74).

There is no communication between Hilda and Oliver. Hilda avoids knowing the real
meaning of life, which might be sought beyond the day-to-day realities and which Oliver basically yearns for, but:

Hilda tried not to see this, or would not, was afraid to see. She built herself a raft of superficialities and floated down the stream. She tried to drag him on to her raft, and when he almost upset it she did not complain (p.74).

Hilda wants to float with Oliver, on her raft, on the surface of the "river" of their married life, but does not want to dive deep into its waters. Oliver refuses to be dragged aboard. Therefore, though Oliver seeks the company of Alys Browne, Hilda closes her eyes to the fact since it might be the cause of the breaking of her marriage. In this way she avoids the truth in order to protect her security.

When Oliver meets Alys Browne, he is aroused from a kind of spiritual dormancy. Through Alys's piano playing he experiences a profound feeling, which Hilda has never inspired -- "love in the sense that Chopin or Schumann implies" (p.120). Alys's music leads Oliver to discover that he has deeper needs, and this almost enables him to break through his "shell". Through the music, he feels closer to something "universal in its tone" (p.127), and this feeling enables the two to reach a deeper understanding of what they want, though they do not communicate this thought to one another because "there [seem] no words in which to express compassion for a human being with whom you [are] in a close relationship" (p.78); they communicate instead through music.

Music is used by White repeatedly, both in this and later novels, as a vehicle for spiritual communication because he seems to feel that it can impart the meanings that written and spoken language cannot adequately convey. Alys’s music is related to what Schopenhauer asserted to be the function of music, that it acts directly upon the will, i.e. the feelings, passions, and emotions of the hearer, so that it quickly raises them or changes them, may be explained from the fact that, unlike all the other arts, it does not express the ideas, or grades of the objectification of the will, but directly the will itself.

It is landscape, however, which is the author’s main symbolic tool in this novel, though he is perhaps, at this point in his development as a novelist, less confident in his use of landscape as a means of deeper communication. For example, in AS, Theodora Goodman obtains spiritual consolation from the landscape of her home and shares her feeling with her father, though, of course, they do not use words in their communication; they walk in the paddock in silence. Later, Theodora has a similar spiritual experience.

4. In HV, Chuffy Chambers is a player of an accordion as Alys Browne is a player of a piano; in LD, Wally Collins is a player of a saxophone; in AS, Moraitis is a Greek cellist. These characters are allowed to convey something significant, which is unable to be expressed explicitly.

as the result of hearing the music of the Greek cellist Moraitis. In this case, music functions as the means whereby Theodora's mind is returned, by reflection, to her home at Meroë (AS, p.116), which is identified with Greece as the country of bones (AS, p.112). In TM, White appears to be fully in command of the symbolism with which he can express his moments of awakening or enlightenment. Hence, Stan Parker is clearly seen to achieve peace of mind, at the end of his life, by his acceptance of the natural environment, but then Stan had no desire to leave his land. Thus he can come to terms with the universe, through his natural surroundings, because he feels at home in them. Because of his sense of harmony with the land, Stan discovers "poetry" within him, which is similar to the feeling of being attuned to life which Oliver captures from Alys's music.

Aroused by this music, Oliver recognizes his love for Alys, which is an expression of his "will itself":

And Alys was up there, he loved her, he wanted her, there was something strong and productive about loving Alys. Loving Alys was not just existing, it made him believe in something more.

It began to grow hot in the cold room. His thoughts were hot, his head. Flapping its soft, plushy wings, that moth beat up against the lamp, pressing out of a dark sea towards a yellow island of light. Alys stood in a circle of light, the wave beat, the shore crumbled musically (p.201).

Alys, who stands "in the circle of light", symbolizes Oliver's productive future and he attempts to reach her -- the heart of a yellow island of light in the sea. Oliver is here compared to a moth that, drawn by light from the sea of surrounding darkness, could face its own extinction. He is at once attracted to Alys, by her music, and afraid of this attraction because he equates it with moral collapse:

It was wrong to love Alys. It was rotten and disintegrating, his love for her, and he was making her part of his own moral collapse (p.202).

Since it is spiritual fulfilment that Oliver really desires, a fulfilment which he equates with Alys, it is inevitable that he eventually overcomes his "crisis of conscience" in order to pursue his dream. Consequently, he waits until Hilda is asleep and goes to visit Alys, but his mind is still confused. In this scene, White uses the symbolic combination of both sleep and the landscape to show the difficulties that spiritual awakening can bring:

You go up on to a high hill and look down at them asleep .... Hilda stirring in sleep. I had forgotten Hilda. Of course. He began to fill his pipe. I ought to feel sorry, but there is no regret, which is perhaps a perversion of the moral sense, if finding yourself is a perversion, because this is what I have done (p.165).

Oliver can see Alys Browne waiting for him up the hill, but down the hill, Hilda is "stirring in sleep". He cannot make up his mind which direction he should go,
wandering back and forth between Alys and Hilda, up and down the hill. Thus, Oliver’s awakening is merely theoretical, whilst he can see that he has always somehow been "asleep", his movement towards spiritual enlightenment is limited by a confused sense of responsibility to his family. Eventually he decides not to see Alys, and walks back down the hill:

I am being apocalyptic, or just plain romantic, he said. He went along and he did not think of much, he was tired, physically tired, but his mind was without qualm, rested on its certainty. The glow of his pipe went down the hill alone (p.166).

The image of a hill reappears in the later novels. For example, Theodora Goodman climbs one in order to acknowledge the dichotomy of life with the assistance of her imaginary mentor, Holstius (AS, p.284), and, in Voss, Frank Le Mesurier also ascends a hill during a storm in order to put his spirituality to the test (Voss, p.248). This image of a hill, in White's treatment of it, is a symbol of aspiration to higher levels of understanding.

Oliver is unable to climb the hill just as he is unable to reach any significant level of higher understanding. He admits that there is the possibility of a productive and meaningful life if he goes away with Alys, but he does not have any realistic design for the future; he is afraid of the unknown future but he is still desperate to escape the known:

He did not think of consequences now. The future was America, not what you would do, not the carefully docketed plans of people living in houses. He did not want to think like this. He only wanted to get away (p.239).

Oliver's view of his future life is rather negative, he yearns simply to get away from Happy Valley, from his family, from the daily life made up of its "accumulation of habit" (p.293). There is a vague prospect of a better life in America -- Patrick White seems to use "America" as a symbol of hope6 -- but Oliver does not have the strength of will to grasp it. He does not know where he really wants to go: "The signpost pointed nowhere, not Moorang, not to Kambala, because in the half-light these have grown purposeless" (p.239).

Ultimately, Oliver and Alys attempt to make an escape from Happy Valley only to be stopped by the discovery of Ernest Moriarty, dead on the road. Although Oliver has waited all his life for this moment of escape, the discovery of Moriarty changes him immediately. He ceases to be Oliver Halliday, the man, and becomes instead Oliver

---

6. In AS, Theodora Goodman goes to the United States in Part Three. Here America also functions as a symbol of hope, perhaps reflecting White's personal experience of staying in the United States during the War.
Halliday, the doctor. He decides to turn back because "you do not escape from Happy Valley like this" (p.275). Thus even in the grip of "stray impossible thoughts" the reality of life in Happy Valley intrudes. As he proceeds, with the body of Moriarty, back to the town he sees images of his life, with all its difficulties:

Then it began to come back, the situation in which he stood, he and Alys and Hilda and the Moriartys linked in this frail wooden house. Our bodies similar to these, though moving still, the same passions, the fears, of face that said, Ernest must write to the Board, she said, Ernest must escape, because I love my wife, poor Vic, what she puts up with, doctor, before the needle plunged and the face relaxed in temporary peace. Peace out of chaos, out of Happy Valley, we must look for this, we must go to Queensland, Hilda said, because Happy Valley is pain and the kind of irrational impulse on which the Moriartys have come to grief (p.277).

In this novel, Ernest Moriarty, a school master, is the embodiment of the pain and frustration of Happy Valley (p.122). He not only suffers from asthma but is also a failure in his job. For example, he falls asleep in class and is afraid of the children. Neither he nor his wife, Vic, have ever been happy in the valley:

The day they came Vic said, so this is Happy Valley, she said, I don't know why you've brought me here. He sat at the table and clenched his hands till they went knuckle-white (p.176).

As time proceeds, however, Ernest's frustration and pain grew until he begins to feel that he is already dead:

To-morrow was going home. To-morrow was to-morrow was Shakespeare was. The trees were dead, those grey trees at the turn, and the wind clattering in a dead branch, sitting at a desk a dead branch tapping on the desk tap tap (p.175).

Ernest wants to escape from Happy Valley with his wife, who also shares this desire. However, Vic has an affair with Clem Hagan, a man from New England, which is perhaps, for her, the same thing as actual escape, though this affair effectively leads to her death and also that of Ernest. At the end of his life, Ernest thus becomes nothing, except perhaps the "slow darkness" (p.273). He has lived his life in Happy Valley without discovering the light of meaning and in the end he dies as much for that as anything. He is, in this, a manifestation of the general pointlessness of life in Happy Valley and can escape this painful life solely through death: "... you cannot cast off the shell the ways and customs, except in death ..." (p.278). To Oliver the tragic death of Moriarty merely underlines his own insignificance for he feels that by dying Moriarty has achieved more than he, Oliver, is capable of:

7. Oliver's attitude towards life is in stark contrast to that of Theodora, who travels to Europe and America in search of her identity, and ultimately finds solace in the landscape of the Mid-Western United States.
Moriarty walking out along the road from Happy Valley and falling dead, this
automaton, was no more automaton than, only you did not fall dead, you
stopped short, returned to the inevitable starting-point. You did not escape
from Happy Valley like this (p.275).

After his return to Hilda and his home Oliver reflects upon this sense of failure:

Oliver Halliday saw from his window the desolate line of the hills, jagged in the
higher reaches, then falling to a slow curve, describing the course of a fever ...
(p.291).

His aspirations towards self-fulfilment, uplifted by his relationship with Alys, thus begin
to decline before the reality of the world around him. This process is indicated by
reference to the rise and fall of the hills that surround the town of Happy Valley, whose
shapes Oliver equates with a fever chart.

The conclusion of the novel is pessimistic for Oliver. He retreats from a
confrontation with the possibility of a life with Alys. Consequently, both his love for her
and his hope of a more fulfilled life die off just as "[t]he flame of the candle [sinks] in its
pool" (pp.277-278). He is too weak to resolve anything (p.293), and at this point
surrenders himself to life and lets it bear him along: "... a feeble creature dictated by
whatever you like, we'll call it an irrational force" (p.294). He realizes that there is a
"mystery of unity about the world, that ignores itself ..." (p.166) and believing that
neither she nor the world can control this mystery, he yields to what he perceives to be
his inevitable fate, and becomes "... a creature of cleavage and pain walking with [his]
eyes closed" (p.166). His return to Hilda is therefore nothing but the evidence of his
surrender to the inevitable. He decides to leave Happy Valley with his wife and two
children, having given up the spiritual potentialities of his love for Alys, but it is almost
certainly incorrect to assume that "Hilda and Oliver are reconciled after Moriarty's
death, and a genuine affection is established between them" as Morley remarks.8 There
is no real reconciliation in the personal sense, only a feeling of resignation.

Oliver's capacity for spiritual suffering, to which the lines of the epigraph are
relevant --

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.9

-- is somewhat limited, as John Colmer argues: "... his last vision is neither as
substantial nor as impressive as it is clearly meant to be".10 Nevertheless, Oliver's

8. Patricia A. Morley, The Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick
suspicion of "the mystery of unity about the world" can be seen as a forerunner of Stan Parker's discovery at the end of his life: Stan perceives harmony and unity in "the natural world", but not in "the world beyond". Oliver never reaches this stage, however, for even at the end, when he leaves Happy Valley with his wife and two sons, he does so only in the spirit of resignation. This would seem to indicate that the message here is that fulfilment can only come from the acceptance of one's life and this discovery leads to a kind of elation:

Perfection is never destroyed. I would like to thank you in more than words for all these weeks of happiness, for all you have helped me to see and feel. My darling, I could never thank you for this (p.294).

Oliver here remains unfulfilled but he has learned to live for what he has and this knowledge he owes to Alys.

Alys Browne, like Oliver Halliday, might also be considered a searcher, who is destined to find fulfilment. Though she has the potential to grasp it, she is not sufficiently active to do so. Her aspiration towards a meaningful life is really dormant.

Compared to Hilda Halliday, who never communicates with her husband, Alys has a depth of character to which Oliver is attracted. She lives independently and gives piano lessons to the children, as well as making dresses for the girls. She is strongly individualistic and has her own opinions, though she does not have the opportunity to share them (p.38). She lives in Happy Valley because that is where she originated and because her father left her "[s]ome acres of land near Kambala and a weatherboard house" (p.41). She does not really want to be there, but stays because "[i]t had settled itself, this going back to Happy Valley, she did not know exactly why" (p.41). Thus her life, like those of all the other residents in Happy Valley, becomes a thing dominated by the seasons:

The shadows were longer on the road as she turned up towards her house. It was still sunny and hot, but with that quietness which anticipates the decline of the sun, and there was a brassy sheen on everything. In summer when your sense of perception has been numbed all day by the light and the heat, and you have sunk down into a blurred world, of which the reality is less actual than your own, because you have constructed something in desperation in which to take refuge with yourself, you first become aware again in this softer but still florid light, you discover in the external its proportionate significance (pp.132-133).

In summer the people in Happy Valley have to escape from their actual life into "a blurred world" because of the harshness of "the light and the heat". Alys constructs her own world, as if she were "looking through a gauze all day". She is sufficient unto herself, comfortable in her shell. She reads a lot of books; poetry, particularly Tennyson (p.39), as well as Russian novels (p.43). She has a natural inclination towards intellectual preoccupations, going "on and on into a mental twilight and a finale of original chords" (p.43).
These intellectual preoccupations or pretensions are perhaps manifestations of Alys's reluctance to fully accept her self and her place in things. This is further exemplified by her decision to change her name from Alice to "Alys". She does this to be different and clearly she has always been playing the rôle of "Alys", instead of being her original self, though now "only the name 'Alys' remained, had become a habit, she really did not know why. It was on a little brass tablet at her front gate, ALYS BROWNE, PIANO-FORTE" (p.40).

Alys, by the time White introduces her to the reader, has become a type of person who is "looked through in the dispensary and seen as nothing worth noticing" because "[h]er life is if anything an under-statement of the fact, a system of delicate, and undoubtedly unconscious, indirect implication" (p.119). However, when she meets Oliver, the "gauze" through which she has been watching the world falls away. Subsequently, her previous desire to escape from Happy Valley and to go to California immediately becomes a thing for which she can now realistically hope; she could never have gone alone. Until then her life had been a straight process, a thing haunted by feelings of anticipation:

... she always seemed to be on her way between two points, or waiting, she waited much more than in the past, though now with a sense of fulfilment in waiting, as if it were some end in itself (p.131).

Unable to commit herself to the active pursuit of fulfilment she passively prepares to hand her life over to Oliver.

Feeling that she has come to "the start of something positive" (p.132), Alys and Oliver plan to run away together and to go somewhere where "there are no labels ..." (p.264), and in this way hope to find themselves. With Oliver, Alys feels free to confront the reality of her life and to embrace the possibility of fulfilment. Alys is not able to go to America, the place to which she yearns to go, however, because Oliver chooses to forsake his dreams and returns to Hilda. In the end, therefore, waiting becomes part of "the design or the purpose" of Alys's life. Uninvolved in the emotional eruptions of Happy Valley throughout the novel, she returns to the routine of daily life after she breaks up with Oliver, as if nothing had happened. Thus, incapable of truly flowing with events in the town she remains inactive and uninvolved and as simply Alys Browne: "... the negative coefficient, cancelled out to provide what, for Happy Valley, is

11. Patrick White often uses this analogy, of the change of name, as a means of illustrating his characters' reluctance to be themselves and their failure to come to terms with reality. For example: Mrs Standish (LD) changes her name from Kitty to Catherine when she gets married; Theodora Goodman (AS) changes to Miss Pilkington in America; Thelma Parker (TM) changes her first name to Christine after she marries Mr Forsdyke. By changing their names, Mrs Standish and Thelma deny their identity, but Theodora transcends her identity to become "nothing more than air or water").
the solved equation" (p.296). Remaining in the same situation, neither being destroyed nor improved, "She could not move, she would never move out of the shackles of the present moment, she could not even unclasp her hands" (p.275). She is in essence "a core of reality in Happy Valley" (p.191) and as such is simply stagnant, as stagnant as the town itself.

Alys's passive acceptance of life is rather like Oliver's and her situation might be seen as a precursor of Stan Parker's in TM, but unlike Stan, Alys is not reconciled to her homeland. She is trapped and can neither escape nor come to terms with life at home:

... outside the hills were grey, and the plain, they pressed in, just pressing quietly with a gentle, slow pressure, until her hands clenched, and she longed almost for some form of eruption rather than this grey, still pressure of the hills .... Then there was a storm of rain, at night, beating on the iron roof, with the wind, a black chaos. I am alone in this house, she said. It was a statement almost without emotion, either self-pity or fear, that she heard come back in the beat of the rain (p.318).

While existing in Happy Valley, she mentally rejects it and continues to dream of her plan to escape, which she does not, of course, implement.

Compared to Alys, Stan in TM reaches a much higher level of unity with his surroundings, as is indicated by the symbolic circle in the centre of which he is seated just before he dies (TM, p.474). Although P.R. Beatson argues that "Alys resolves her problem in almost Buddhist terms, finding contentment through contemplation of the still pool of life", it would seem, rather, that she has not resolved her problem at all, she has never felt fulfilled with the life at Happy Valley and there is no indication that she ever will.

The theme of rejecting one's environment is emphasized in HV in that Oliver, Alys and the Moriartys all wish to leave because of their painful or meaningless lives. Alys and Oliver, the searchers, never find a clear purpose in life, they merely believe that there is a vague possibility that it might exist outside Happy Valley. The people have no commitment to the landscape and only respond in a negative way to the seasonal cycle. There is no harmony between human life and nature in Happy Valley, and apparently no reason why it "should take part in the inevitable time process rather than stay concealed in some channel up which either time or circumstance had forgotten to press" (p.115). Patrick White is suggesting that Happy Valley, as well as its inhabitants, is almost forgotten by Life, so meaningless is the existence within it.

The theme of meaninglessness in human life and the relation of this to the desolate landscape of Australia and man's alienation from the natural environment, recur in

White's succeeding novels. The progression of these themes, throughout the later novels, can be seen, in many ways, as reflecting White's personal relationship with Australia, and his development as a writer. When he wrote his first three published novels it seems he had not really come to terms with Australia as his home, although he felt nostalgic about it. This tension between White's attraction to and his rejection of Australia is frequently manifested by his novels.

Patrick White was fundamentally frustrated with his life, unable to settle in any place, either at home or in Europe. In order to fill the spiritual void, he wrote novels, which naturally reflect his state of mind. As a result he was not happy with what he wrote. The first book, at least, he withdrew from publication soon after it appeared in print (1939) because he felt embarrassed by it. This fact might be said to indicate something of his dissatisfaction with the lack of positive resolution at the end of the novel:

This is the part of man, to withstand through his relationships ... all those passions that sweep down through negligence or design to consume and desolate, for through Hilda and Alys he can withstand, he is immune from all but the ultimate destruction of the inessential outer shell (p.327).

$HV$ ends if not in despair then certainly in resignation. The moral of this story seems to be that "[it] is only in acceptance that people can finally begin to give shape to their existence". The harshness and futility, expressed in White's choice of ending, would seem to stem almost directly from the bitterness of his experience as a jackeroo in the Monaro and Walgett. Nevertheless, Oliver's decision to accept his life as it is, reflects White's own determination to "[deny] the possibility of superficial escapism" which he believes "marks the beginning of a potential cure". White is essentially concerned with developing a sense of belonging but this perhaps emerges prematurely in Oliver's resolution, because Oliver's decision to return to Hilda is depicted rather more as an act of despair than as one of anticipation. There is no "potential cure" in such an act.

Unlike the principal protagonists of $HV$, the Quongs seem to be at one with their environment. They live in Happy Valley in a state of placid objectivity:

Sometimes you thought that the Quongs were exotic, foreign to Happy Valley, but not as they stood outside the store, this first and last evidence of life. You never got beneath the Quongs, the brown, aloof faces, the silent glance. The road down the valley was a brown curve, distinct and aloof like Amy Quong. In spring the hillside flickered up, in winter died to a dull grey, there was not much more evidence of any emotional quantity (p.326).

15. Ibid.
The Quongs do not struggle to escape from Happy Valley and they and the town are effectively indivisible in that both are described as being "aloof". Perhaps, though there is no real evidence of this, this is because they are Chinese Buddhists and accept that life is a thing to be lived "for the day". This is not an ideal form of acceptance in the Laurentian sense, because it is not the result of an active process but rather is the result of a belief in inevitability, hence they are "the first and last evidence of life ..." (p.326).\(^{16}\)

White is concerned with developing a sense of identity in relation to the landscape of one's own country, but in HV there is little to indicate that he has succeeded in this, for even Oliver's son, Rodney, is no real symbol of hope in this direction. He is really a miniature Oliver, for he dreams of being either a writer (p.190) or an explorer (p.325) (as Oliver dreams of being a poet). Rodney is therefore a searcher like his father, and like his father he does not seek within the landscape, indeed he sees it as a thing to be destroyed. This is illustrated by an incident when he "decapitate[s] a flower" (p.190).

Rodney does, however, find the future hopeful, though this may be due to nothing more than his youth. In addition, he seems to be aware that he is in charge of the future events of his life, which is something Oliver never seems to grasp. All Rodney's hopes, however, are centred not on any comprehensive image of a "place", but on a malformed fantasy of urban life:

In Sydney there were trams, at the Circular Quay the peanut man. You swam down through the water, opened your eyes, it was morning there, yellow against the sand. Rodney Halliday's eyes, fixed beyond the present, were the eyes of the swimmer under water opening on another world (p.325).

Patrick White was living abroad at the time he wrote this novel, and it is possible that he was trying to untangle a series of conflicting emotions and ideas about himself and his "place" in the world. Drawn away from Australia by Europe and America he was nonetheless continually haunted by images of the Australian landscape,\(^{17}\) images that, judging by this novel, he was determined to resist.

In HV, none of the characters reach a deep understanding of themselves or their "place in things" through an alignment with the natural world that surrounds them. If

---

\(^{16}\) White does seem particularly concerned to establish his characters, a "sense of place" in the Laurentian manner, that is, through conscious and participatory effort. That the Quongs, therefore, appear to accept their lot in Happy Valley in a distant or "aloof" manner, which renders them largely unsympathetic characters, is by no means accidental. Lawrence, during a brief stay with a Buddhist friend in Ceylon, is reported to have found "eastern mysticism ... repulsive", according to Robert Darroch, *D.H. Lawrence in Australia* (Melbourne: The Macmillan Company of Australia, 1981), p.6. Though this may not be true of White he does seem to be paying homage to Lawrence's response to Buddhism, in his treatment of the Quongs in this novel.

\(^{17}\) White says, for example, in *FG*: "... the landscapes ... had never left me" (p.127).
White is pursuing the Laurentian notion that one can only be free by coming to terms with one’s home which must also include its landscape, then it is clear that the natives of Happy Valley are a long way from freedom, as perhaps White himself was at this time. If one is looking for a triumphant element in HV, one must therefore look to the landscape, because there is no real sense of triumph in the lives of those who live in it. If there is a single message in this novel, then perhaps it is that "nature alone is triumphant".

In The Living and the Dead, the landscape of urban London has lost so much of its significance that it becomes a thing of noises and faces and houses, hence:

... his ears took sound, but selected no predominant note out of the confused stream, taxis unsticking their tyres from the wet surface of the street, the rumbling of the buses. All this was so much prevalent, and yet irrelevant sound.18

The book opens with these images, as experienced by Elyot Standish, and they remain consistently used throughout, with all characters responding to this perception of urban life to the detriment of both an understanding of themselves and a wider understanding of others in their "place in things". LD is a novel about the inability of its characters to function fully as human beings and perhaps this is as much due to their separation from the natural world as to that distancing, from one another, that can result from the inability to fully communicate. Because of its setting this is also a tale of urban isolation and alienation and the human failure to confront these aspects of living. Perhaps the failure of the characters to fully come to terms with their lives as city dwellers is as much due to their separation from the natural landscape as to their inability to fully communicate their inner hopes and conflicts to one another. But whatever the total cause, the consequences are somewhat predictable; "things fall apart" in London as easily as anywhere else. London is:

... the smell of apples and a magazine, and the voices calling through the yawning of a train, and the faces, and the faces, and the faces (p.8),

and a place where,

[it] was so easy to substitute the dead for the living, to build a cocoon of experience away from the noises of the street (p.16),

and where,

... under a spring sky, the chimneys pointed at an illusion of their own solidity and greatness [and] gardeners pressed the earth round the roots of flowers, as if you could transform with so many heads of bloom what was a sour, sick earth (p.304).

In this world of noise and faces, "deluded" chimneys and sick soil, the Standish family, Catherine and her children, Elyot and Eden, strive to give their lives some meaningful substance but, as is the way of life in a White-created world, they are not destined to succeed. Catherine Standish, in her search for this "meaningful substance", is a complete failure. For example, her relationships with her children, Eden and Elyot, are fraught with misunderstandings that result from inadequate communication, and this inevitably leads to alienation. Like Alys Browne in HV, Catherine also shows some inclination to be "alienated from herself". When she marries she changes her name from "Kitty" to "Catherine" as though, like Alys, she is seeking a more sophisticated image, but she is inconsistent in the use of this name, slipping from "Catherine" to "Kitty" on various occasions, until she finally loses her identity altogether. Thus, rather than seeking her real self, by the active assertion of her will, she exists vicariously through her marriage and the lives of her children, rather like Hilda Halliday in HV.

Catherine's inability to fulfil herself on an individual level is exemplified in two ways: firstly, in the previously mentioned change of name, upon her marriage to the far from productive or successful artist, Willy Standish, with whom she is "physically in love" (p.39); secondly, in her infatuation with the idea of her son, Elyot, of becoming a writer:

She hoped he would be a writer. If only one of her children were creative, her vanity would flourish like a tree, cover the dead branches of the bitter moments, the leaves as green, as soothing as the stroke of violins (p.162).

Despite the "lip-service" Catherine pays to the desire for her daughter, Eden, to also profit her ego by contributing artistically to her life, Catherine requires from Eden something more immediate: "Mrs Standish realized that she loved her daughter physically, the arms, the cheek, touched now, and that she derived a comfort from this" (p.143). Thus Eden comes to fill in time, that place at least partially vacated by Willy, who is nothing if not adulterous, while Elyot remains the source of his mother's hopes for the self-aggrandizement, through another's creative output, that she probably felt would be hers forever when, as Kitty Goose, she married Willy Standish, the man who was ever "painting" and who "had, of course, [a] studio in Chelsea" (p.38).

Catherine Standish, straining towards a future she can only envisage as a panoramic view of the imagined accomplishment of her children, neglects her own day-to-day life, and thus consequently neglects herself. Whilst keeping up the façade of her appearance: "... never deterred ... from putting one more coat of gilt between herself and the humdrum side of living" (p.14), the "humdrum side of living" eventually wears her down to the point where her house "and particularly [her] room ... become[s] almost the sole visible purpose of [her] existence" (p.14). Encased in a "protective cocoon", assembled out of dreams that relate to other people and an accumulation of material
trappings, Catherine Standish is condemned to lose herself as assuredly as she will eventually lose her children:

Mrs Standish stood in the marble wasteland, waiting not here, not anywhere, she had lost her bearings, was without a map. You will wait here, he said. The easing of tension had left the ticking of an eye. Told to behave in such and such a way, she could still hope, she supposed, for further directions. But she could not move on any intuition of her own in the marble forest, lit with the glittering of foreign smiles, filled with the idioms of foreign voices. A traveller who had chosen to lose her way, she could not regret this, or the last moments of lucidity. She stood in the marble clearing awaiting the pleasure, the condescension of her guide (p.291).

The "marble wasteland", a harsh, interior-urban image, is here a reflection of Catherine's inner self, an inner self that looks always to others to direct her in life. Perhaps a spirit forever "offered" to others must inevitably crystallize like "marble", if only in self-defence. Whatever the truth of this, however, Catherine Standish's inability to come to terms with herself, and the day-to-day realities of her process of living, leads to alienation from her children, her environment and herself. Eventually, she even loses her self-esteem when as "the frayed end of a cigarette", her voice lost among "crumpled sandwiches .... She [has] to throw up on the carpet the last fragments of her dignity" (p.326).

Eden Standish, like her mother, is a rootless character who wanders through the desolate "wasteland" (p.152) of wartime London:

Or she walked, as a release, long walks that took her into places that had no bearing on herself, the long, listless, eyeless streets, from Camberwell to Bethnal Green. She walked along the Mile End Road, its wide and windy pavement, where she was ignored quietly, nobody looked at her. She was altogether pointless, rootless. She failed to fit into the pattern of the streets, she played no part in the emotional pattern of the groups at windows or standing in doorways. It even seemed as if her own emotional, sentient life had ceased (p.145).

Unable to grasp any significance in the material world and alienated from "the pattern of the streets", she lives in her spiritual world failing even to discover any tangible evidence for her being. Struggling to gain some sense of realness about herself, Eden has an affair with a man she does not love and even when she discovers she is pregnant she does not fully recognize this as a confirmation of her physical reality.

Through physical pain and the loss of her child, whose "realness" she has responded to by having an abortion, Eden discovers "some emotional theme that she wanted to express" (p.172). But this, also, is a source of great confusion:

The physical fact of their being on the sea wall, the common warmth of the bodies, on her cheek still the roughness of his fingers, these were a source of tranquillity that let her close her eyes in safety. But the worlds that stood apart, the less material worlds, infinitely separate, these were what frightened her, these were what she wanted to possess (pp.271-272).
Aware, perhaps, that the reality of the self is expressed through the dichotomy of essentially separate phenomena, the spiritual and the actual, Eden can only be afraid though longing, at the same time, to possess both "worlds", in the instinctive knowledge that to do this is to come to know the "wholeness of things". When finally, having lost both her father and her lover as the result of war in Europe, she decides to sacrifice herself in the same way, she attains some sense of spiritual fulfilment. But Eden's sacrifice is made in the same spirit of resignation as is Oliver Halliday's decision to surrender himself to the realities of life with Hilda in HV: "... I shall be an airman, she said, even if I fall in the sea. Even if I fall in the sea .... Eden's voice accepted the sea" (p.353).

Beside Eden, as the only witness to her decision, is her brother Elyot, himself as involved in the search for "some other way" (p.354) as is Eden. As a silent and reflective "fellow conspirator" to Eden's choice of a solution to her spiritual dilemmas, Elyot provides the reader with a fine summary both of the causes of discontentment and of the options that are open to the discontented:

The arch-enemies were the stultifying, the living dead. The living chose to oppose these, either in Eden's way, by the protest of self-destruction, or by what, by what, if not an intenser form of living (p.354).

It would seem from this that Elyot's "resolution", to whatever problems he has had regarding life and his "place in things", is to live life to the full. However, his response, when Eden departs on her quest for sacrifice, is so devoid of any emotion that one is not fully convinced of his abilities to pursue "an intenser form of living":

... he was watching the flutter of a gloved hand fail where the darkness swam against the greenish light. He was turning his back on nothing. There was very little indication now that he would ever see Eden again (p.356).

From boyhood Elyot is alienated from other people, and as a man becomes acutely conscious of his isolation from the world around him:

... Elyot Standish found himself floating, placeless, timeless, there was no end to his present or past fluidity, there was no connexion between himself and any of the intervening years. There were even few significant points, forming out of this void (p.116).

Oppressed throughout his maturation by a doting mother, whose image of him is as divorced from reality as are her images of herself, it is perhaps inevitable that Elyot should grow up a stranger to himself. He is, however, as equally a stranger to the physical world, doubting the "reality of trees, |and| stones" (p.124).

Distanced from the natural landscape, by the circumstances of his urban-based life, and separated from himself, Elyot walks "through the landscape of his own mind" (p.11) "guided by no intention" (p.357), yet for all his alienation Elyot is able to see much more that is significant in the world than either his sister or mother. Even as a child he
is sufficiently perceptive, for example, to realize that the circumstance of living in a house not of his choosing is conspiring to shut him away from something outside, though what that something is he cannot define as "freedom". But in a game with Eden and the intruder, Connie Tiarks, when Eden declares her intention to take Connie prisoner, Elyot can reply without thinking: "This is the prison ..." (p.100).

This observation, made in childhood, is the first indication of Elyot's awareness of the possibility of an alternative way of life. It is a sentiment that is repeated at the end of the book, when, freed by the death of both parents and the departure of the nihilistic Eden, Elyot takes a bus, "bound nowhere in particular" (p.358), yawns and begins to feel "like someone who [has] been asleep, and [has] only just woken" (p.358).

LD's finale rings a vaguely optimistic note that is barely heard elsewhere in this novel. Yet it is not a note that has any great certainty about it but only, perhaps, some possibility of certainty.

It is small wonder that life is so bleak for the Standish children, surrounded as they frequently seem to be by the depressing landscapes of urban life. Yet this novel is not devoid of rural imagery, for, when, young, the Standish children are evacuated to the country and when, after the war, Elyot goes to Germany, the natural landscape is presented mainly as an almost incidental backdrop to the confusions of childhood and adolescent minds. There are, however, moments of enlightenment that suggest that in time, if "nourished" sufficiently by the natural world, Elyot at least could grow to some greater awareness. Thus, in the country "retreat" during the first war, Elyot notices Eden, "the blood ... jerking into her cheeks" (p.100), and with a certain admiration observes that as "[y]ou marched down the hill, and you were getting somewhere, in the warm, dusty afternoon ... you were marching towards something which it was difficult to describe" (p.100).

Elyot may not be able or articulate, or even fully to cognize, his responses to the natural world but the suggestion is that here he perceives a place of "sustenance" and secret possibility: "At Ard's Bay everything was plain sailing. You looked into water and saw the shape of things" (p.102).

Even as a small boy, Elyot snatched moments of solitude in a natural environment where he could enjoy some feeling of community with something, and this he refers to as "his secret life", something he needed very much, "[s]omething that he didn't have to explain, and which he had chosen for himself" (p.102). As a young man in Germany, however, faced with the loss of himself, through his infatuation with Hildegard, who threatens to "[draw] him into a world of her own" (p.124), Elyot recoils from the landscape, as he recoils from the difficulties of a pending relationship:
Everything in Germany was too green. There was a hectic, feverish tone about the undergrowth, from which you could detach a smell, strange and repellent, of rotting leaves. Passing a cemetery at dusk, the urns wept white draperies (p.125).

This intensely symbolic passage is related both to the substance of Elyot's emotional response, at this critical entanglement with the possibility of a relationship, and with his flowering sexuality. Indeed, "hectic, feverish ... undergrowth"; "a smell, strange and repellent, of rotting leaves", and a weeping urn with its "white draperies" are some of the most sexual images in this book. Elyot is clearly a man who has the potential to flourish emotionally in an environment of natural beauty, but most of the time he is denied this chance, and this denial leads to his alienation from all around him. Perhaps it is this that leads to his cold detachment at the moment of Eden's departure.

Eden, for her part, finds little real solace in natural things, she notices them only as a complement to her own confusion. Thus, when holidaying with Joe Barnett, the father of her aborted child, when she feels him "[settling] back ... into a shell of resistance", her only awareness of nature comes as "[s]he listen[s] to a cold bird" (p.271). This image is an echo of a similar event in her mother's early life, when anxious at the prospect of meeting Wally's parents, Kitty Goose, as she then was, feeling "very stupid, numb [and] extravagant", kicks at a stone and "[a] small, bright bird offered a cynical eye from the hedge" (p.25).

This novel is important in the evolution of Patrick White, both as a writer and as a man who is striving to find his "place in things". Distanced from his own country, in an actual and a metaphorical sense, his continual preoccupation with the landscapes of Australia, as previously mentioned, may have contributed greatly to the feelings of alienation that are so predominant in LD. The haunting images of Australia might also have led the author to attempt to derive "the most good from the least evil", by seeking some point of reference in the natural things of London and his recollection of the landscapes of England and Germany. But there is a lack of conviction in all these allusions, as though the writer was by no means sure of their intimate connection with himself. Yet if White is indeed seeking to come to terms with his Australian heritage, he is as far from the realization of this, in the writing of LD, as it is possible to be, because he has moved his consciousness from an all Australian setting in HV, to a solely European one, in LD. As an intelligent man, whose life encompassed both English and Australian experiences, he must have known, however, that in order to embrace one, he had to lay the ghost of the other. Haunted by Australia and drawn to Europe he was at war with himself and, given this situation, it was perhaps inevitable that in his third published novel, The Aunt's Story, he should include both these "theatres of conflict".
CHAPTER 3
THE AUNT'S STORY:
LANDSCAPE AND SELF-DISCOVERY

The Aunt's Story is one of the more difficult of Patrick White's novels to read as it is an ambitious experiment in the rendering of a single character's spiritual life, with an emphasis on the blending of present and past, illusion and reality, sanity and insanity. This novel is important in the sense that in it White's quest for "truth", in relation to "the mystery of life", progresses significantly, as does his development of the Australian theme. This can be clearly observed in White's symbolic use of the natural landscape.

In Part One of the novel, one can see a great difference in White's treatment of the natural elements of Meroë as opposed to that used in Happy Valley. Now we find a harmony between people and natural things. In Meroë, Theodora Goodman, the principal protagonist, communes with the landscape and experiences peace of mind while walking in the paddocks or when floating in the brown waters. Unlike Oliver Halliday and Alys Browne of HV, Theodora recognizes a unity in the natural world and the landscape of her home, but she is not able to comprehend fully its significance. Indeed this sense of unity and wholeness is not something Theodora can articulate, because it is not a thing she perceives with any real clarity. She operates in the landscape of Meroë in a totally harmonious manner, but this harmony is a thing she takes for granted. It is only when she embarks on her journey to Europe and America, in order to discover a sense of identity, that she comes to understand the intimacy of her relationship with her homeland. Though she leaves Australia, the landscape of Meroë still plays an important rôle in her memories of her home. In America she recognizes a wholeness of the natural world only through her memories of the landscape of Meroë and of her interaction with it, but this realization of the unity between herself and all things comes at the expense of her reason. Separated from the source of her previous peace of mind, the Australian countryside, she reclaims it at a distance, from the confines of an asylum in America.

This complex resolution may reflect the fact that White, during the writing of AS, began positively to recognize the importance of coming to terms with his homeland. While travelling overseas, he became aware that his roots as a writer could be sought in Australia largely because he was unable to forget that he had once found a certain comfort in its landscape: "The actual, noble, though often harsh and bitter Monaro scene was my spiritual sustenance in the year I spent working there" (FG, p.49).
AS is the first novel in which White's potential as an artist of power and original vision begins to display itself. His preoccupations with the quest for "truth" are "revealed for the first time in a definitive form,"\(^1\) and the result is a novel that is both difficult and exciting to read. In this chapter, the author's symbolic use of the landscape of Meroë will be discussed and compared with his use of descriptive images of Europe and America, and Theodora's attachment to her home will be analysed in terms of a spiritual progression towards a sense of unity with nature that is greater than that which Oliver and Alys achieve in HV.

The landscape of Meroë is depicted as dead and desolate with volcanic hills, skeletal trees and solitary tussocks of grass. The colours of yellow, black, grey and brown are frequently used as indicative of harshness. If the landscape of Meroë is intended to be harsh and inhospitable, however, it does not impress Theodora in this way, so perhaps it is a symbolic landscape, the purpose of which is to associate Meroë, the Goodmans' property, with Ethiopia, and thus to extend the idea of unity in all things. Hence the skeletal trees at Meroë are "abstractions" of real trees:

But there was no melancholy about the dead trees of Meroë. They were too far removed, they were the abstractions of trees, with their roots in Ethiopia.\(^2\) Hearing from her father that "[t]here is another Meroë ... a dead place, in the black country of Ethiopia" (p.25), Theodora accepts this "legendary landscape" (p.25) by "feeling, sensing and touching" the actual Meroë and thus perceives the deeper meaning that lies beyond outward appearances. This perception is subliminal, for though Theodora certainly feels a great deal for her home, she has not yet reached the stage whereby she can fully appreciate its part in the wholeness of things, nor can she even express her feelings about it. Thus when asked by her niece, Lou, about Meroë, Theodora is unable to answer:

But to tell the story of Meroë was to listen also to her own blood, and, rather than hear it quicken and fail again, Theodora smoothed with her toe the light on the carpet, and said, 'But, my darling, there is very little to tell' (p.20).

Meroë has such a deep spiritual significance for Theodora that it is impossible for her to translate its meaning into words. It is part of her body and soul.

As a child, Theodora was fond of walking alone among the yellow grasses under the desiccated trees of her home where

the water in the creek was brown and warm. Frogs brooded, and magpies


flew low. Light yawned out of the hills, and from the yellow thickets of the gorse. Theodora stood and let the water lip her legs (p.40). When she comes to the creek, Theodora takes off her clothes, and floats in the water, empty of thought. She merely listens to the sounds of life in Meroë: the birds singing, water running, wind blowing. Theodora's brown body is "the shallow browner water" (p.40); she becomes a part of nature.  

White suggests that, with a body like a stick, Theodora is suited to touching and communicating with "the bones of the earth" and can therefore "come a little closer to the truth" (p.63). Hence, even as a child, she perceives that it is both "desolate and soothing" (p.63) to sit in the black volcanic hills, an understanding of the dichotomy of life that is denied most people. There is "peace of mind" (p.26) for Theodora in Meroë, which she believes she can feel in her "bones", though in retrospect she cannot communicate this accurately:

'Bare,' said Theodora Goodman.
'Bare?' said the Greek, 'Naked is the word for women.'
'Naked can be the word,' said Theodora.
'Bare', smiled Moraïtis, for a fresh discovery. 'Greece, you see, is a bare country. It is all bones.'
'Like Meroë,' said Theodora.
'Please?' said Moraïtis.
'I too come from a country of bones.'
'That is good,' said Moraïtis solemnly. 'It is easier to see' (p.112).

Theodora here fails to express clearly her youthful responses and sense of interaction with Meroë, but by this failure she accidentally stumbles across another example of unity. A humble and by no means accomplished country woman she discovers that both herself and the Greek cellist, Moraïtis, have a shared understanding of their individual countries, and of the terms that can equally be applied to them, but she misses the connection. Had she fully realized the significance of this conversation with a foreigner and the underlying truth within it, she might never have felt the need to seek further a sense of unity by going to Europe, for as Moraïtis remarks, "[i]t is not necessary to see things ... [i]f you know" (p.113). Theodora only unconsciously "knows", so she still needs to "see".

Bound by her bones to the soil of Meroë she is also tied to the landscape by her colour:

If gestures were completed, it was according to a law of motion, which takes

---

3. This directly mirrors White's experience while working as a jackaroo at Walgett. As White relates in FG (p.51), he used to throw off his clothes and bathe "either at the artesian bore ... or in the river flowing between the trunks of great flesh-coloured gums ...".
over from the will, and which now guided Theodora Goodman’s black. Black
had yellowed her skin. She was dry, and leathery, and yellow. A woman of
fifty, or not yet, whose eyes burned still, under the black hair, which she still
frizzed above the forehead in little puffs (p.12).

Theodora’s colours here are, of course, the colours of the landscape of Meroë:
The hills were burnt yellow. Thin yellow scurf lay on the black skin of the
hills, which had worn into black pockmarks where the eruptions had taken
place. And now the trees were more than ever like white bones (p.87).

But whilst the import of these colour motifs are not lost to the reader, Theodora’s
subsequent departure from Meroë says only too clearly that it is lost on her.

She is, however, so much a part of her home that it even has the power to
influence her emotions. Hence she is tied to it on both the physical and spiritual levels:
the black volcanic hills are non-productive, but Meroë deceptively has latent energy of
another kind, one that is associated with the seasons: "Out of all this exhaustion formed
the clear expectant weather of autumn, smelling of chrysanthemums and first frost"
(p.87). Theodora is instinctively so responsive to this "expectancy" that "[s]he wait[s]
to see if there [is] anything else she [will] be expected to give" (p.87). In contrast to the
harsh and sterile natural environment of Happy Valley which evokes hostile feelings in
its inhabitants, the desolate landscape of Meroë is not antagonistic to Theodora, because
she blends with it, both physically and psychologically. When she faces it, she
acknowledges she is part of it, and is able to extract spiritual sustenance from it,
recognizing the "truth" within, that is intrinsic to it. This is a knowledge that comes to
her not through intellect or reason but through intuition and she is therefore unable to
express it because she is not fully aware of its importance in her life.

Except for her father, Theodora is alienated from the rest of her family, who prefer
life indoors and never commune with their surroundings. Mrs Goodman always sits on a
sofa, but is unable to "touch" the sofa with the shape of her "bones", as it were, never
seeing through appearances to the spiritual dimension of life:

She sat on her sofa, like a marble statue wearing silk, and read Heredia and
Leconte de Lisle. To Mrs Goodman everything had a form, like bronze or
marble. She saw clearly, but not far. She saw the cattle going down to drink.
She saw the sunlight as it lay among the brushes on her dressing table. She
heard the passage of her own silk (p.68).

Perfect in form as she is, Mrs Goodman is lifeless and spiritless, a firm frame effectively
imprisons her soul. The imagery of metal and marble are manifestations of hard
materialism and White uses it to indicate that this character has set herself apart from
all save the tangible. In addition, this passage suggests that to Mrs Goodman the only
reality is the reality of things effectively changed by man. Marble, bronze and silk are
natural things, in origin, but they are not natural to Meroë. They are symbols of
gentility and not of the Australian scene.
Mrs Goodman is divorced from the natural environment, as is indicated by her desire for a rose garden; roses are not, of course, native to Australia. She cultivates a rose garden as though she is God creating Eden, all over again: "... let there be roses" (p.22) she says. There are, duly, roses but there is no physical contact between them and "their creator", because they remain separated by the walls of the Goodman house. Although the flowers hold the potential power to influence those who can see and touch them, Mrs Goodman is not aware of this. For her they function only as ornaments and symbols of her alienation from the native landscape. Theodora, on the other hand, feels very close to the roses even when she is inside the house. She is therefore depicted as a woman with a strong sense of communication with all forms of natural life.

At odds with her surroundings and having no sense of belonging to Meroë, Mrs Goodman is restless, temperamental and dissatisfied. Not fully aware of the cause of this, she can only respond to her turbulent mixture of emotions through acts of violence. Hence: "... she ... beat the window with the handle of her riding crop ... she beat, she beat the jags that were left in the frame" (p.68) -- and all because her horse was not brought round on time. In this episode White clearly portrays a frustrated individual who, unable to exercise a satisfying degree of control over the natural world, also abandons control of her own nature. Once again, therefore, the author contrives to reveal his somewhat Laurentian views on the need for harmony and a sense of place. Mrs Goodman is not, however, simply an embodiment of this lack of harmony, for she is also White's archetypal mother. Possessive, egocentric, domineering and superficial, she is really another Catherine Standish of LD.

Fanny is the only "real" daughter, being "as pretty and as pink as roses" (p.23) -- a sentiment that further reflects the older woman's vanity. Fanny marries well and is perfectly equipped to be an ornament to an affluent landowner but Theodora, a sallow girl in a yellow dress, is condemned to become a middle-aged spinster. But lean and lithe, Theodora is symbolically equipped to penetrate to the heart of things, while Fanny, red and fat in middle-age, can only respond to the superficial and is a long way from apprehending the mysteries of Meroë's black volcanic hills.

Fanny's response to nature can be seen in the following incident:

There was a small pale grub curled in the heart of the rose. She could not look too long at the grub thing stirring as she opened the petals to the light.

'Horrid, beastly grub,' said Fanny, who was as pretty and as pink as roses.

Theodora had not yet learnt to dispute the apparently indisputable. But she could not condemn her pale and touching grub. She could not subtract it from the sum total of the garden. So, without arguing, she closed the rose (p.23).

---

Fanny only sees beautiful things in life, avoiding the ugly, while Theodora accepts the grub in the roses as part of nature. Young as she is, Theodora can appreciate the dichotomy of life: ugliness and beauty are inseparable, the second can only be clearly perceived when underwritten by the first.

The contrast between Fanny and Theodora is further underscored by Fanny's talents as a pianist and Theodora's lack of manual dexterity. To Mrs Goodman it is evident that "Fanny is the artistic one" (p.33), but, in fact, Fanny can play a piece, that amounts to no more than "a whole bright, tight bunch of artificial flowers surrounded by a paper frill" (p.30), that is, one that is no more genuine than the calculated artfulness of Mrs Goodman's rose garden. Although technically very accomplished, Fanny does not commit herself to playing the piano, and her music is lifeless and soulless. By contrast, Theodora who "has great understanding" (p.33), communes with music and is drawn by it towards the natural surroundings of Meroë:

After she had hidden in the garden, she looked at her hands, that were never moved to do the things that Fanny did. But her hands touched, her hands became the shape of a rose, she knew it in its utmost intimacy. Or she played the nocturne, as it was never meant, expressing some angular agony that she knew. She knew the extinct hills and the life they had once lived (p.32).

In spite of her inability to play the piano, Theodora can play it in her own mind and invests her "music" with the agony she has felt in her solitary and alienated life at home.

Theodora's ability to commune with music is further displayed by her later reaction to the music of the Greek cellist, Moraïtis:

The concerto had begun. The violins made a suave forest through which Moraïtis stepped. The passage of the 'cello was diffident at first, struggling to achieve its own existence in spite of the pressure of the blander violins. Moraïtis sat upright. He was prim. He was pure. I am a peasant, he said. And he saw with the purity of primitive vision, whether the bones of the hills or the shape of a cup (p.116).

While playing the cello, Moraïtis comes closer to the core of himself and by so doing he is able to "touch" and "sense" the essential meaning of the music, in the same way that he "touches" and "feels" the deeper meaning of his country. Through music, both Moraïtis and Theodora grasp some sense of their inner selves, a thing not always possible in the course of day-to-day living, and it draws them together, in much the same way as Alys and Oliver in HV:

... the music which Moraïtis had played was more tactile than the hot words of lovers spoken on a wild nasturtium bed, the violins had arms. This thing which had happened between Moraïtis and herself she held close, like a woman holding her belly. She smiled. If I were an artist, she said, I would create something that would answer him (p.117).

Equally, words between Moraïtis and Theodora have little real function, being at most "frail slat bridges over chasms" (p.133).
In _HV_ and _AS_, White shows music conveying meanings that words cannot, but ironically he can only use words to talk about music. However, in _AS_, White also uses landscape to convey a sense of spiritual depth as in the case of Theodora and her father, who walk together without talking in the paddocks of Meroë. In this way, White stresses the limitations of language as a medium for the purpose of spiritual communion. Thus, when Theodora and her father embark on their metaphorical and spiritual "odyssey" through the paddocks of Meroë, to "Ithaca" and "Ethiopia" (p.25),

Father did not speak. He respected silence, and besides, whether it was summer or winter, the landscape was more communicative than people talking (p.34).

White is really striving to overcome his own dissatisfaction with words as the sole medium by which emotional responses to nature and music can be expressed. For him music is a useful tool which he hopes will avoid the limitations of language: "It is difficult to express what I have to express in a naturalistic medium in the age in which I live. I feel you can do far more with paint and music; I am hobbled by words".5

In addition, silence also assumes a dominant rôle in White's novels, so that Theodora and her father are able to feel the mystery of the natural world, approaching it unencumbered by the need for speech. Enlightenment, perhaps, is a thing that comes to one who waits in silence.

Theodora's enlightenment, however, is not an entirely passive or inactive process for it also progresses through an act of violence. Whilst walking in the paddock with Frank, she is reluctant to kill a hawk because it reminds her of a previous experience she had had with a small hawk whose eyes, she felt, "spoke of worlds that were brief and fierce" (p.35). However, despite her recollection of this past moment of "kinship",

[She] took aim, and it was like aiming at her own red eye. She could feel the blood-beat the other side of the membrane. And she fired. And it fell. It was an old broken umbrella tumbling off a shoulder.

'There,' laughed Theodora, 'it is done.'

When they were silent, Frank picked up the body of the hawk and hung it on the wire fence. Then Theodora saw that it was, in fact, a little hawk, and that it had a red eye which was half closed. She felt exhausted, but there was no longer any pain. She was as negative as air (p.74).

When she shoots the hawk, she has a feeling of completion, but with the same act she feels she has destroyed herself as well. The hawk at this moment symbolizes for Theodora her capacity for evil: "... I have a core of evil in me that is altogether hateful" (p.126), and she equates the killing of the hawk with the destruction of this evil in her:

... I shall continue to destroy myself, right down to the last of my several lives.

---

Once she walked past the spot where the hawk hung on the fence, blowing stiffly in the wind. It was her aspiration. In a sense she had succeeded, but at the same time she had failed (p.74).

Through killing the hawk, she achieves a kind of fulfilment because she comes to strip herself of superfluous emotional responses. She is surrendering her vanities, strength, weakness and frailties to the one aim of discovering the core of her being. As a result, she is awakened or reborn in the symbolical process of suffering. Destruction and death are recurrent themes in White’s novels, and they are inevitably tied up with enlightenment of some kind.

The symbolic function of the hawk in AS is more positive and productive than White’s use of the same image in HV. Oliver experiences no communion with a hawk:

If he had a gun he’d take a pot at that hawk, put a shot in its belly for lunch, and it would fall down and lie on the snow, its blood red on the snow, dead. But there would be no pain before annihilation. All its life it would probably know no pain, not like Mrs Chalker writhing about on the bed at Kambala. The hawk was absolved from this, absorbed as an agent into the whole of this frozen landscape, into the mountains that emanated in their silence a dull, frozen pain while remaining exempt from it (HV, p.18).

The hawk in HV is not identified with Oliver Halliday; it is, for him, simply one of the elements of the landscape of Happy Valley, from which he is alienated. The hawk can be seen to some extent as a symbol of transcendence in that it is able to rise above the human world of Happy Valley and yet is also at one with it. In this it is in stark contrast to those of the characters of Happy Valley, such as Oliver, who wish to flee but cannot. Oliver accordingly resents the hawk.

Theodora at times entertains the idea of killing her mother, whose monstrous ego oppresses her so much. For Theodora, to kill Mrs Goodman is again to kill some part of herself, the same evil part that she destroyed by killing the hawk. Theodora does not kill her mother, but nonetheless feels guilty of murder because the idea of murder "is the same thing [as murder itself], blood is only an accompaniment" (p.128).

Unlike Theodora, Mrs Goodman has never felt it necessary to destroy herself. She has no self-doubts nor can she begin to see that there are realms of meaning beyond her limited vision of life. She is too arrogant to "kill" herself -- she sees herself as the centre of the world: "... she herself [is] God" (p.133), but she sometimes feels that it is a great tragedy that "she [has] never done a murder" (pp.99-100). Mrs Goodman has never set out on any spiritual odyssey having always been enclosed by the "shell" of her ego. The

"shell" in this as in other novels represents the barriers of fear and egotism that White sees standing between his characters and their interaction with the landscape. Unlike her mother, however, Theodora has no "shell" and hence she is open to enlightenment or spiritual awakening.

Part One of *AS* thus concentrates largely on Theodora's experience of this spiritual awakening, which involves the recognition of the inner significance of outer appearance. In this the primitive, harsh and desolate landscape functions as a symbolic mirror to reflect Theodora's inner self. Walking in silence through the yellow paddocks, Theodora communes with the hills, trees and rocks and in so doing, learns a double truth: that one cannot possess things with one's hands, and that the world that is perceived spiritually and aesthetically may not seem to have a corresponding objective reality. To know a landscape is not to experience a transfer of knowledge from the landscape but to participate in a process of being awakened by the landscape to the reality of self. The natural environment in White's novel thus functions catalytically on human nature, awakening it to the perception of truth.

Mr Goodman, important though he is in the novel, being the only person who shares knowledge of the landscape with Theodora, is not really a major character. His function is to assist Theodora's search for spiritual truth. A similar rôle is fulfilled by "the Man who was Given his Dinner" (p.45). This anonymous and unexplained character has a spiritual influence on Theodora. He appears on Theodora's twelfth birthday which is a day of great significance for her, largely because of several events. Thrown to the ground when the oak tree in front of the house is struck by lightning, Theodora is symbolically killed, but picks herself up and gives a "pale laugh" (p.42). She soon recovers and goes off to look at a calf that has just been born. Thus, even though part of her has been destroyed, psychologically if not actually, Theodora is restored in discovering the generative powers of nature in the new life of the calf. This incident foreshadows Theodora's future. She will achieve a peace of mind only through the destruction of herself and it is the Man who was Given his Dinner who predicts this: "You'll see a lot of funny things, Theodora Goodman. You'll see them because you've eyes to see. And they'll break you" (p.47).

In this way the Man who was Given his Dinner opens Theodora's eyes so that she can see through the "barriers" that surround her. From this moment, these walls function metaphorically to distinguish the people inside, Mrs Goodman and Fanny, from the people outside, Theodora and Mr Goodman, and this dissolution of barriers symbolizes Theodora's ability to see more clearly. The Man who was Given his Dinner is thus instrumental in the development of Theodora's receptiveness to the spiritual meaning of the material world, and he is this because he possesses the charisma of a
prophet. Both Mr Goodman and the Man who was Given his Dinner reappear in Part Three of this novel in the figure of Holstius, who is the embodiment of Theodora's true self. Hence although these characters function differently in guiding Theodora towards a recognition of unity in the world, they are both influential in the development of Theodora's life.

Theodora acquires some awareness of deeper truths, while she remains physically and spiritually rooted in the soil of her homeland. However, when she loses her home she also loses these perceptions, for her mother sells the property on Mr Goodman's death. Theodora stays with Mrs Goodman in Sydney until she becomes a middle-aged spinster. In Sydney, cut off from the deep source of inspiration that was her love for Meroë, Theodora loses touch with these revelations. Only when Mrs Goodman dies leaving Theodora alone and free, can Theodora recommence her spiritual odyssey. However, she does not know where she really wants to go and has no clear concept of what freedom really is, save that it is "a blunt weapon" (p.18). She therefore embarks upon a quest by going overseas. In this, Theodora represents a significant progression in White's articulation of the need to seek a meaning for life, for unlike Oliver and Alys in HV, she is in active pursuit of it.

Theodora decides to explore her place in things by means of a journey to Europe and America, but it will be a hard task for her as she has nothing and no one to help her: no friends, no lovers, no religion and no artistic talent. Theodora is the "loneliest of all White's characters", but perhaps she is also his bravest, for she has both the courage and determination to pursue her place in things. She is, in this, the embodiment of all Alys Browne's wildest dreams.

When in Europe, Theodora stays at the Hôtel du Midi, whose jardin exotique is a microcosm of the decayed state of Europe:

The garden was completely static, rigid, the equation of a garden. Slugs linked its symbols with ribbons of silver, their timid life carefully avoiding its spines .... Walking slowly, in her large and unfashionable hat, she began to be afraid she had returned to where she had begun, the paths of the garden were the same labyrinth, the cactus limbs of the same aching stone. Only in the jardin exotique, because silence had been intensified, and extraneous objects considerably reduced, thoughts would fall more loudly, and the soul, left with little to hide behind, must forsake its queer opaque manner of life and come out into the open (p.146).

The landscape of the jardin exotique threatens Theodora. Her desire to go out into the garden, inspired by the vivid roses, and her memory of life at Meroë, is first thwarted by the metallic hindrance of the brown door with "the brass teeth" (p.145), a strong and

7. Dutton, Patrick White, p.18.
hostile image that is reflected by the garden itself. The garden seems almost to resent the presence of life, even that of the "slugs". It does not accept Theodora who wants to commune with the roses: "In its own right it possessed, and rejected, absorbing just so much dew with its pink and yellow mouths, coldly tearing at cloth or drawing blood. The garden was untouchable" (p.146) and thus Theodora feels afraid.

The people staying at the Hôtel du Midi are meant only to live indoors (p.230) -- an echo of Theodora's mother and sister, who never go beyond "the walls" into the paddocks at Meroë. Here in France, confronting the physical barriers which enclose the people inside on the one hand, and the unresponsive garden on the other, Theodora cannot escape "into a comfortable isolation" (p.173) as she used to do in Meroë, hence she feels repelled and alienated by the natural world, which is here a thing apart.

Even the landscape outside the hotel is dominated by fortifications, this time against the sea:

They began to walk along the street, along the asphalt promenade, on one side of which, protected by brick and stucco, glass and iron, life was being led. But the other side, the sea side, flowed. They had put an iron railing between the asphalt and the sea. But this did not deter any latent desire. It was as much a protection as theory is from the fact. This was the evening air damply stroking, wind fingering the bones, the opening and closing of violet and black on its oyster-bellied self, the sound of distance which is closer than thought. The iron railing spindled and dwindled in the evening landscape. Sometimes faces looked through the openings in brick and stucco, from their pursuits behind glass, or under the blunt planes, or in the elaborate bandstand, looked out to wonder at the extent of their own charade (p.186).

The sea, representing the natural world, is separated from humanity by the solid, inorganic material and so human life is conducted behind the protection of "brick and stucco, glass and iron," just as "theory" is a safe substitute for "fact". There is no natural world to which Theodora can gain access except the sterile simulacrum of the jardin exotique. Her life is reduced from solitary splendour at Meroë to suffocating conditions in the Hôtel du Midi, wedged between a garage and a confiserie.

Having lost touch with her natural surroundings, she therefore loses any real possibility of communicating with her inner self. Everything reminds her of Meroë and as a result she continually returns to her home in her imagination, an experience that might reflect White's own. Even the people she meets in the hotel "drive" her home. The Greek girl, Katina, brings Theodora back to the bony country of "the black volcanic hills" through her recollection of her conversation with Morai'tis. Katina yearns to leave the hotel for her home (p.148) and this strikes a responsive chord in Theodora: "Theodora Goodman had become a mirror, held to the girl's experience" (p.148). The Russian exile, General Sokolnikov, encourages Theodora to play the rôle of his sister, Ludmilla, whom he identifies with Theodora: "... my sister, a reasonable soul, and a
spinster .... wore boots like a Cossack under her long skirts” (p.155). This image of a figure in boots reminds Theodora of herself carrying a little rifle through the paddocks of Meroë: "Theo Goodman was some bloke in skirts” (p.70).

Consequently, Theodora enters the illusory world of Sokolnikov without much difficulty:

Theodora listened to his voice leading her into a clearing, where they had fixed a little amateur stage, on which the curtain had not yet risen. Looking at the flat surface of the curtain, she was not sure whose corpse had been prepared, but she knew that the guignol must not begin (p.182).

"The corpse" in Sokolnikov’s imaginative drama is symbolic of the dead past, Sokolnikov’s ghost play, the full details of which Theodora has not yet heard.

The curtain of the stage implies the boundary between the world of Theodora’s reality and that of Sokolnikov’s illusion. In Theodora’s mind, the distinction between these two worlds gradually becomes ambiguous and confused. The walls, which distinguished people indoors from those outdoors in Meroë, become no longer walls in the jardin exotique, for here walls become curtains and Theodora is free to penetrate into other people’s lives and trapped to wander between illusion and reality. Her mind is sometimes in Meroë and sometimes in Europe and concomitant with this confusion is her growing loss of rationality.

At this point, Theodora’s garnet ring, which she had inherited from her mother, serves a significant function as a link with the past. In the first part of the novel, it is a symbol of Mrs Goodman’s egocentricity, which was such a dominant force in Theodora’s early life: "Sometimes Theodora could feel the hatred in her mother’s hand. She could feel the pressure of the rings” (p.99). However, in Europe, when Theodora is free of her mother, the ring alters in significance: "... a garnet ring which had been her mother’s, but which had changed its expression ...” (p.204). Even with this comforting "presence" on her hand Theodora becomes uncertain about her place as the fact that she takes it off, when playing the rôle of Ludmilla, indicates. In addition, the removal of the ring and one of her shoes, and the loss of control of her "bones", are all symptoms of Theodora’s loss of a sense of place. The “rose wall”, the symbol of life at Meroë, is about to collapse (p.204). She is losing the link with home:

Her feet were rooted now in mute needles .... Across the clearing trees had begun to move. It was these that frightened. She smelled the fire. She smelled the voices, their smell of sweat, and dark hair, approaching out of the darkness, this was thick with hair. In the general disintegration of firelight, and darkness, and burning resin, and sailing trees, the belt round her waist was no great guarantee of personality (p.213).

Disturbed to the point where even her senses become a confused mêlée of past and present, of Meroë and Europe, even trees, which used to be "a protection", frighten her.
In losing control of her memories like this, she loses the sense of reality. Since her mind is confused, even the people she meets at the hotel appear unreal, all being linked with her past.

General Sokolnikov wants Theodora to have two selves to break through the curtain, which has now replaced the metaphorical "wall" of Meroë and the hotel, and in this his function is perhaps similar to that of Mr Goodman, who encourages her to climb over the fence in the paddock, that is, to transcend her own psychological barriers. Mrs Rapallo, the American adventuress, who lives in a fictional world where she creates a brilliant daughter, the Principessa, is also an echo of Theodora's possessive mother, who is eager to shape her daughters according to her own ideals. Both Sokolnikov and Mrs Rapallo are impostors, living in fabricated worlds which are lifeless and spiritless, but such intellectual distancing from life disguises a great passion and potential violence and it takes little to release either. Consequently, when the explosion comes, it is about nothing more than a nautilus shell, an alien token of someone else's "landscape". This is not lacking in significance, however, for Neptune could summon to battle the elements and creatures of the sea with such a shell, and it is to battle that Sokolnikov and Mrs Rapallo are drawn. Each seeks to possess the shell, "the gothic shell of Europe" (p.145).

General Sokolnikov and Mrs Rapallo fight for the ownership of the nautilus, and the shell, perfect in shape but empty inside, like the Hôtel du Midi and the glass pagoda in the painting of the decadent artist, Lieselotte, is only "made to break" (p.221).

Mrs Rapallo sees the shell as a material object of ownership insisting that it is hers because she bought it. Sokolnikov, however, regards her as a thief, since "it is not possible to buy ... what is already mine" (p.163). Thus both actors in this obsessive drama claim ownership of a thing of beauty that belongs only to the world. The fight begins and rages as a backdrop to Theodora's own internal conflict and in time she comes to see these irrational beings as extensions of her own quarrelling parents and herself as the youthful observer of adult stupidity. Yet it is as difficult for the reader to untangle fact from fantasy, in this scene, as it is for Theodora. She is quite lost in a distorted illusion of life and she is only released from this when the nautilus shell is broken and the General announces: "A murder has been committed" (p.222). Theodora feels "considerably reduced" (p.223) by this and once again some part of her is destroyed in the interests of clearer perception, a natural thing, like the hawk at Meroë which represents that world with which Theodora longs to be at one.

Subsequently, a symbolic revelation occurs when the real personalities of the people at the Hôtel du Midi are revealed to Theodora during the course of a picnic:

Soon the landscape had begun to fit. The air withdrew its obliviousness. It stroked. The sea moulded the human form into tolerant shapes. How far the
sun condescended was seen in the face of Katina Pavlou, its open, golden petals, with the dark seeds for eyes. Theodora waited for Katina's eyes to germinate. She watched for the expanding of some mystery that she had already guessed at and rejected (p.231).

Theodora recovers her strength when exposed to the sun and the natural world and, consequently, is able to perceive her companions fully for the first time. At once the theatrical stage of Sokolnikov's illusory world comes to an end:

But it was not the hour of much attention, so nobody listened to Alyosho Sergei. Sea lulled the bodies into fresh attitudes of anticipation, sleep, and melancholy. Directly under the sun the rocks, orange and stubborn, were painfully oblivious (p.236).

In addition, the English poet, Wetherby's, "sick self" is destroyed by the sunlight to reveal "his nothingness" (p.231) and Mrs Rapallo, seeking refuge from the sun under her parasol, having never been "one for the alfresco" (p.230), confesses to Theodora that her daughter does not exist and strives to instruct her in an important lesson of life: relax and go with the flow. Then Sokolnikov, forever living in the dead past, finally admits: "You, Ludmilla, you are an illusion. You died years ago in the forests of Russia" (p.245). Accordingly, by following the General's reflection that "[y]ou can also create the illusion of other people, but once created, they choose their own realities" (p.246), Theodora comes to accept illusion as part of her life. At last, understanding both reality and illusion, she is able to say, "I have reached the age of tolerance" (p.236). She is beginning to learn.

Following this picnic, with its assorted revelations, Theodora comes to realize that she is unable to disconnect herself from her past life in Meroë and with this realization comes the acknowledgement that she cannot be fulfilled in European society:

All that afternoon Theodora Goodman, walking hatless between houses, past trees, near the fragments of stone walls from which lizards looked, heard the words of Sokolnikov. Like rubber they departed and returned. Now her motives were equally elastic, because Sokolnikov had made her doubt. So she could not take the direct road. Roads did not lead through the infinite landscape in which she hesitated, least of all the obvious red coast road. As the town thinned out into advertisements and tins, she wandered higher, where the needle turrets of signorial villas were strangled by roses, and the night club still wore its daylight tarnish. She walked on the edge of the lavender hills (pp.246-247).

Theodora goes to the tower, which, rich in Napoleonic history, is a further symbol of European society, enclosing as it does, "the smell of nettles, and possibly a dead bird, some personal exaltation or despair" (p.248). She is now without her hat which had functioned as a barrier between herself and the outer world, as do her shoes, and, exposed in this way to the full force of the natural world, her mind is becoming clearer.

Her walk to the tower is a determined response to her need to confront her own
deficiencies, for the tower functions also as the classic symbol of sexuality. On the way she meets Katina Pavlou whose voice "as cold as stone" (p.248) belies the undercurrents of turbulent emotions. In a moment of great compassion and intimacy Theodora takes Katina’s hand in her own and feels "a rather stupid kind of happiness, that [is] also painful" (p.249), but Katina only turns away and asks: "Have you ever been inside the tower, Miss Goodman?" (p.249). This question with its directly sexual implications brings Theodora to the brink of yet another point of self-discovery:

And now Theodora felt inside her hand the hand coming alive. She felt the impervious lips of stone forming cold words. She dreaded, in anticipation, the scream of nettles.

'No,' said Theodora, 'I have not been inside the tower. I imagine there is very little to see.'

'There is nothing, nothing,' Katina said. 'There is a smell of rot and emptiness.'

But no less painful in its emptiness, Theodora felt.

'Still, I am glad,' said Katina Pavlou, speaking through her white face. 'You know, Miss Goodman, when one is glad for something that has happened, something nauseating and painful, that one did not suspect. It is better finally to know.'

Under the still skin of Katina Pavlou’s face the blood had not yet begun again to flow. Since yesterday, Theodora saw, the bones had come (p.249).

In this scene yet another "inmate" of the Hôtel du Midi is traumatized by a confrontation with an aspect of real living that she can only see as "nauseating and painful". Though sadly she feels it necessary to reject the experience, this rejection also involves an admission: "... I have come here for a purpose ... if only to be confronted with my own inadequacy" (p.248). Life, for Katina, is a thing to be lived, for "[i]t is better finally to know" (p.249).

Katina is a much braver figure than Theodora in that she is willing to pursue experience on an active level, even though she suspects that it may be unpleasant. She therefore chooses Wetherby with whom to have her "moment of experience" (p.246) as indifferently as one might select a slice of bread, the lesson being all, irrespective of its quality. For Theodora, however, such events are things to be avoided, though it is to her credit that at least she is aware of this, she knows her limitations, she is content to stand and watch; but observers are denied fundamental experiences and life cannot fully be lived without such experiences.

Consequently, Theodora's rejection of such intense happenings diminishes the possibility of enlightenment. She will not be drawn to confront even this possibility, though she is nonetheless profoundly vulnerable to the shock of the unexpected. Thus when she witnesses the impassioned Lieselotte’s destruction of her own paintings, of "the glass pagoda from which her own soul look[s] out, flaming like a bird of paradise" (p.175), she can only deny the experience:
'No!' cried Theodora, holding her hands to her head to protect it from the glass which did not fall.

'Oh, but I am right, said Lieselotte. 'We have destroyed so much, but we have not destroyed enough. We must destroy everything, everything, even ourselves. Then at last when there is nothing, perhaps we shall live (p.175).

These words, even though they echo Theodora’s own experience regarding the necessity for self-destruction in the search for knowledge, only repel her, so she goes quietly away, telling herself that "this [is] not yet her crisis" (p.175).

When Lieselotte finally destroys not only herself but Wetherby and several other innocent people in a conflagration of self-destruction, Theodora is wooden in her responses, inspired only by the beauty-in-terror of Lieselotte and the urgent need to rescue her garnet ring. Thus she loses sight of Lieselotte as though she were nothing more than a drift of smoke.

The fire at the Hôtel du Midi is the culmination of Theodora’s European journey which was really a journey made in desperate hope. A journey that she begins with a sense of expectancy, of waiting "for fresh acts" (p.141), ends in a blaze of destruction that totally depletes her energy and leaves her slack, "[h]er hands open" (p.265), herself open to the flow of things. In a sense, Theodora has risen again from the ashes of unexpected tragedy just as she once rose from the destruction of an oak tree at Meroë. That others die in the fire from which she escapes is to be expected, given the symbolic nature of this episode, for the people who die in the Hôtel du Midi are people of great significance to Theodora’s development. The phoenix, after all, rises from the ashes of its own bones.

Lieselotte, by the destruction of her own worth, her raison d'être, acts out the thesis that life can only truly begin when one has reduced oneself to nothing. Wetherby, the man whose poems have "all the ugliness of truth", (p.171), is a symbol of Theodora’s own possibility, a victim of circumstances that he declares are "no choice of mine" (p.243) but by which he allows himself to be impelled to the point of annihilation. He is a living warning to Theodora but she is unaware that his history is "meant for her" (p.171). Mrs Rapallo, whose advice to "relax and float" (p.252) Theodora is tragically destined to pursue, must also die just as the prophetic Man who was Given his Dinner must fade out of her life once he has imparted his secret knowledge to her.

The two survivors of the great symbolic conflagration, which destroys the corrupt manifestations of European life as equally as it liberates Theodora to commence the third stage of her spiritual journey, are themselves equally symbolic. Katina, melted into a warm and living being, inflamed with the desire to return to her home, is a symbol of the regenerative power of that most fierce of nature’s elements: fire. But Sokolnikov, re-emerging with tales of past experiences, is of greater significance because "Sokolnikov [is] deathless" (p.259), as deathless as the energy that is invested in life.
Once again Theodora is regenerated to pursue her search for her place in things and this is partly seen in her rejection of Europe and her contemplative acceptance of the nature of her relationship with Meroë and her mother. She comes to terms with the latter relationship when she puts on her garnet ring: "It was rather an ugly little ring, but part of the flesh. In the presence of the secret, leaping emotions of the fire she was glad to have her garnet" (p.257). At this moment Theodora is freed from the bonds of her obsession with her mother and liberated from her own ego, the "great monster Self" (p.134) and thus primed for enlightenment, an enlightenment that she approaches with open-handed passivity.

In the landscape of the "pink earth, and chalk-blue for sky" (p.273) of the Mid-Western United States, Theodora once again comes face to face with her personal need for nature, a nature that was wholly confined, in Europe, to the queer and prickly specimens of the jardin exotique. After such bleak and barricaded surroundings Theodora appreciates the space and emptiness of America and feels free, as if she were flying through it. The endless sky and open plains are directly contrasted to the small receptacle of the Hôtel du Midi in the following passage:

Theodora could smell the dust. She could smell the expanding odour of her own body, which was no longer the sour, mean smell of the human body in enclosed spaces, but the unashamed flesh on which dust and sun have lain. She walked. She smiled for this discovery of freedom (pp.273-274).

Having escaped from the stench of corrupt European society she is delighted to smell the dust which, devoid of the smell of enclosed humanity, is for her the scent of true liberty. However, exposed to freedom, Theodora's memory begins to waver -- she remembers that she is going home but this intention is transformed into the more symbolic journey of returning to Abyssinia (p.266), that twinned notion of the original Meroë, but then, as Ann McCulloch argues, "[h]ome for Theodora will ultimately be within herself and will exclude any real contact with an external world". As if responding to this subliminal notion, Theodora destroys the tickets she has bought in New York "for the purpose of prolonging herself through many fresh phases of what [is] accepted as Theodora Goodman" (p.274). Her actual destination becomes irrelevant as she moves towards her spiritual destiny.

Theodora meets her first "significant" American in a train but he represents nothing of the nearness to nature that she might have hoped for in a world so vast and open. Instead he is the victim and embodiment of its materialistic and acquisitive values:

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 pie, and phosphates, and love, and movie contracts, and indigestion, and real estate, and loneliness (p.266).

There is no depth, here, and no real potentiality of depth in one for whom human communication is only sought through words. To Theodora, however, lost to the significance of her real self, open to the penetrating significance of enlightenment, it is enough to know that "you [can not] tell all things always in words" (p.281). Hence even the "words" that form her name become things she rejects, so when asked her name she calls herself Pilkington (p.279), because she is not Theodora Goodman any more. By denying her own name she metaphorically cuts her link with her home just as, by disposing of her tickets, she uproots herself. She has no home to return to now. Her new name, "Pilkington", has no history and no connections with any of her past experiences and Meroë has become part of the landscape of her mind. She dissolves herself into nothing more than air or water (p.134) and in fact abandons herself to "madness". But her insanity is so perceived only by those who are not concerned with the quest for "reality", and this is in keeping with the epigraph of Part Three of this novel: "When your life is most real, to me you are mad".

Having abandoned the constructive elements of normality, her name, her practical aims, the confining clutterings of a "balanced mind", Theodora is free to pursue the ultimate core of truth that is encased by actual appearances. This is illustrated by Theodora's mental journey to her home, an event that is sparked off by the landscape:

Theodora walked beyond the yard, beyond the dry flags of corn, and the gate upon which the red dog was stiffly lifting his leg. She walked to that point in the road where she had left off. She continued, climbing higher, where the road led, though this was less determinate. It wandered over rocks and sand, almost obliterated, or else its ruts cut deep where floods of rain had run, giving these scars the appearance of natural formation .... Theodora heard the crackle of undergrowth. Sudden glimpses of the black trees struck cold. Then, there was a small plateau and a house, which she imagined must formerly have been the final objective of the faint road (pp.284-285).

The house on the top of the hill is reminiscent of a similar house in Meroë, a house where a madman lived and died and "nobody knew what his intention had been" (p.63). In Europe, Theodora could not bring herself to enter the tower with its mysterious smells and haunting phallic symbolism but here she does not hesitate, indeed she enters the house with pleasure:

There was the same space of emptiness, but the larger windows gave more

---

9. Theodora's change of name is somewhat different from those of Alys Browne, Catherine Standish or Thelma Parker who all merely weaken their identity by the gesture, rather than dissolve themselves into nothingness.
light, the windows that she threw open now, and there the valleys flowed. In this light the valleys did flow. At the foot of the mountains they moved in the soft and moving light, the amethyst and grey. They flowed at the roots of the black sonorous islands. All the time the light seeped deeper into the craters of the earth (pp.285-286).

Once she is inside, she is attracted by the landscape as seen through the window and equates the emptiness of the house only with space or freedom. It is in this house that the "dissolving" of Theodora's mind is finally accomplished but drawn by the scenery outside she can only observe that: "... the process of disintegration that was taking place at the foot of the mountains should have been frightening and tragic, but it was not" (p.286).

It is whilst she is in the house that Theodora meets the man called Holstius, that mysterious figure, invisible to everyone else, who will be the last of her mentors on a journey that began with the predictions of the Man who was Given his Dinner. Holstius reminds her of her father, of "[w]alking with her father on the frost at Meroë, or sitting with him in his room, in which the pines were never quite still" (p.288). It was Theodora's father who, absorbing the silent landscape of Meroë, had first commenced her lessons on the dichotomy of life and taught her that: "Life was divided, rather, into the kinder moments and the cruel, which on the whole are not conditioned by sex" (p.34). Just as she listened to her father then so she now listens to Holstius, a man who speaks "in abstractions" (p.288), and who also attempts to persuade her to accept life's dichotomies, which he calls the two irreconcilable halves:

'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' (p.289).

Theodora is consoled by the love of this figment of her imagination, Holstius: "His hands [touch] the bones of her head under the damp hair. They [sooth] the wounds" (p.289), but she is unable to come to terms with the dualism of life. If she expects anything it is for some comforting notion of unity or harmony about the world that she looks, so that she resists Holstius because to embrace his doctrine entirely is to reject her father's concept of the indivisibility of Meroë and Ethiopia and Abyssinia. Yet her father also believed in the multiplicity of life and so Theodora is brought face to face with a challenge: by accepting Holstius's contention of the dichotomy of life, Theodora would reject that half of her father which believes in unity; yet to opt for unity is also to reject her father, because he too believes that life is riddled with dichotomy. She is trapped by the irreconcilable, but she nonetheless accepts Holstius's love, though she
resists his doctrine.¹⁰

Theodora, comforted by her meeting with Holstius, "[r]esistance [having] gone out of her as she lay" (p.289), sleeps and awakes to find that "[l]ight [is] beginning" (p.289). She rises to the effort of reconciliation with her own physicality, slowly restoring sensations to the "working shape" (p.289) of her body. When she stands "[t]he numbness of her whole body [leaves] her with intensely clear vision" (p.289). But Theodora's clarity of perception is a fundamental ingredient of her inability to rationalize fully. Having resisted Holstius's discourse on the disparate nature of life she continues to pursue her dream of harmony and unity, something which she had experienced in the landscape of Meroë. Hence it is to the landscape that she immediately responds, feeling her feet sink into wet earth, washing her face and hands in the brown water of a rusted tin, a water that is reminiscent of the stream in which she floated as a child:

The water made her laugh. She looked at the world with eyes blurred by water, but a world curiously pure, expectant, undistorted. She could almost have read a writing on the bark of any given tree (p.290).

The immediate impact of the physical world further intensifies her vision of it. Energized by this and by the comfortable certainty that Holstius will return to her, she takes over the house as if it were part of herself, all the while looking to nature to provide her with spiritual assurance, looking "through the trees for the tree walking, which in time would become Holstius" (p.290).

Holstius here assumes the guise of a nature spirit, perhaps the spirit of nature for which Theodora has always searched in her longing for a "wholeness in things". She is still, therefore, unable and unwilling to acquiesce in the notion of diversity, or irreconcilable parts. Yet Holstius's second visit has a remarkable and soothing effect on Theodora, for he releases her from the anxiety she has always felt about her fate, since the Man who was Given his Dinner predicted the destructive nature of her ability to see. Released from the fear of "what was prepared" (p.48) by Holstius's act of symbolic healing, through the laying on of the hands, beneath whose touch "leaves glistened down to the least important vein" (p.294), Theodora finally and fully gives herself up to whatever her fate entails. In this she is moved by nature at its most intimate, by leaves that penetrate deeply into herself, this is her moment of peace and, too, her last and greatest moment of enlightenment: "In the peace that Holstius spread throughout her body and the speckled shade of surrounding trees, there was no end to the lives of Theodora Goodman" (p.295).

¹⁰. There seems little doubt that Theodora cannot wholly accept the notion of dichotomy at this point though clearly she is consoled by Holstius. See McCulloch, A Tragic Vision, pp.13-14.
Theodora discovers at once the meanings of all the lives of those who have in some way been involved with her. Each one, be it that of Moraitis, Mrs Rapallo, Sokolnikov, Katina, or any number of other friends or mentors, has been incorporated into the structures of Theodora's "many lives". In this way, Theodora comes to see that just as life is a thing which ends, so death is a thing that begins: "George or Julia Goodman [are] only apparently deceased ..." (p.295). This is the dichotomy of life laid out before her like a map. When she leaves Holstius she leaves him without thought, obedient and acquiescent only to his prophecy. She knows what will happen next but she also knows that it does not matter, for in "the brown circles of perpetual water [that is] stirring with great gentleness the eternal complement of skeleton and spawn" (p.296) life goes on; Theodora Goodman is "deathless".

But this immortality is the immortality that is present only in the cycle of "multiplication and division" (p.295) of which Holstius speaks. It is the mandala, a thing indifferent to individual beings. Theodora is lost to the Fates, herself a remnant of a past life, she is soaked up like water into a sponge, by what may or may not be the only reality there is: the dichotomous cycle of nature. That she is thus incorporated wholly into the "wholeness of things" might indeed be said to render her "ruin", but it is a reality that rests on larger things and comes only at the expense of individual identity. Therefore, when "[h]er face [becomes] long and yellow under the great black hat"(p.299), Theodora Goodman ceases to be. It is not she but Meroë that walks placidly into an asylum.

Theodora's whole life is patterned by the landscape, she feeds upon it in an almost parasitic way, absorbing it into her being for the purpose of sustaining and defining her spiritual identity. She never functions as a whole, individual, active social being at any point in her life and feels comfortable only as an isolate, a thin brown stick floating in Meroë's waters. As a child, removed from her home to a boarding school, she feels constrained and alienated, and, devoid of artistic or intellectual accomplishments, she is seen as truthful but barren. In Sydney she functions without the vocation for either marriage or career at a level of frustration, and her European trip reveals nothing but a tendency to capitulate almost totally to the whims of others. She becomes Ludmilla as simply and easily as she accepts the prophecies that others make. Sokolnikov wants her to be Ludmilla, therefore she is Ludmilla. The Man who was Given his Dinner predicted that she would be broken by her own vision, therefore she is broken. Holstius tells her that she must surrender to the machinations of "admirable" and "limited" people and like an obedient child she keeps to his plan.

Outside Meroë, Theodora is a non-entity. A thing broken off from the parent plant and removed to a place that cannot sustain it; she withers and dies without
producing either a simple root or leaf. That, at the end, she becomes "utterly herself" as William Walsh\(^{11}\) has argued, is therefore only true in so far as she has always been part of Meroë, she has never existed as a separate entity.

Theodora's quest for a unity in things is therefore a search for something that, all along, existed in herself. Her life is like a Sufic parable, she follows the Man who was Given his Dinner in a mad quest for gold that all the time could be found in the soil of Meroë and in the landscape of her country. Longing to connect herself with reality, the reality of universal wholeness, she pursues her longing beyond the boundaries of reality itself because for her all that is real is Meroë. At Meroë, Theodora experienced reality in an intense but intuitive way and only re-experiences such reality when Holstius, the walking tree, lays his hands upon her and puts leaves in her veins.

The resolution of AS is neither particularly positive nor negative, it is a thing that happens and only that. It can be argued that "only the mad are sane"\(^{12}\) just as it can be said that the mad are mad, in the end it does not really matter. What does matter is that a character's reason is sacrificed in pursuit of a thing that defies reason. How much of White is poured into the pages of his books may never be wholly known but what is evident in this novel is that its author is relentlessly striving towards acquiring some sense of meaning in life. This quest, as exemplified by so much of his work, is a deep and personal thing, the nature of which led to his isolation. Perhaps it is inevitable, therefore, that the principal character of this book should come to be apart from everyone else. Whatever the unifying principle of life, be it the divine essence, apeiron\(^{13}\), or call it what one will, it is a thing that men have searched for throughout recorded history and probably longer. It has defied the capabilities of great and supple minds and Theodora, at least, is not blessed with such a mind. All she can do is respond to the belief in such a unifying thing instinctively and at the expense of her identity and her reason.

For some, of course, the answer is a simple one, it can be found in God, God whose splendour is writ large in the natural landscape. But White, when he wrote AS, had not reached such a resolution, for he notes in reference to this novel: "... I had not yet begun to accept (except perhaps unconsciously) that I believe in a God".\(^{14}\) Yet the pursuit of an intellectual understanding of the "wholeness of things", "the unifying principle" or

---

the "divine essence" is perhaps a vain pursuit and if this is so then Theodora Goodman, by surrendering her reason, her intellectual capability and herself, may well be the winner after all, because she knows in her veins, in her nerves, deep in the waters of her being that: "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not. It is the heart, not reason, which feels God. That is what faith is. God felt by the heart, not by the reason". 15

CHAPTER 4

THE TREE OF MAN: THE UNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND LANDSCAPE

The fate of Theodora Goodman, in AS, engaged in an intense pursuit of unity in the world, is a fate that might equally be shared by Stan Parker. Yet perhaps Stan is protected from the total loss of self that is Theodora’s lot by a quiet, somewhat objective approach to life that precludes obsession of any sort. Obsessions may well be the province of the unreasonable and the nature of Theodora’s sacrificial life is arguably a monument to the unreasonable. Stan Parker is, in complete contrast to Theodora, an average farmer, "the real typical Australian" settling in the countryside "in the true pioneering fashion". 1 Stan has no time to be unreasonable. What happens to him is ostensibly ordinary and everyday -- the sort of thing that is not beyond the realms of existence of any Australian. As Patrick White remarks: "I wanted to try to suggest in this book every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman".2

One focus of this novel is perhaps the fact that an ordinary man, who lives in a "deadly dull" country, is able to aspire to the extraordinary, to the harmony of the natural world that is beyond conscious human control or comprehension. This quest is, of course, a continuous theme of White's novels: "... 'the search for some meaning and design' in what [man] sees as the 'tragic farce of life -- to find reason in apparent unreason, and how to accept a supernatural force, which on the one hand blesses and on the other destroys'".4

Just before his death when "[a] great tenderness of understanding [rises] in his chest", 5 Stan Parker reaches a state of being able to accept "a mystery of life" running through the material world. His fulfilled mind, his achievement of a knowledge of life, is symbolized by the "circle in the shrubs and trees" (p.474) in the centre of which Stan is

seated. White reveals his belief in this state of receptiveness as being effectively, "an acceptance of a God". The process of achieving this perception as portrayed by the novel is, of course, not associated with any overt concept of Christianity or the Bible. White identifies the idea of God for Stan, who is able to acknowledge God in a "gob of spittle" (p.476), with a supernatural force and sense of beauty in life, as he remarks: "... the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of [an ordinary man and woman], and incidentally, my own life ..." 6

White says that he had not believed in God at the time he wrote AS, but when he came to write TM, he had begun to feel himself strongly moved by a religious impulse. 7 It is apparent that White's philosophical stance has changed between AS and TM, as the import of his novels and his own words attest. In this chapter, Stan's progress to the stage of accepting a superhuman order will be discussed in terms of a God or Divine Immanence, especially in the light of his responses to the natural environment of his homeland. Stan comes to understand the true meaning of life, through his growing conviction that there is a unifying power in the natural world. In this he is in direct contrast to his wife, son and daughter, who all fail to reach a similar stage of spiritual understanding.

The novel is structured around the seasons of the year, as well as around Biblical imagery. The first part of the novel is set in spring, the season of man's innocence; the second in summer, the season of experience; the third in autumn, the season of temptation, destruction and desperation; and the fourth in winter, the season of death and resignation with the prospect of rebirth or regeneration. Stan and Amy Parker, who open up the land, can be considered to be Adam and Eve, the first man and woman. The seasonal imagery and allusion to the Biblical concept of regeneration introduce the theme of the eternal fluctuations of life, the perpetual cycle of life and death. As a result, this novel can be seen as an "Australian Genesis".

Stan Parker settles on the land he inherits from his father. Life has not yet "operated on his face" (p.9) as it must do, both literally and metaphorically, before he can come to feel he belongs to the land. "Anyway, in the beginning. At Willow Creek" (p.11), as White laconically begins, Stan starts to open up his land and symbolically his own life, surrounded by a natural abundance emanating from "God" (p.11), of whose existence he is not yet aware, and for whom he does not yet feel a need. He is still strong: "One live[s]. Almost no one question[s] the purpose of living. One [is] born. One live[s]" (p.104).

The young Stan reads Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* which he obtains from his mother, and "those passages in which men emerged from words" (p.12) from the Old Testament but there is no question of interpretation, because Stan is not an interpreter: "He was nothing much. He was a man" (p.12). He "succeed[s] in filling his belly" (p.12) and his life is enough simply because he lives it. Stan lives in harmony with nature, with the seasonal cycle:

There in the scarred bush, that had not yet accepted its changed face, the man soon began to build a house, or shack. He brought the slabs he had shaped for logs. Slowly. He piled his matchsticks. So the days were piled too. Seasons were closing and opening on the clearing in which the man was at work. If days fanned the fury in him, months smoothed, so that time, as it passed, was both shaping and dissolving, in one (p.16).

Unlike the characters in *HV*, therefore, Stan is part of the landscape, neither rejecting nor escaping. Even though there are "veins of wisdom and poetry" deep in him, they cannot be unearthed at this spiritually embryonic stage of his life, because he is unconsciously establishing his connections with the essence of the world that is deeper than mere appearance. In this land, Stan just lives, grubbing up weeds, felling trees, and tightening the wire fences which are the metaphorical enclosures of his "poetry". Through ploughing the soil, his body is hardened as its muscles are sculptured into a "neat, self-contained shape" (p.42). The mystery of his being, however, that is his soul remains enclosed, unreleased, never receiving interpretation by words, but it does emerge as "flesh language". His physical life can be seen as an embodiment of physical permanence with an as yet undiscovered spiritual counterpart. Stan’s flesh and soul are not yet reconciled.

However, Stan’s unspoken "poem" gradually begins to surface as his oneness with the landscape develops:

In the comfortable silence, in a blandishment of trees, in the smell of hot leather, the young man drove homeward after market days. Distance flooded his soul. He began to open. He would remember many simple but surprising things: his mother combing the hair from a brush, the soldiers on the battlements of Elsinore, the breath of a roan cow at daybreak, mouths biting at a prayer but not consuming. All the riches of memory were recounted on these mornings (p.35).

Stan’s response to the significance of distance in the Australian landscape is an indication of his natural humility and the growing awareness of his place in things. "Distance" here is White’s metaphor for the mysterious potentialities of the natural world as opposed to human limitations. Like Theodora, Stan opens his eyes in silence to something which is not yet clear. This marks a transition to the second stage of his awakening. Stan desperately wants to see or to know what it is, but does not know how to find the answer, so in his frustration begins impatiently, even passionately, to chop some logs. Finally, he throws aside his axe with disgust, searching "for something wood
will not disclose" (p.42). This "something" is embodied for Stan in the names of foreign places, the mystique of the expression, "the Gold Coast" (p.39), which for example, functions like "Ethiopia" -- the second Merœ of AS. Other images enter his conscious mind, giving him glimpses of something that "he sense[s] inside him without yet discovering, [which] stirred, heaved almost to the surface" (p.39), and he becomes torn between "the images of gold and ebony and his own calm life of flesh" (p.39). Though "the Gold Coast" is not a place he can see or touch, it is as if "the beauty of the world had risen in a sleep, in the crowded wooden room, and he could almost take it in his hands" (p.39). The poetry of Stan is grasped, not in concrete words or form, but in the awakening of his imagination.

As Stan is in harmony with the mountains, trees, rocks and gullies, his response to the natural violence of storm, deluge and fire is one of acceptance as well as an emerging awareness of some spiritual power that is beyond his ability to comprehend:

The whole earth was in motion, a motion of wind and streaming trees, and he was in danger of being carried with it.

When he was a little boy he had lain on a hard horsehair sofa and been carried through the books of the Old Testament on a wave of exaltation and fear. And now, brought to his knees, about to be hit over the head perhaps, a lightning flash lit his memory. God blew from the clouds, and men would scatter like leaves. It was no longer possible to tell who was on which side. Or is it ever possible to tell? Surrounded by the resentful inanimacy of rock and passionate striving of the trees, he was not sure (p.47).

Buffeted by the storm Stan searches for "some expression of sympathy on the sky's face" (p.47), as though it were a living being. Yet he does not react to the storm by feeling a need to protect himself. Instead he feels possessed by something ambiguous, a kind of unhappiness that is not really fear or distress. He is able to reconcile himself to the situation through an intuitive understanding of the significance, to his inner self, of the storm, and to feel at peace in it. He does not attempt to interpret or logically examine this experience, since "he has not learned to think far" (p.49) or, rather, he is not "aware of the practice of doing so" (p.66). The experiences of the storm and lightning are merely "written on" (p.49) his life, as it were, and he reaches the conclusion that "he is a prisoner in his human mind, as in the mystery of the natural world. Only sometimes the touch of hands, the lifting of a silence, the sudden shape of a tree or presence of a first star, hints at eventual release" (p.49).

Stan's attitude towards "the mystery of the natural world" is akin to that of Theodora, who was at one with the natural surroundings of her home at Merœ. When Theodora strips and lies drifting in the river, as though she were a stick, she feels free, surrounded in this way by nature, with which she communes in silence. Stan similarly feels released in the contemplation of the tranquillity of the trees around him or in the presence of a first star.
The town of Durilgai, a mile from the Parkers' property, is located in such an immense space that words "lose their direction" (p.103) and silence reigns supreme. The people of the town are born, live and die there. They never doubt the validity of their lives, merely existing as physically and simply as the general store stands on the street. Accordingly, no one questions his or her purpose in living, each one takes everything as it is, so that names are unimportant, and even the objects primly displayed in the shop windows look timeless and have acquired a kind of permanence. The lives of human beings are thus apparently in harmony with the natural surroundings, and peaceful daily life persists, but, in fact, these people are totally unconnected with the deeper spiritual significance of their lives and the land they inhabit.

Their world, however, does not always remain peaceful. It is able to cause catastrophes which can directly affect human life and until these erupt, people do not realize that the violence of nature is beyond their control. During his life, Stan virtually runs the gamut of all possible disasters: storm, flood, drought and fire. In the process of experiencing them, Stan gradually learns to open "the wire fences" which enclose "his poetry".

In the early part of the novel, there is a big flood as the river in Wullunya breaks its banks and rain, a necessary and valued element of Australian life, becomes a destroyer:

The house was no longer a house; it had been reduced to a pointed roof on which rain fell. People in their houses at night no longer occupied themselves but sat sideways, with thin and yellow faces, doubting each other's motives, as they listened to the iron rain. It fell always. It fell in their sleep. It washed through the dreams of sleepers, lifted their fears and resentments, and set them floating on the grey waters of sleep (p.70).

The rain in this symbolic narrative has become a tyrannical force which cannot be contained. The "iron rain" washes through people who have been "sleeping" in peaceful daily life, and who have never recognized its potential power. They, of course, are forced to flee for their lives. When asked, Stan agrees to help rescue those who have been cut off by the flood but his behaviour at the rescue scene is, from the beginning, passive, in fact he acts like an observer.

The world is water now, everything is submerged, and the men in the boat are amazed by the transfigured landscape, which appears strange to everyone except Stan, who by this time knew in himself that you can expect anything, and that it was not necessarily the hand of the mayor of Wullunya pointing the way to the flat boat (p.73).

Stan accepts his situation without any reaction, able to acknowledge the natural force which he as yet cannot fully understand. He simply floats on the water and watches as it sweeps away all familiar things:
... a chair with no one in it, there was a piece of bitten cheese, and letters grown spidery, and a hassock in the blackberry canes, a hat with a drowned feather, a baby’s chamber pot, a Bible open at Ezekiel (pp.73-74).

These items, hitherto a part of everyday life, have now lost their function as a result of the flood and all Stan can do is observe them floating to and fro from the stationary boat and wonder at the awesome phenomenon that makes such things occur. He is at the centre of the landscape of the flood, everything is moving around him, changing its appearance and function and he is only mystified by it.

On the way to rescue marooned people, Stan sees the body of an old man stuck upside down in the fork of a tree. He does not mention this to the other volunteers—"[a]ll omissions [being] accepted by the blunt boat" (p.74). Even when he eventually discovers that the dead man is the father of a woman they have rescued, Stan fails to tell her about the corpse, despite his pity for her. This is an indication of the degree of passivity with which he approaches the rescue. He is, in fact, a kind of corpse himself, floating in the stream of events. Stan Parker does not show his reaction to the flood for he is here characterized as a man released from the restraints and limitations of his own ego, which White thinks can sometimes prevent the human being from perceiving the profound dimensions of the natural world. During the flood, things that were once viewed as permanent, trees, paddocks, houses, animals, even human beings, are swept away or inundated by the water; such are the lessons of the natural world which Stan is beginning to understand. These events remind him of his mother’s face before her burial. He “touched her cold hands, and buried her, and went away” (p.15) without further reflection, since he did not then understand the significance of life. Now even the soil which envelopes his mother’s body cannot be relied upon, it too is subject to nature’s capriciousness. His thoughts have become clearer than before and he recognizes, with some fear, the metaphysical implications of this display of nature’s force, that "the solidity of things" (p.73) is not assured. Through the experience of the deluge, Stan subconsciously acknowledges the reality of life, but he is unable to explain it in words as he cannot express the "poetry" that he now realizes lies within him.

Later, when confronted by a storm and while sitting in the flickering darkness, waiting for it, Stan experiences yet another moment of enlightenment:

... as the storm increased, his flesh had doubts, and he began to experience humility. The lightning, which could have struck open basalt, had, it seemed, the power to open souls. It was obvious in the yellow flash that something like this had happened, the flesh had slipped from his bones, and a light was shining in his cavernous skull (p.151).

At first, Stan accepts the rain on his dry skin and is even content with it. In the centre of the storm, he is at one with the falling rain just as he was at one with the flood. He recognizes his own physical existence by feeling the water on his flesh. However, as the
rain becomes heavier, he feels his body weaken, the solidity of the flesh is not assured, and a feeling of humility comes to him. Through the process of his surrender to the storm and by his yielding to it, Stan's human "arrogance" is ultimately subdued. The power of the storm continues to build on his previous experience with the flood, until his eyes are opened to the degree whereby he begins to sense something more definite and purposeful behind nature's display of strength. The mystery of the world becomes clearer to Stan as "the form of the lightning enters the crest of the trees":

Standing there somewhat meekly, the man could have loved something, someone, if he could have penetrated beyond the wood, beyond the moving darkness. But he could not, and in his confusion he prayed to God, not in specific petition, wordlessly almost, for the sake of company. Till he began to know every corner of the darkness, as if it were daylight, and he were in love with the heaving world, down to the last blade of wet grass (p.151).

He is sure that he is able to see "something or someone" behind the wood and beyond the darkness, and love it even though he is unable to explain what it is. He feels he knows "every corner of the darkness" and is able to reconcile himself to the violence of the storm as he acknowledges its physical superiority. After it passes, there comes a "gentleness", and Stan, though exhausted, feels he can accept the order of the natural world.

In summer, drought takes hold of the country. Everything seems dead; the leaves of the trees are like sand-paper, the wind blows through the yellow dead grass; the grey skeletons of the trees and old, weak cows are scattered across the landscape. The people, however, do not pay any special attention to this, taking it for granted. Nevertheless, just as the rain has the potential to become a destructive deluge, so the drought can prepare the way for bushfires, which further threaten the lives of human beings and animals. Eventually a fire breaks out, ironically in that part of the country, in the direction of Wullunya, where the floods had been:

The men of Durilgai straggled along the bush tracks, in groups, discussing other fires, or singly, looking at the ground. The latter were surprised at the details of sand, stones, and sticks they saw. They had discovered in the earth an austere beauty that they now loved with a sad love, that comes when it is already too late. The fire causes this inevitably to happen to solitary men. They are reconciled to the lives they are leaving behind, as they ride between the black trees, and the yellow light lowers, and animals begin to run towards them instead of away (p.164).

The fire, worst than any seen before, helps to open their eyes, for a time, to unfamiliar aspects of the natural world which they inhabit but with which they have never fully lived. They begin to see beauty in destruction and to be reconciled to their past. In the end, however, the metaphysical import of the raging fire is too overwhelming for their constrained, "fenced in" minds and spirits and they turn away.

When the fire climbs to Glastonbury, the property of the successful butcher,
Armstrong, most of the people are ready to fight it and Amy asks Stan to save Madeleine, who is trapped in the blazing house. Amy has mentally composed a novelette about the aristocratic Madeleine, and wants Stan to be the hero of the story by rescuing her heroine from the fire. Stan, "dull and passive" in the "presence of such brilliance" (p.176) is reluctant to do so because such overt acts of courage are not attributes of his character. He has always waited, "not to give, but to receive" (p.176) and is inclined to respond as he did before in the face of the flood. However, he accepts the new experience:

All that he had never done, all that he had never seen, appeared to be contained in this house, and it was opening to him. Till his head began to reel with fiery splendours of its own, and he was prepared to accept the invitation, and follow the passages of the house, or fire, to any possible conclusion (p.176).

Stan does not feel that the fire is any real threat to him, hence, once he accepts the challenge of rescuing Madeleine, he does not hesitate to enter the burning house. Expecting and fearing nothing he approaches the task as if it were no more than another simple experience. His attempt to save Madeleine is regarded by the others as "something positive" (p.176), but he just lets himself float on the current of the event, as he did on water of the river.

Inside the burning house it is as if time had stood still and there is a sense of unreality about the whole venture. Stan wanders like a bemused child in Aladdin's cave, "[h]is shadow ... involved with the dormant chandelier" (p.177), and he is at once fascinated with the beauty and opulence of the furnishings he sees and ashamed of "his cloddish boots" (p.177). Accordingly, he is drawn away from the immediate recollection of his initial purpose and further hesitates at the thought of having to speak to Madeleine, whom he obviously feels has the social advantage, even in this situation. He presses on, despite this, however, though uncertain at the time, whether he is "the saviour or sacrifice" (p.178). When he finally confronts Madeleine he is drawn to her "glowing and flowing" (p.178) body. He experiences, then, a moment of sexual tension when he and Madeleine, bound by terror, silently acknowledge that "passion of the last moment". But of course it is not the last moment and the status quo is re-established. Yet it is not Amy's fantastic illusion of a heroine who emerges in Stan's arms from "the holocaust of Glastonbury" (p.181), but a woman who vomits up smoke on all fours. She is a lovely but fundamentally human being with human deficiencies, her hair singed off, herself made real by a moment of intensity on the stairs with Stan Parker. Amy abandons her novelettish ideal "without regret" (p.181), because the reality of Madeleine destroys it. But she is quick to see the romantic advantages of having a real hero in the form of her husband.

In the fire, destructive though it is, Stan feels as if he is in the presence of an
overwhelming power. The fire performs the function of purifying the dead landscape left by the drought, and this symbolically represents the awakening of the "sleeping" inhabitants to a renewed vision of life. The fire, of course, can be compared with that in the Hôtel du Midi in AS, whose function is also to purge and regenerate the decayed and dying society of Europe. The fire at Glastonbury also engulfs the decadence of the Armstrongs, and consumes Amy's dream of "a lady on a white horse", in the cleansing flame of spirituality.

Like the deluge, the bushfire is a strong indication of natural violence and Stan responds to this accordingly. He knows that in the face of the fire, "the royalty and the saints" stuck on the wall are powerless and "only the paper [remains], drained of its mysticism and spotted by flies" (p.179) and thus that even the higher temporal and spiritual powers are impotent before it. The Armstrongs, for all their wealth, cannot restrain the fire. Human beings and animals cannot help but can only watch, powerless to prevent this natural violence. They surrender themselves to it just as they submit to the mystery that is nature. The only thing that can quench it is the rain, which once caused a deluge at the same place, but which now turns to drops of jewels (p.181). White appears to suggest by this that by letting oneself "drift" with the natural harmony or cycle, one can experience something tangible, which cannot be expressed or explained, and can be understood only by our subjective experience.

Stan has thus incorporated the natural environment into his awareness of things, awarding it personal significance and thus making it an element of his psyche. Through contact with flood, storms and fire, he discovers a kind of beauty in the uncompromising Australian landscape, acknowledging his spirituality as it awakens from its sleep. Amy, on the other hand, never experiences "the poetry" of the natural world, seeking contentment vicariously, through the bravery of Stan's act of rescuing the woman from the fire, for example. Amy is afraid of the violence and the mystery of nature and so avoids committing herself to it.

In the early stage of the novel, Stan Parker marries and settles on his land. He and his wife are ordinary people and their married life is not characterized by any special or unusual event. The two clear and cultivate their land and survive the many natural disasters that are common to the rural areas of Australia. They have children, Stan goes to the war, his wife has an affair, and eventually the children leave the parents to live their own lives. Stan and Amy's married life might be considered a cycle as natural as that of the seasons, of life and death, of fire and flood. Stan responds to this in the same way as he does to the environment, in contrast to Amy, who does not live in harmony with the natural cycle.

When Stan marries Amy, he does not make a "decision" but marries in response to the ebb and flow of his barely conscious life:
Stan Parker did not decide to marry the Fibbens girl, if decision implies pros and cons; he simply knew that he would do it, and as there was no reason why the marriage ceremony should be delayed, it was very soon performed, in the little church at Yuruga, which looks a bit cockeyed, because built by hands less skilled than willing, on a piece of bumpy ground (p.24).

Stan does not really know the woman he has married and only discovers their difference in a moment of crisis. When the earth is a "motion of wind and streaming trees" (p.47),

Amy responds to the power of nature in a different way from Stan:

Presently the man saw his wife running, her limbs fighting the wind and the stuff of her own dress. Seeing her tortured into these shapes he did not know, and the drained, strange face, quite suddenly he felt that this was not the girl he had married in the church at Yuruga, and loved and quarrelled with, but he forced himself to stumble on towards her. To touch.

They stood holding each other in the storm.

'What will we do?' she cried, through her mouth that was still of a strange shape.

'There is nothing much we can do', he shouted, 'except hope it will be over' (p.47).

Stan does not understand why Amy's limbs struggle in the wind. He is possessed by the storm and never struggles to escape from it: as the wind leads, so his body follows, because he feels exhilarated by the presence of a power which he is unable to control.

As for Amy, as long as her body is joined with Stan she is secure and firmly settled in the earth. The storm passes them and "[m]an and woman [are] flung against each other with the ease and simplicity of tossed wood" (p.48). Stan feels as if he has discovered a new taste (p.48); Amy sees that "his head [is] very young with the hair plastered to the skull" (p.48) but she does not really see its significance. Stan has achieved a "purity", refreshed by the storm, as he effectively takes part in its natural rhythm, without resistance. In contrast, Amy gets quickly to her feet, because "there [is] a lot to do" (pp.48-49); there is no reason for her, with her utilitarian attitudes, "to suppose their lives would become different by thinking of it" (p.49). It is quite obvious that she does not apprehend the inexplicable power controlling the natural world.

Amy recognizes her husband's love when her hands touch his back and for her "all things should be translated" into words, while Stan does not feel "the necessity to translate his own life" because "[h]is life as lived [is] enough" (p.34). The whole landscape which surrounds Amy becomes important only when she hears Stan begin to hammer in the evening, or she listens to the voices of her husband and the neighbouring boys, who are giving him a hand. When she looks at Stan's strong body, she realizes that "she [is] looking at her life" (p.63). This perception gives shape to her life but her attitude toward her husband is one of possessiveness, she can only respond to him by identifying him with herself.
For similar reasons, while expecting a child, Amy keeps an old pregnant cow, identifying herself with it:

She buried her forehead in the cow's soft side, and there was a continual stirring, and the gentle cow smell. The whole air those evenings was soft with the smell of cow's breath, as if the blue tongue had slapped it on. The old cow stood wisely waiting. Her ears were held twitched back, as if she were pleased. Her brown eyes looked inward, it appeared. There were little dots of passive moisture on her granite-coloured nose.

Still even than the dusk was this peaceful relationship between Amy Parker and the yellow cow. Their soft, increasing bodies were in full accord (pp.55-56).

The cycle of the cow's life and Amy's are in harmony in so far as both are in the process of bearing offspring, but, at the same time, Amy has to touch the cow with her body to make their oneness concrete. Amy is preoccupied with the mysterious behaviour of her body, which frightens her because she has no control over it.

When the old cow dies after bearing its heifer, Amy runs, "accompanied by her own animal breath" (p.63), to relate the events:

But the farther she left their dead cow behind, the closer she came to all that she had not experienced. So that her skin was cold as she ran through the nets spread to catch her, straining without much thought, except to escape as directly as possible from her own fear (p.63).

Facing the death of the cow, with which she identifies, Amy has to flee, caught as she is in a trap of "fear". She has no power over such events, and her attempts to analyse them are in vain, and so she "stumble[s] again weakly over the wet bracken" (p.64).

Stan's response, on the other hand, is simply to accept the death of the old sick cow as the natural result of leaving behind a new heifer. It is for him another example of the natural cycle of life, but at this moment Stan recognizes "the incommunicable misery" (p.65) existing in the relationship between himself and Amy.

Amy's life is actually swamped by the natural cycle, and she struggles to understand it as she is affected by it emotionally and intellectually. Accordingly, she is not able to see where and what she is, she is a prisoner in the natural world as well as in her own flesh:

If the floods of life swelled inside her, they were not seen in those parts, where she was respected, and also liked. Only sometimes her face devoured the landscape, or she waited for the roof to be torn off, but only sometimes (p.66).

Even though she attempts to know the mystery of life and to understand herself and her own body, she does not succeed, always remaining in her "prison". On the other hand, Stan is perfectly at ease with himself and the environment in which he lives. Amy is excluded by this experience and fails in consequence to wholly possess or understand her husband. These examples of Amy seeking to externalize and make concrete her own identity, through other objects (Stan and the cow) and of her fearful reaction to the
cow's death, help to establish a dramatic contrast between Amy and Stan. As in other novels, White sets a materialistic character against one more spiritually inclined.

Amy and Stan have two children, who soon become the objects of Amy's possessive love, while for Stan they are the "stranger-children" because "the mystery of possession is a mystery that it is not possible to share" (p.56). Amy has to own these children in order to make sure of her own sense of being which is often the tragic consequence of a woman's inability to fully communicate with her spouse. Her possessiveness is further reflected in her keeping puppies as pets, though this may also be a manifestation of her abundant natural instincts. The puppies, however, are reminiscent of Mrs Rapallo's monkey in AS which is both an object of love and a "being" to be possessed. Both are inclined to be possessive individuals, though Mrs Rapallo is also living in an illusory world for she constructs "the fiction" of her daughter, the Principessa, while Amy invests her creative imagination in the "noveletta of Madeleine". Amy loses her puppies when Ray apparently kills them. She is thus betrayed by those whom she loves and longs to keep. After the flood, Amy and Stan take in a lost boy, whom Amy wants to "imprison ... in her house by force of love" (p.97), but he also disappears. Eventually, however, Amy feels that she herself must "produce some tangible evidence of the mystery of life" (p.97). Unfortunately, she is trapped by the mundaneness of her life and cannot overcome it.

Stan's responses to his children are in stark contrast to those of his wife. Even when the first child, Ray, is born, Stan does not touch him. When Thelma is born and Stan is in the church for the christening, he has to make a conscious effort to "recapture the sense of ownership" (p.124) of his daughter, who is being "labelled" with his name. Amy, on the other hand, has achieved her goal of creating a family through which she can acknowledge her life as a thing of concrete fact and this gives her life some sense of structure and definition.

On one occasion Amy takes her children for a walk through the paddock. This scene can be compared with that of Theodora and her father who also take a walk through the paddock at Meroë:

One day after rain she said they would walk across the paddocks. It would be a change, from what, she could not have answered. But she put on an old hat, that was brown and rather ugly. And her children came, sulking at the injustice of a walk. They followed her through the dead, wet grass. All through the paddocks where they walked there was the smell of wet grass and of turpentines. There was a breeze too, that turned the leaves of the trees back to front, till they were silver and more festive. There was a restless moodiness in this gentle weather, that was only a lull in the more positive blaze of summer. Damp breezes and the passing touch of cool leaves invited to retrospect and fantasy. Till Amy Parker floated, and her children, conscious of this levitation, became eager and melancholy (p.133).
Amy can not communicate her needs to her children, and indeed the children become rather resentful at being forced to be part of their mother's "strange" actions. She can, however, commune with the natural surroundings, responding to the "restless moodiness in this gentle weather" which is a reflection of her discontent. While walking, Amy lets herself daydream about the aristocratic Armstrongs and this leads to romantic fantasies of a more personal nature: "She began to wonder whether she could have resisted the advances of a lord, if he had driven up, and she wearing a mauve dress such as she had never owned" (p.134). Frustrated by the tedious nature of her life Amy can only resort to her imagination for release but her dreams of wealth and success do not allow her to come to terms with her real circumstances. In contrast, Theodora, walking with her father, communes with him in silence and by being at one with the landscape achieves peace of mind (AS, p.34).

When Stan goes to the war, Amy is not much affected by his absence. To fill her days, the object of her sense of purpose and obligation being absent, she looks after an old German. The pattern of her life is thus maintained by her responsibility for the old man, as well as by those related to her -- children and cows. With her maternal rôle assured and her weakness having not "yet been discovered", she is still strong only in her determination to ignore this important part of her identity.

Because he is a German, Fritz is maltreated by the neighbours, and in order to ensure Amy's security he feels he should leave. But Amy is afraid, "with a first foreboding" (p.191), that perhaps Fritz will die. She is frightened by the idea of death and just as she fled once from the dead cow out of fear, so she now decides to let Fritz go, even though she feels affection for him. She feels "it [is] plain now that everything must come to an end" (p.194), she has learnt one of the harder lessons of life.

At the departure of her husband, Amy takes refuge in the practicalities of her arduous existence and in this way learns to come to terms with his absence. She is helped in this by the arrival of the old German whose life is now her responsibility. It is, however, a responsibility she is not able to cope with, given the circumstances of his origins, and consequently she comes to fail him. As a result of abandoning him, Amy feels that "the structure of her life is shaken" and she can only cry. Through giving up her rôle of carer, she feels she has lost the purpose of her existence and mourns for "the lost world" (p.194) that has brought this situation about. Once again, however, she has recourse to her other responsibilities in order to save herself:

Then Amy Parker continued on her way, through that fresh and innocent landscape of her own solitude and sadness. At the end of the road her children were waiting for her to affect that strength which they expected, and cows did not doubt, and fowls would fling themselves towards her sensing that her hand would dispense from on high.
It seemed that her life was planned, and she was glad (p.196). Returning home after saying goodbye to Fritz, she finds all the creatures that are dependent on her waiting for her at the end of the road. She is pleased to have this function in life thus acknowledged and she is able to regain a sense of purpose.

Her life is limited by the barriers that her socially prescribed rôle has erected, and she is therefore unable to direct herself towards deriving some spiritual meaning from her simple physical communion with the natural world:

She too went into the paddocks. She went in the evening when the work was done. There were times when she could feel so peaceful that she awoke from her peace with a start of guilt, to urge herself on to some fresh restlessness, in this way to do homage to her absent husband. From the peace of her finally achieved self-sufficiency, of farm and children, he was absent. But in the restlessness of her footsteps over grass, in the restlessness of wind in tumbled grass, in the crying of gulls, in the uncompromising line of a black wire fence, he was always present (p.204).

In her daily life at the paddock, she finds fulfilment in her own practical rôles. She achieves peace and a sense of self-sufficiency from farm and children. In this Stan's absence almost becomes part of her small amount of pleasure, and perhaps she subconsciously enjoys feeling sorry for herself. There is no spiritual communication possible between Amy and Stan, because for Amy love is equated with possession. This is indicated by the silence between the two when Amy, having received from Stan some "bits of himself that were secret" (p.209), possibly for the first time in their married life, can only sit and smile and Stan, uncertain whether she is "beautiful or irritating" (p.210) begins to feel uncomfortable. Hence he feels that Amy has become a stranger to him because, to him, she has put up "walls round her knowledge" (p.210).

As the children grow, Amy has to admit that they do not belong to her. Ray, whom Amy loves more than Thelma, does not love her in return despite her earlier hopes and expectations. He even wonders "what she will try to sell him" (p.242), one of the earlier indications of his fundamentally unsettled nature. The boy is not hers, he is out of her control. Therefore, she is pleased to take on a young Greek as a hand, out of "some inner devotion that she liked to think did exist" (p.230). She feels "ever-present concern for him" (p.230), yet Stan grows tired of thinking about him, whom he sees as being "not a bad lad, but who [will] not be told" (p.230). After a while, the Greek hand tells them he is going to leave to marry a widow. Amy, whose motherliness towards the young man overflows, again fails to possess another person. By this time, Stan Parker has become old, and is, in keeping with White's symbolism of the seasonal cycles, in the autumn of his life. His eyes have an assured look of spiritual permanence which Amy does not understand. Spiritual permanence is of course in direct contrast to the physical limitations of human life, though it is only through fully living within these limitations that spiritual growth can be assured.
Ray is an unstable, rebellious and destructive character. He refuses Amy’s love, never letting her touch him, and strongly dislikes his father. When Stan returns from the war he takes Ray for a drive, because he wants to convey something of what he has experienced or learned, but Ray detests even the smell of his father (p.222). This is perhaps not surprising as Stan has never really tried to communicate with Ray before and his attempts to do so now are so uncharacteristic as to cause the boy to be unsettled and suspicious. Stan tries, by "some formal act of recognition [to] give a shape to his knowledge, or [to] express the great simplicities in simple, luminous words for people to see" (p.221), but of course he cannot express himself. The only thing Stan can do is to show his son a lizard, which he sees among the stones:

There was a lizard amongst the stones that the man saw, and to which his attention now clung with the hope of the hopeless. As if he might suddenly interpret for his son, by some divine dispensation, with such miraculous clarity and wisdom, the love and wonder the horny lizard had roused in him. That day could still become transparent, which remained opaque (p.222).

The lizard is perhaps a symbol of the Immanence of a Divine Power and of its "miraculous clarity and wisdom", arousing as it does such "love and wonder" in Stan. Stan, in the end, is unable to convey this wisdom to Ray and Ray fails to recognize the "poetry" of the lizard. 8

Ray looks at the bushland "with gloomy distaste" (p.221) instead of attempting to reconcile himself to it. He is plagued with discontent, having neither seen a city nor discovered the "herd" for which he longs. As a result, he feels both isolated from his surroundings and frightened by his isolation: "The boy began to be afraid of this isolation, to which it all boiled down in the end" (p.246). This frustrated and insecure state of mind manifests itself in violent and destructive behaviour. He wanders through the bushes "hacking or scratching", looking for something to kill. His violent nature is brought to the surface by the departure of the Greek farmhand, when Ray takes a knife and cuts through a photograph, which he stole from the Greek, because all he wants to do is to destroy. "When it [is] done, and he [can] press the blade no deeper into the heart of his friend, the boy [throws] away the knife and the shreds of paper somewhere, he [does] not look" (p.235). He loves the Greek, but like Amy, he also fails to possess him. Ray’s character is thus similar to that of his mother in some ways for both of these characters are denied fulfilment, and White implies that their feelings of alienation and ostracism are connected with their inability to come to terms with the realities of their own lives. Furthermore their lack of a certain kind of sensitivity makes it impossible for them to grasp the spiritual meaning of life that lies beyond the façade of the material world.

8. The lack of communication between father and son in this novel echoes that of the unsuccessful attempt by Dr Halliday to establish a relationship with his son in HV (pp.189-190).
Ray, unable to discover any purpose in his life at home, struggles to escape from its restrictions and eventually leaves home. He runs away from his mother "as easily and naturally as the seed from the pod, to become lost in the long grass" (p.249). It is, of course, in the way of things that the seed shall leave the pod, but the tragedy here is that this seed is destined to fall on "waste-ground". After departing, Ray never stays in one place again although he marries and has children. Once he returns home with his illegitimate son, only to be spurned by Amy who will only accept her legal grandson.

Ray, surrounded again by the landscape of his home, feels a stranger, realizing that he no longer belongs there:

"Here the shapes of tree and fence were so unequivocal that Ray Parker felt blurred. He had reached the stage at which you realize that you have nothing. The man in the strange landscape was frightened by its aloofness. The pale and lovely sky eluded him. The coppery tufts of winter grass, that he had mooned amongst as a boy, stood still. There is nothing here, he said, pulling at a blade of grass with his brown teeth."

Then his mind began to rootle round, out of that cold place, into the world that he had made do, as being of some sense and substance (pp.421-422).

Ultimately, he is shot in a club and the newspaper's report of the homicide describes Ray as a well known "receiver, housebreaker, thief", a man with a reputation on the "turf".

Thelma Parker does not come to such a destructive end as her brother. She is a rather independent girl who is not close to either her parents or her brother. From childhood, she is keen to make more of her life than her parents could make of their own, and strives to be free of the restrictions of her home. As a child, Thelma is a character who is ready to fight, to explore, to undertake "epic tasks". She is completely different from her mother, who passively waits for something to fill up the void of her life. However, like her mother, Thelma fails to fulfil her wide-ranging potential. Unable to accept the more obvious truths of country life, it nonetheless becomes impossible for her to find them in the more sophisticated world that she desires.

Thelma is a neat girl who habitually washes her hands; she bathes frequently, powders her skin, and seems constantly to be pressing her best blouse. Such obsessive cleanliness is here symptomatic of a rejection of her own physicality and seems also to be an indication of her meanness of spirit. Her obsession is "oppressive, even insulting" (p.241) to others but she is unaware of the negative effect it has. She is concerned only with "her own mysteries" (p.241). As she grows older, she becomes self-destructive, enclosing herself in her own world to protect herself from her brother. In addition, she further indulges herself by keeping a private diary. She even begins to wear a ring, White's symbol of egocentricity, which he previously used in association with Theodora's domineering mother. This observation is borne out by the fact that Thelma ultimately comes to live in her own world, surrounded by the solid shell of her ego.
Thelma plans everything in her life and she puts her plans into action regardless of the cost. When she decides to go to a College for Business Girls, she says "I shall pass the necessary exams, in typing and shorthand, and take a job, with a stockbroker or a solicitor, something like that. And make something of my life" (p.245). Accordingly, she leads her life as planned. She leaves home and studies in Sydney, works at a lawyer's office and becomes the wife of a solicitor. Of Stan's family, only Thelma is able to leave her home and take part successfully in city life.

When Stan visits Thelma in Sydney he is, on the one hand, proud to be with her but, on the other, feels overshadowed by her successful appearance, which makes him feel rather "shambly". It seems to Stan that Thelma's life has "begun to crystallize" (p.276). Thelma's attitude towards life is very similar to those of Mrs Goodman and Mrs Rapallo in AS. All three women constantly enclose themselves within barriers: Mrs Goodman treats everything as if it were bronze or marble; Mrs Rapallo attempts to own the nautilus shell which symbolizes the boundary of her illusion; Thelma sees her identity as hinging on material possessions. Really all these characters seek only what they have constructed in their minds, they pursue a fabricated idea of reality and are thus destined to achieve nothing. They are unaware that life cannot be governed by their individual egos, and thus fail to see the need to defeat them.

After her marriage Thelma and her new husband visit her parents. As she approaches her parents' property she says: "This is their road now" (p.338). She is deliberately dissociating herself from the geography of that place (p.338):

She continued to look about her at the countryside, which had become uninteresting, insignificant, since she had achieved position. It was existing vaguely in spite of her, she saw, but it was not evident to what purpose. Purpose floated in that sea of leaves plastered against leaves. The paddocks were fat again. But the houses of poverty still stood in them, tumbling down or held up by iron and wire. At times a smell of wet fowl manure penetrated the discreet car and strayed amongst its fittings (p.338).

For Thelma, the landscape of her home has nothing further to do with her; she does not even want to acknowledge that it is the place of her birth. In fact she attempts to conceal this from her husband, because she sees it as the unsavoury part of her background and she refuses even to acknowledge her unsuccessful brother. Thelma protects her new sense of reality in the same way that she protects her hands, with tightly and perfectly fitting gloves (p.335).

Thelma, while she feels contentment at home, cannot admit this to herself:

She thought in amazement of her house, of which the paint shone between laurels in the afternoon, or she stood in the darkness, secretly, to look, and the house was a fixed framework of light, round which tossed an unruly suggestion of trees that other people had planted (p.334).
The birth place which Thelma has left, of her own free will, now makes her feel nostalgic, but she has to acknowledge the fact that she no longer belongs to this house, surrounded by "trees that other people had planted". It is with such imagery as this that the author contrives to convey the idea that Thelma has severed her roots: "I shall scream, thought Thelma Forsdyke, inside her incredible coat, that could not have belonged to her" (p.342). She now realizes that she has left behind both her "home" and her "original self", which was formed in and around it and with this realization comes the feeling that there are many bits of herself that she would like to have broken off and discarded, if it had been possible. But it is already too late.

After this initial visit, following her marriage, Thelma begins to call on her parents more often. It seems that a certain humility has come to her. Her successful position as the wife of a solicitor does not give her any real contentment; she has "grasped so much, materially, that she ha[s] exhausted most avenues for further gain, and so she turn[s] her attention to spiritual aggrandizement" (p.371) -- in a sense she wishes to be "a martyr" to someone or something:

Sometimes the rector called. Thelma Forsdyke gave to the church without encouraging the parson, who would not have fitted into her social scheme. She had become generous, deliberately so; she gave rare objects or presents of money far in excess of the occasion, her eyes reddening for her own acts. Afraid, or unable to give herself, the voluptuousness of generosity became necessary to her (p.372).

Thelma thus tries to fill her spiritual void through materialistic means, giving "presents of money", which she can of course now afford. She also brings presents to her parents, in order to compensate for her feelings of guilt at having left them behind. Her generosity does not stem from the desire to help others but from the need to find contentment; her "martyrdom" is not "a giving of herself to others" but a sort of payment for undisturbed complacency and peace of mind. This act of charity is a "secret vice, her wardrobe gin or hypodermic" (p.372).

Thelma is continuously insecure even though enclosed "in [the] sealed room" of her ego, because it does not exclude "all the incidents that must be excluded" (p.372) if one is to be complacently happy. In time she becomes so separated from herself that even her face has no convincing relationship to her inner being. She is basically hollow, she has only "a synthetic soul" (p.373), uprooted as she is from her native soil. Stan's contentment with his life, however, appears on his face and is directly proportionate to the extent to which he has come to terms with his own land. Thelma has to acknowledge the fact that she is unable to escape "the abyss of her origin" (p.373), yet instead of accepting her life as it is, she begins to blame her parents bitterly "for the situation" to which she has been exposed and to believe that God has deceived her. She fails to understand the poem which she reads for her relief. There is nothing "she [can]
ring and ask for" (p.376) and thus there is nothing that can relieve her discomfort. Hence she visits her mother, aware of this gnawing at her soul, though she does not know the nature of her spiritual void, sensing only that there might be something to discover by returning to her place of origin.

As Stan and Amy become old, Thelma suggests that Stan sell their property. It is not important for her that she will lose her original home. This lack of commitment to the place of her birth and maturation is again similar to that of Mrs Goodman in AS, who sells the family property when Mr Goodman dies. Thelma, in fact, eventually urges her parents to pull up the roots of their trees, which indicates the degree of her indifference both to her former home and to nature. Stan yields to this suggestion, not through senility, but simply out of passivity. Thelma, of course, unaware of this fact, tries to control Stan's property, as well as his life, believing that she is doing him a good turn. She thus mistakes "instrumentality for power" (p.397).

When Thelma secretly changes her name to Christine (p.428), for silly social reasons, she is symbolically no longer related in any way to the past. She keeps this name from her family and only for "those friends, or acquaintances rather, who [have] inherited the senior title too suddenly, and of whom she live[s] in terror, lest they should break the relationship for some reason or other" (p.428). She dislikes the name of Thelma "more than anything else, as in her imagination it stands for her "naked self" (p.428). By changing her name Thelma is, of course, motivated by the same impulse that prompts Alys Browne and Catherine Standish to do the same: the desire to conceal and embellish the self, though Alys also has professional reasons for changing her name. In each case, the desire to change one's name is the ultimate expression of the rejection of one's original identity and of one's home, but it is also a reflection of the lack of a sense of belonging:

Thelma Forsdyke, on the other hand, remained uncertain of the direction that life was taking, and at the most would allow herself ungraciously to be led. As she followed Elsie into this house, which, in spite of the immense event that had taken place, was open to birds and leaves on all sides, and to the picking and fossicking of gathering sunlight, Thelma's nonentity was complete (p.472). Thus though Thelma has left home to live in the city, she continues to be subconsciously drawn back to it.

The dichotomy of Thelma's state of mind can be interpreted as an analogy of Patrick White's own experiences. Whenever he stayed outside Australia he was unsettled by recollections of his native landscape, and when he returned to his home, he was frustrated with what he perceived as its spiritual void. This feeling can best be summarized by the following remark: "Nothing seemed important, beyond living and
eating, with a roof of one's own over one's head." 9

Spiritual pursuits, however, can sometimes alienate a man from those around him, and White illustrates this through the character of Stan Parker. Stan fails to communicate with his entire family. The more he understands his personal human weakness, and accepts the power of the natural world, the more he acknowledges this alienation from his family. This is illustrated by the following passage, when Stan returns from Sydney after Ray's death:

He knew the contours of the landscape more intimately than he did the faces of men, particularly his children. Children are learned by the mother, he said. He would have liked it that way. But his unhappiness was less obtrusive, the train disclosed. From Bangalay he took the bus which runs over the hills to Durilgai. There he got down and walked across the paddocks. He would sometimes choose that more solitary approach, slowing through the yellow grass and black trees, looking about as if he were a stranger there, looking at the scrolls of fallen bark, which is a perpetual mystery. Then the ignorance of the man was exchanged for knowledge (p.277).

Wilkes argues that the "tendency of solitariness" characterized in *AS* is resisted in *TM*: "It might almost have been written to put an end to the theme of 'alienation' developing through White's earlier books". 10 However, it can be inferred from the above that White still has some preoccupation with the concept of human isolation in *TM*. Stan is alienated from other people, his parents, his friends, his children, even from his wife. *TM* is different from the previous novels, however, in that Stan accepts his isolation in a more positive way than Oliver Halliday, Alys Browne or Theodora Goodman, though Theodora, like Stan, derives a greater degree of "spiritual sustenance" from the landscape than Alys and Oliver. Unlike Oliver or Alys, Stan does not struggle to escape from what he is, and unlike Theodora, he does not separate himself from other people who do not accept him, though he has learned that a human being can be defined by solitude: "It is possible to believe that one is alone in this world. The stiff, needly [sic] leaves of the bushes exude no sap of kindness. But one does not ask for kindness. Rocks and silence are sufficient in themselves" (p.406). Stan Parker thus accepts the "aloneness" of human existence in his close relationship with the natural world.

In the autumn of their lives, Stan and Amy begin to be kind to one another, as if each senses that the other is "in need of the protection of kindness in the world of strange truths" (p.310), though they still find it impossible to communicate. Amy tries to give "evidence of her love" to Stan as well as accepting his love. In fact, she plays the rôle of a good wife well in looking after him, putting a handkerchief in his pocket when

he goes out, and brushing the fallen hair from his collar. These are merely superficial indications of affection, however, and Amy finally cannot help feeling that she fails to know "the mystery of her husband's God" (p.303). For his part, Stan's affection towards her, his way of kissing her, for example, becomes merely habit (p.298). Amy never reaches the understanding of Stan she seeks and so stands perpetually in great isolation as if "on the banks of [a] swollen river" (p.307).

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that Stan is unable to lift "the lid of [the] box" (p.308) which symbolically contains what he has in his mind, that is, his spiritual mystery. It can be argued that, by the use of imagery such as this, White contrives to suggest that Stan has not refused to open himself to her, but that something prevents him from doing so. In reality, though, when he does attempt to tell Amy something of himself, he cannot put it into words because he is unable to define it. His difficulty is perhaps one not merely of interpretation but of articulation:

Even when the sun came up, a bit ragged at first, but red, then breaking through the cobweb of mist, slapping the light across the land by strong acres, standing the trees up solid in the blaring unequivocal light, it was difficult for Stan Parker to look altogether convinced. In that peacetime he was still diffident of accepting anything as solid, factual, or what is called permanent. Much had to be proved. Only he could prove it (p.213).

As Stan comes to terms with the mystery of the natural world, he is able to accept the harmony evident in the whole of his surroundings, even though he cannot speak of it, nor is he entirely convinced that what he perceives is real. Amy, who only believes in concrete facts or words, becomes frustrated by her "weak husband" (p.311) and this further illustrates the extent of the gulf that exists between her and Stan, through which "[g]rey water [is] flowing" (p.308).

Realizing the lack of communication that can exist between human beings, Stan feels for the first time that he understands the suicide of Mr. Gage, who hangs himself on a tree in the yard, leaving behind little but the disturbing statement of his paintings. Mr. Gage, who used to throw himself on the ground and look intently "at an ant" (p.105), might have been in search of his own God and attempting perhaps to convey this through his pictures. However, Gage could not verbally communicate his needs to other people. Stan at this point entertains the idea of taking his own life but consoles himself by thinking "we must expect this at our age ... and the cold weather coming on" (p.308). The winter of his life, in White's imagery, approaches and he is ready to accept it.

When Stan goes to church, he begins consciously to question the existence of the Christian God in which he had been told for so long to believe, though he has always subconsciously doubted it. He thinks that something is wrong, but he, of course, cannot
explain this logically: "... only a leaf falling at dusk will disturb the reason without reason" (p.295). The inexplicable, which he has discovered in his mind, is reflected in the landscape:

Stan Parker went about the place on which he had led his life, by which he was consumed really. This is my life, he would have said if he had expressed himself other than by acts of the body. But there were seasons of stubble and dead grass, when doubts did press up. There were certain corners of his property that he could not bring himself to visit, almost as if he might have discovered something he did not wish to see. It is all right there, he said, and persuaded himself that nothing does alter that is established in the mind (p.295).

As Stan begins to come to terms with this understanding of the world, he acknowledges his own weakness as a human being and remembers the guilt he felt in his youth when he ignored the corpse of the old man in the flood (p.74). After telling this story to Amy, he still feels guilty and because of this he is humbled.

Amy, losing any communication she might have had with her husband, has to seek something more tangible to hold in her hands, to provide "a concrete reason for her life". As he had already done in his description of Amy's reaction to the fire at Glastonbury, White has Amy again refusing to commit herself to the realities of her life. Instead, she is made to expect enlightenment to come from outside herself (p.333). White does this in order to contrast her with Stan who discovers a knowledge of life by himself, simply as the result of living. Amy sits on the front verandah waiting for something to happen, for somebody to bring some meaning to her life. Aware that her "potentiality for evil [is] streaming away from her" (p.311), she has an affair with a young commercial traveller. This experience, however, does not satisfy her because she is still unable to discover the mystery of her husband and finally all she can do is cry for the self she has lost by having the affair. Amy is obsessed with her own flesh as "[h]er body [is] what she has" (p.285), but still, she can never reconcile herself to possessing only her own body; her insecure ego always strives to demonstrate its existence and power by the possession of things or people, and in this she is similar to Thelma.

When Stan learns of her affair, he drives into the city, alarmed and confused by what has happened to him. However, he does not yield to despair, for even whilst "failing to rise to the height of tragedy and passion" (p.323), he realizes that nonetheless he is unable to kill himself and, alone with his own thoughts, resorts to alcohol to make himself forget. He has to empty himself, to shed the "old banana skins" (p.324) in order to regenerate himself:

There was a paper sky, quite flat, and white, and Godless. He spat at the absent God then, mumbling till it ran down his chin. He spat and farted, because he was full to bursting; he pissed in the street until he was empty, quite empty. Then the paper sky was tearing, he saw. He was tearing the last
sacredness, before he fell down amongst some empty crates, mercifully reduced to his body for a time (p.324).

Stan feels for the first time the absence of God, although he does not actually believe in God. Symbolically he has completely emptied himself of all that he once considered sacrosanct and this unwittingly paves the way for enlightenment. In the short term, however, realizing that he has grown "too soft in the night to endure such tensions" and that it is not "necessary to kill to destroy" (p.325), he recognizes he does not own anything, and so feels a deep humiliation. White emphasizes this state of mind by introducing the music\textsuperscript{11} played by the daughter of Stan's Greek friend, whom Stan by chance meets on that day. Listening to it, Stan attains a feeling of "permanence", but at the same time acknowledges the fact that it is impossible to retain that feeling, because "\textit{all things of importance, in the liquid light of the silver song, are withheld or past}" (p.328), because "a sense of permanence" can be attained only for a moment. He returns home and it seems that nothing has changed in the relationship between Stan and Amy since everything goes on as usual. Both of them, though, have reached a new stage in their lives, accepting but not understanding one another's mystery, that stage of "\textit{letting} alone the lives of other people ..." (p.332). Stan is even consoled by the "warm drinks and slippers" (p.333) which are disguised as love.

Stan Parker at this point in the novel is free from Amy and his children as well as from most of his property, which has been sold at Thelma's suggestion. He is able to envisage even giving up his life, which he now believes does not belong to him. In this way, Stan is completely liberated from his belongings and his spirit begins to flourish:

\begin{quote}
\ldots Stan Parker walked about his property, slowly, and with all the appearance of aimlessness, which is the impression that spiritual activity frequently gives, while all the time this communion of soul and scene was taking place, the landscape moving in on him with increased passion and intensity, trees surrounding him, clouds flocking above him with tenderness such as he had never experienced (p.397).
\end{quote}

The communion between Stan's spirit and the landscape about him increases as his understanding of his relationship with it grows. In his youth, he had always felt controlled by some great and mysterious power which he was unable to grasp fully. Finally, free of all material ties, Stan becomes aware of "\textit{the activity of tingling ants}", which Mr Gage has already perceived and which could easily be dismissed by those who are concerned only with things related to human life. Through this experience, Stan acknowledges "\textit{the ruthlessness of divine logic}" (p.397) which rules the natural world.

Amy, who can only live provided she has a purpose or reason for everything, feels

\textsuperscript{11} As in \textit{TM} and the previous novels \textit{HV} and \textit{AS}, music is repeatedly used by Patrick White to indicate the characters' spiritual fulfilment.
lost after they sell off most of their property, and sees no escape from her confusion except by living it out. She decides to go to the play *Hamlet* with Stan for a "change", and Amy's and Stan's responses to the play again reveal their essentially different attitudes towards life.

While watching the play, Stan is haunted by the significance of the poetry, realizing that he does not know himself. Nevertheless, the memory of what he had experienced at the top of the stairs in the burning house at Glastonbury returns:

The poetry of the burning house was not of words. He could remember, rather, how her red hair burned, how their singed hair had curled together, each head grappling the other with hooks. But never speaking. People do not speak in an exchange of souls (p.402).

Stan is now convinced that he experienced some kind of spiritual communication with Madeleine, a communication which is similar to that achieved by Theodora and her father in *AS*, and which is based on the silent acknowledgement of being at one with nature (*AS*, p.34).

For Amy, on the other hand, the play of *Hamlet* is as mysterious as Stan and consequently she feels that she cannot "share it" (p.400). While watching it she recollects her own life and tries to analyse it in relation to the play, wondering "what she has lived", identifying herself with the characters in *Hamlet* and meshing them with the reality of her own life. Hence she asks herself, "Does Hamlet hate his mother?" (p.403).

For his part, Stan Parker recalls that moment of drama in his own life, when he discovered that Amy had committed adultery. He thinks he too has been poisoned, but this thought does not cause him to feel hurt, because the pain brought to him by the young commercial traveller has long ago been emptied out of him and he acknowledges that he has been satisfied by this "emptiness". At the end of the play, though, he becomes agitated by the idea that he will soon die. Returning home, he continues to live as usual, but it seems that "[h]abit supersedes thought, or extracts the sting from it" (p.406). Going down to the gully at the back of his house, Stan finally accepts the hard reality of life that "one is alone in this world" (p.406). At this point, White seems to be saying that human beings cannot expect anything from anybody and should be sufficient unto themselves, accepting life as it is. While walking, Stan falls over:

Then the old man who was walking along stubbornly on slippery feet slipped suddenly. He was an old scarecrow with wooden arms and a gun waving at the end of one of them, and the ridiculous little box of ferrets with its airholes bumping and bouncing on his shoulderblades (p.406).

At the moment of slipping,12 Stan realizes that he has accidentally pulled the trigger of

---

12. This scene reflects White's own personal experience of falling flat on his back in the mud during the wet season at Castle Hill. See *FG*, p.144.
the gun. He could have killed himself but has failed. Rather he has symbolically shot his spirit.

After destroying part of his spiritual being, he reaches the point of accepting the existence of God, which he has up until now omitted from "his system of life":

'Oh God, oh God,' said Stan Parker.

He was suspended.

Then his agreeable life, which had been empty for many years, began to fill. It is not natural that emptiness shall prevail, it will fill eventually whether with water, or children, or dust, or spirit. So the old man sat gulping in. His mouth was dry and caked, that had also vomited out his life that night, he remembered, in the street (p.407).

After he acknowledges the existence of God, his life fills, he accepts everything he has experienced including his ignorance and his arrogance at having been content for his life to be empty. Until this point, he had not been fully aware of this egotistical part of himself nor of his need to destroy it, a thing essential in White's spiritual system of values. This episode has the same function, in this novel, as does that involving Theodora in the shooting of a hawk. Both Theodora and Stan are successful in destroying a part of themselves: their egos. Theodora experiences for a moment a state of mind that White apparently feels is desirable, she feels she is "as negative as air" (AS, p.74), while Stan goes further than Theodora in discovering a positive concept of God.

Stan is firmly convinced of the existence of God as the result of this episode. Afterwards he gains nothing from attending the communion service, while Amy embraces only a religion of her own need and looks for "miracles like some young girls" (p.410). At this time Stan takes the bread but his throat, is too dry to accept it; the words from the priest do not reach him. He asks himself why he has come, but accepts the wine and drinks it. Subsequently, after the shooting incident, his throat which once vomited everything, moistens with the hot wine, and thus symbolically Stan becomes receptive to his God. Peace has come to him and there is no need to show or give evidence of it: "Peace is desirable in itself" (p.416). Stan accepts this state of mind with humility and gratitude which makes him "smile luminously. Or else it [is] the warmth beginning to pervade him on a cold morning, or else the benevolence that some old men achieve for their fellows towards the end of their lives" (p.416).

Amy, who still does not know who Stan's God is, or even what she is, sits next to Stan at the service and tries to receive the answers from the priest; but nobody gives answers to her questions. Consequently, she begins to allocate the blame for her own inadequacies to others. In this, she is not unlike Thelma who curses her parents for her existence (p.376). After taking the wine, Amy analyses her problem and realizes that it lies between "herself and God", and it is quite possible she will never succeed in
"opening her husband and looking inside" (p.415), perhaps because even to attempt this is something of an act of violation. In truth, she never does succeed in understanding Stan, perhaps because she cannot even understand herself. She does not realize that her failure in this is caused by the fact that her idea of fulfilment is based only on tangible things, nor is she even aware of the possibility that true fulfilment is a thing that comes from the soul. Unable to comprehend that people "do not speak in an exchange of souls", she cannot break down the barriers between her ego and her suppressed spirituality, and hence at the end of the service she is lost.

Before Stan dies, while sitting on a "circle" of lawn surrounded by shrubs and trees, he reaches a stage of "great tenderness of understanding", in keeping with White's seasonal imagery, which is linked to the winter thaw:

It was perfectly obvious that the man was seated at the heart of it, and from this heart the trees radiated, with grave movements of life, and beyond them the sweep of a vegetable garden, which had gone to weed during the months of the man's illness, presented the austere skeletons of cabbages and the wands of onion seed. All was circumference to the centre, and beyond that the worlds of other circles, whether crescent of purple villas or the bare patches of earth, on which rabbits sat and observed some abstract spectacle for minutes on end, in a paddock not yet built upon. The last circle but one was the cold and golden bowl of winter, enclosing all that was visible and material, and at which the man would blink from time to time, out of his watery eyes, unequal to the effort of realizing he was the centre of it (p.474).

The circle, an image of perfection, peace and eternity, is also linked to the cycle of nature, with its seasonal progression, and so to life and death itself. Stan recognized that he sits in the centre of the circle which encloses the entire visible and material world including the last season of his life: "the cold and golden bowl of winter". He has become reconciled with this harsh season, even accepting unfaithful Amy, who does not understand him, the irresponsible, unstable and destructive Ray, and the materialistic, egocentric Thelma. Stan does not try to reject the deceit, despair and depression that life can bring but accepts them as he had earlier accepted the storm, flood and bushfire in the spring of his life. He has maintained this passivity throughout his life almost as a defence against the forces that govern it, and it is only when he comes to terms with the inevitability of his own death that he can develop the humility to acknowledge God, and therefore to accept adversity fully as part of the overall design of life. This stage is, of course, not reached through the acceptance of "revealed religion" nor is it the result of any specific system of belief on Stan's part, it is simply attained through the everyday, commonplace experience of an ordinary man. Stan is disconcerted by the young evangelist, who brings him "the story of the Gospel", indeed he feels that the young missionary is arrogant in his conviction that faith can come from books. Stan is not influenced by the young man because, as an old man approaching death, he has at last discovered that God is within himself. His cryptic remark: "If you can understand, at
your age, what I have been struggling with all my life, then it is a miracle" (p.475) is as much a confession as an attempt to convey a truth. When he shows the young man his own God, that God who dwells in a "gob of spittle" (p.476), who is present "in the cracks in the path" on which ants are "massing [and] struggling up over an escarpment" (p.477), the evangelist can only frown and walk away. Yet, for Stan, reaching the stage of acknowledging that contraries are reconcilable, that struggling is joyful (p.477), means that "[t]he most obscure, the most sickening incidents of his life" (p.476) at last become clear. His spirit, which has been "a prisoner in his own ribs" (p.413) is peacefully released from his flesh and he succeeds in discovering a fundamental truth, that there is a harmony in the natural world that makes sense of everything.

At the moment of Stan's death, Amy holds him with all her strength and will, out of fear that she has been left behind, but she finally realizes that Stan has escaped from her forever without her ever understanding him in any way. "What is God to Stan?" (p.413), she cries forsakenly. After Stan's physical death, his "poetry" persists, for it is implied, at the end of the novel, that it is conveyed to the next generation through his grandson, it forms part of the tree of man, it is part of the continuity of knowledge.

The God Stan Parker discovers at the end of his life is not a definable God. At one stage of his life Stan, through depression and desperation, had vomited up the "Christian God" (p.404) and though later he was able to accept the Host at Communion, this act of reconciliation is due more to the expansive nature of his spirituality than to any intellectual acceptance of God in the Christian sense. It is therefore, his own God that he finds at the end, the God of the natural world, as Patricia Morley argues:

Stan's belief in a leaf, the ants, and his own spit, along with his understanding and acceptance of the most sickening incidents of his life, represents his profound acceptance of man's humanity, of his physical body and the natural world, of the necessity of this temporal flux within the economy of things eternal and of its final identity with the One which is 'the answer to all sums'.

Stan's direct assertion of belief is not "beyond" the earth, but of it. Stan discovers divinity in ants, a gob of spittle, trees, rocks and even in human beings. By so doing, he accepts the world as it is and acknowledges that "mystery of unity" which is the same mystery of which Oliver Halliday was once aware (HV, p.166).

Wilkes argues that fulfilment in TM does not lie within the framework of life as it is normally lived, but beyond it. This is true only in so far as the mystical side of Stan's personality seeks a defining power by which he can make some sense of things.

---

But it is to the real and natural world, that world in which he functions on a day-to-day level, that Stan looks for spiritual sustenance. Hence he may be "more than ordinary" in his desire for an understanding of things, "beyond" the ordinary, but it is from the ordinary that he obtains it. As a simple farmer in the Australian countryside, his life could hardly be more "normal" yet still he discovers the supernatural power of the natural world, which unlocks the doorway to fulfilment.

Some critics have pointed out that White's framework and characterization in this novel could raise some problems for the reader. A.P. Riemer, for example, says: "Readers of the book must be puzzled why the author chose to contain his highly sophisticated preoccupations ... in such an apparently na"ıve form as the pioneering novel".15 In addition, Kramer argues: "The major weakness of the book is White's failure to make credible connections between Stan's actual life as a small farmer, and his role as discoverer of a doctrine of the unity of human life and material objects".16 It is, however, White's intention to write about human truth and human divinity, and these are also accessible to the common, everyday man, whose modest acceptance of life can rise to the level of these perceptions.

White attempts to dramatize the search for spiritual meaning that can be a part of an ordinary man's experience and at the same time succeeds in portraying, with clarity and precision, the simple life that underpins it. In TM he finally develops and fulfils the spiritual quest that is really inaugurated, by Theodora, in AS. In his portrayal of the Australian landscape, however, he also emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the human spirit and the natural environment. It is therefore essential to note how the characters of the novel operate in relation to the natural world and its elements. Thus, in TM, the landscape plays an important and often dramatic rôle in Stan's pursuit of a unity with his God and with himself. Stan cannot have peace of mind until he is reconciled to himself and can acknowledge the harmony of the natural world as an expression of the Immanence of the Divine Power. This seems to indicate White's contention that one can only be fulfilled in one's life if one first comes to terms with reality as manifested by one's natural surroundings. To fail to do this is to make the search for an understanding of higher things meaningless.

The author's use of the landscape as a mirror in which his characters' states of mind are reflected is also the means by which he conveys to the reader his own philosophical and psychological preoccupations; for whilst on the one hand acknowledg-

ing that "life in Australia can be for many people pretty deadly dull", on the other, he strives "to convey a splendour, a transcendence ... above human realities", and he does this, as he himself admits, for the simplest of all reasons: "I wanted to suggest my own faith in these superhuman realities".\textsuperscript{17} To this end, White's depiction of the Australian landscape in this, as in the other novels discussed, is symbolic; indeed, the landscape is, as Kramer observes, "a formal landscape, an artist's abstraction from the real".\textsuperscript{18} Yet this departure from a realistic use and interpretation of the landscape emphasizes what may be termed White's "arrival", in \textit{TM}, at that point where he himself comes to terms with the Australian scene. As he was later to remark "even the ugliness, the bags and iron of Australian life, acquired a meaning".\textsuperscript{19} His voyage to this "harbour" of reconciliation has been long and arduous but judging by \textit{TM}, that fruit of his evolutionary labours at this point, it has not been in vain.

\textsuperscript{17} Herring and Wilkes, "A Conversation with Patrick White," p.136.


\textsuperscript{19} White, "The Prodigal Son," p.39.
CHAPTER 5

VOSS: IMPRINTS IN THE SAND

Voss is partly based on the experiences of the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt who died during an attempt to cross the Australian continent, from East to West, in 1848. Patrick White used the accounts of Leichhardt's journey and Eyre's journals to construct the framework of this novel, but of course his purpose in writing Voss is not simply to fictionalize historical records. The character Voss, in fact, is "a creature of the Egyptian desert" (FG, p.104) and is based on White's experiences there as an R.A.F. Intelligence Officer during World War II.

White's duty throughout this period was to censor airmen's letters home, and these letters "which might never reach their destination or, if they did, convey[ed] an uncommunicative message" (FG, p.103) were White's only connection with the outside world. It was this sense of physical and mental isolation that provided him with the inspiration and the need to write Voss. This is illustrated in the novel, by the separation of the "lovers", Voss and Laura; their frustrated attempts to communicate by letters, and their ensuing telepathic and spiritual unity.

Having endured the horrendous experiences of the War, White returned to Australia. There he was frustrated with the people:

A pragmatic nation, we tend to confuse reality with surfaces. Perhaps this dedication to surface is why we are constantly fooled by the crooks who mostly govern us (FG, p.128).

White was yet to find a stimulus for creativity in his own country, but:

A seed was sown in what had the appearance of barren ground. It germinated years later in a public ward of a Sydney hospital where I had been brought from Castle Hill during one of my most violent asthma attacks. In my half-drugged state the figures began moving in the desert landscape. I could hear snatches of conversation, I became in turn Voss and his anima Laura Trevelyen. On a night of crisis, with the asthma turning to pneumonia, I took hold of the hand of a resident doctor standing by my bed. He withdrew as though he had been burnt. While recovering, though still in hospital, I sketched the skeleton of the book I now knew I would write (FG, pp.103-104).

White's state of mind during this illness began the process whereby the Egyptian desert was psychologically transformed into the Australian desert. He was suffering not only from asthma, but also from the stresses incumbent upon his continual search for truth and a sense of permanence. Although White had reached the stage where he could
acknowledge the existence of God during the writing of *TM*, he still faced difficulties in coming to terms with his own country. Australia still remained a place from which, artistically, he felt estranged, though nevertheless he was at the same time aware of the necessity to come to terms with it. Yet there remained a sense of dissonance and his choice of a German explorer, instead of a native born Australian, gives testimony to his lack of faith that an Australian hero could obtain from the wilderness the inspiration for the kind of quest Voss undertakes.1

Some indication of this attitude can be seen in the account of the first meeting between Voss and Laura. Laura, who sits in a large room, "darkened by the furniture, of which the masses of mellow wood [tend] to daunt intruding light"2 is isolated from the country by these trappings of carefully preserved European gentility and therefore distanced in her view of it, saying only "[i]t is not my country, although I have lived in it" (p.29). Clearly Australia, for Laura, is not a place where inspiration is either sought or even expected. To her the landscape is a thing one picnics in or views from the comfort of a station verandah and then retreats from, with some relief. To these confessions, for that is really what they are, Voss can only remark, "[a] pity that you huddle .... [y]our country is of great subtlety" (p.11), but he is not endeavouring to pursue her here, merely passing a rather droll comment on the indifference he perceives in her and her fellows.

The author, by choosing such a scene to describe the essential polarity of these protagonists' attitudes towards Australia, which also effectively sets the scene for their future involvement, is doubtless expressing something of his own conflicting views at the time. In addition White has stated that he chose fiction as a medium of expression because it seemed the perfect "means for introducing ... the cast of contradictory characters of which I am composed".3 It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Voss is at least one personification, or even a composite, of these various "contradictory characters". He is chosen as the primary actor in the drama of this novel, not merely because his Europeanness is appropriately analogous to the life style and attitudes of the

---

1. This may also be a response to White's awareness, which Lawrence also commented upon, that among young German men in particular, the desire to "wander" is almost instinctive and indeed an accepted part of a young German's "coming of age". It is possible that, in choosing a German as his main character therefore White is also paying homage to the "Wandervögel", in which case his choice of Leichhardt as an historical figure of inspiration for Voss is by no means coincidental. The "Wandervögel" inspired D.H. Lawrence and there seems little doubt that Lawrence in his turn inspired White, at least in certain ways. See "Germans and English" by D.H. Lawrence in *Phoenix II*.


comfortable classes of Australian society, whose affluence emanates from this country's soil but whose concept of all that is worthy to be called "civilized" is firmly centred on other lands, but also because he represents much of the author's own dilemmas. Voss, the "visitor", who perceives a greater potential in Australia than those who may be said to represent some of its more significant beneficiaries, is also Voss, the personification of all that is utterly alien, utterly European and utterly Romantic. He brings with him the view that man should not merely carve a niche for himself in a tiny, insignificant part of a conquered land, but should know it and possess it in its entirety. That he is doomed to die on the gallows of his own German Romanticism in no way diminishes his achievements, just as it does little to diminish Australia's reputation for thwarting, by the power of its vastness and often hostile climate, such puny ambition.

Patrick White seems, in Voss, to be setting out to demonstrate that things European are only comfortably "housed" in Europe and that Europeans themselves can only hope to be securely accommodated in Australia by sweeping out from their cluttered intellectual and spiritual "domains" much that is traditional and safe and looking for the new, the unexpected and uncertain that life in Australia offers. On the other hand, while he is making no overt prediction of what in the cultural sense that might be, he is certainly predicting one thing: whatever the Australian vision may ultimately become, much of the European, with all its variety, will remain; hence the mark that Voss is destined to leave, both spiritually and actually, in the baking red heart of the Australian continent.

Voss is of course a novel that functions on many levels. The idea that at least one of these concerns that confrontation between the Romanticism of the Old World and the cultural void of the New, which is after all nothing more than a *tabula rasa* of possibility, is by no means new but it is fundamental. This can be seen by the novel's almost circular shape -- Chapter One begins with Voss acting as the sometimes silent witness and sometimes droll critic of Sydney society's general indifference to the exciting potential of Australia, while in the final Chapter the reader is confronted by a discourse against mediocrity. If one is indifferent, White seems to be saying, mediocrity may be all one aims for, if not one's ultimate fate. Yet mediocrity, Topp observes, is "a creative source of endless variety and subtlety" (p.447). Therefore, at the end of the novel, just as at the beginning, one is left with a panoramic vista of possibility and perhaps that was all White could see at the time of writing Voss.

If Voss is a novel that expresses its author's belief in Australia's cultural potential and so his doubts as to its cultural actuality, it is also a work in a distinctly European philosophical tradition that sees in activity the sole rational response of man to his life and his place in things. Voss is active man endeavouring to persuade the heart of
things, to mark the interior of the continent, of society even and thus not merely to make his presence felt in perpetuity, but to somehow justify that presence in the process. Voss is portrayed as a man "carrying a book which convey[s] nothing to him" (p.49) but who, through "frenzied movements", can come to "feel the shape of the earth" and thus "receive proof of existence" (p.49).

From this it can be assumed that White's view of the "barren landscape of Australian culture" is not that it is absolute or unchangeable but that its very nature is conducive to creativity, provided one is active in the pursuit of anything that will fill the void. In this he is also saying that European knowledge, as manifested by the book Voss holds, is not of itself sufficient in the struggle to achieve a wholly unique Australian cultural identity. On a personal level, then, Voss can be seen as part of Patrick White's own quest to discover what it means to be an Australian writer, as distinct from a writer living in Australia whose art is rooted in a European tradition. The object of Voss's journey is not merely to conquer physically the Australian continent but to pursue "true knowledge" or "the core of reality" that will render life meaningful. The desert has a symbolic function that operates in two ways. In the first it is:

... a way of picturing an inner world that urban man, too, enters if he has the courage and metaphysical depth to explore his selfhood and his relation to God.4

And in the second:

... a place whose bareness ... is helpful, a place where humans are reduced to bare essentials.5

Voss's journey now becomes a voyage into the inner reaches of his own self, where he may discover the truth of his god but also a place where he can confront the naked truth of his own potentiality. The desert is the perfect landscape wherein the battles to discover individual, national and literary identity, and religious understanding can be fought. Accordingly, this novel not only explores what is meant by the "Australian identity" in a personal and cultural sense, but further explores the question of religious faith, human limitation and the place of European consciousness in a landscape that is essentially alien and inhospitable to it. Voss is therefore yet another example of Patrick White's efforts to incorporate himself wholly into the Australian scene as a writer and as a man. As such it is a significant work and may well mark the high point of White's literary development. This can be seen by the way in which he uses landscape images in Voss, in the manner of one wholly reconciled to them.

In his early novels, White employs the desolate Australian landscape as a mirror of

his characters' states of mind. It is evident that the depiction of the natural elements in each novel gradually alters from *HV* to *Voss*. White's ability to use the Australian landscape for symbolic purposes without losing the immediate impact at the literal level, is enhanced from one novel to the next. The characters in the first novel are drawn starkly against a hostile and alien backdrop whereas in *Voss* the landscape and the human actors in it seem to operate on an almost co-operative level. This is perhaps best illustrated by the telepathic communication that comes to exist between Voss and Laura. From this it can be inferred that White has truly found himself, as an Australian author, in the writing of *Voss*, hence his capacity to make palpable the far reaches of the Australian landscape.

In *Voss* this landscape is similar to that of the earlier novels but its function is radically different. In addition, the character of Voss is a progression from those of Oliver in *HV*, Theodora of *AS* and Stan of *TM*. Voss is a man of action, a man of will, seeking "the purpose and nature of that freedom" (p.14). Consequently, the portrayal of the Australian outback is more vivid, in keeping with the notion of the "red heart", but its depiction is that of a hot, subtly resistant place the conquest of which, by Voss, is a foregone conclusion though few can anticipate the consequences. Before entering the desert, Voss finds consolation in the natural surroundings at the first station, Rhine Towers, just as Theodora and Stan are consoled by the country around their homes:

> It was a gentle, healing landscape in those parts. So he was looking about him with contented eye, drinking deep draughts of a most simple medicine (p.124).

Like Theodora, Voss communicates with the landscape in silence and like Stan he accepts his feeling of unity with the natural world "as the only desirable one" (p.124). Unlike Stan and Theodora, however, Voss sees nature as a thing against which to test his will power. In this the natural world is seen as a place of battle, a place waiting for man to make his mark on it, and a place continuously seeking to "absorb" him, usually through the strength of light:

> The purple stream of evening flowing at its base almost drowned Voss. Snatches of memory racing through him made it seem the more intolerable that he might not finally sink, but would rise as from other drownings on the same calamitous raft (p.128).

When the party of the expedition leaves the last base of Jildra to begin its trek into the desert, the vast expanse of the bush separates the members of the party from their past lives. It draws them into itself, providing them with "a sense of eternity". Encircled by the dead landscape of white rocks, black mountains and brown trees, Voss feels that all of the land is infinitely extending in serene chaos, like a thing alive:

> The simplicity of the clay-coloured landscape was very moving to the German. For a moment everything was distinct. In the foreground some dead trees, restored to life by the absence of hate, were glowing with flesh of rosy light.
All life was dependent on the thin lips of light, compressed, yet breathing at the rim of the world (p.179).

Through the passage into the interior, the landscape and its natural environment are active, subjective elements to Voss, and no longer merely external or static. Voss is about to fight and grapple with them. He is also in his element, in the vastness and distance, becoming a part of the landscape, at one with it, until "[b]lackened and yellowed by the sun, dried in the wind, he now resembled some root, of dark and esoteric purpose" (p.169).

This "purpose" is the process of challenging nature which is a fundamental aspect of the determination of this character to conquer the Australian continent. It is also intrinsic to his system of beliefs regarding nature and man’s place in it. Voss sees the landscape as a thing that requires the stamp of man to be put upon it in order for it to be complete. He is pleased when, on leaving Rhine Towers, he is confronted by "this bushland [where] men had already blazed a way" (p.124). The idea that "[t]he world of gods was becoming a world of men" (p.124) is to Voss the way things ought to be. It follows that the acceptance of nature as a mysterious power is not sufficient for Voss, who seeks instead the satisfaction of imposing himself upon it in an intensely personal way. Accordingly, Voss is described as "possessing the whole country with his eyes", a country whose "hills and valleys lay still, but expectant, or responded in ripples of leaf and grass, dutifully, to their bridegroom the sun" (p.155) who is, of course, Voss himself.

Voss, dissatisfied with the superficially secure surroundings of his home in Germany, had left his parents as a young man to wander the green forests and yellow plains of his country. This period as a "wandervögel" ultimately leads him to stand on the "underside of the world", his boots sunk "into the same gritty, sterile sand" (p.14) that he wisely identifies with Germany. He knows then, better than Theodora ever knows, that when one crosses the sea one changes only the sky above one’s head; the earth and thus oneself remains the same. This is established from the outset, the unity of the natural order that Theodora can only dream of and that Stan Parker merely begins to fully perceive at the end of his life. Voss is already a man who has reached a greater level of understanding than his predecessors, in AS and TM, and so his goals are radically different. He knows his "place in things" and seeks only to leave his mark on them. For Voss, "[h]uman behaviour is a series of lunges" (p.14), of which one only sometimes senses the inevitability of direction.

The root phrase here is "inevitability of direction" which suggests that greater forces than individual actions dictate are at work in the world. This somewhat deterministic view seems paradoxical in the light of Voss’s apparent belief in himself to the exclusion of "all other gods". His discussion with Laura Trevelyan on the subject of
faith, however, reveals that he objects to atheism on two grounds. The first is that he equates it with individual meanness and some intellectual inadequacy that renders it impossible for the atheist to "conceive the idea of a Divine Power" (p.89). The second is that the denial of God is the denial of self. Voss is saying that he can conceive of a Divine Power, presumably that same power which determines human "direction" and that he equates that power with himself. Implicitly, this would seem to indicate that Voss believes he is God, yet it could also mean that he believes he merely shares something of that Divine Power.

This attitude may well be the cornerstone of Voss's self-confidence, for there is little doubt that his belief in himself and in his will is indefatigable. Yet at the same time he believes in destiny -- and from whence comes destiny unless from the Divine Power of the cosmos that is outside himself? This is not as paradoxical as it might seem. Voss knows that one cannot deny the existence of something without at the same time acknowledging it in the very process of denial. Therefore while he may not accept the monolithic image of God that some would regard as essential to the Christian faith, he nonetheless accepts a Divine Immanence which for him is in all the world including himself. It is a presence that he recognizes by stating his belief that he, Voss, has a purpose in life, and it is a presence he acknowledges by acting out that purpose, which is to test his will to the ultimate limit.

His dynamism and will-power hinges on his belief in certain inevitabilities and he can pursue his course so boldly only because he has this belief. He may be using his free will to challenge the preconceived ideas of orthodox religion but at the same time he is holding fast to his faith, a faith that makes him believe that he is "reserved for a peculiar destiny" (p.15). By this exercise of free will he is, therefore, doing little else except thrusting himself against the chain that binds him to his god, a god that he believes is both within him and outside him. He seems to be something of a victim of messianic delusions but in this he is not dissimilar to Christ, for it was a faith not unlike Voss's that led Christ to the cross and it also, first, led him into the desert.

The desert with its unknowable, enigmatic aridity and beauty is often the place where great and significant discoveries are made and also, in Voss, an appropriate symbol for the modern age that offers technological progress, but threatens its beneficiaries with the possibility of spiritual emptiness:

The country round them reduced most personal hopes and fears until these were of little account. An eternity of days was opening for the men, who would wake, and scramble up with a kind of sheepish respect for their surroundings (p.194).

The Australian outback does not merely surround Voss and his party, it is an intrinsic part of the difficulties they must face in crossing the continent:
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 (p.336).

As White struggles towards a greater understanding of things and a means to express his poetic and philosophical vision, so Voss pursues something, that is both in and beyond the land. Voss’s will-power is tested in his journey into the endless desert but it is tested only because he has deemed it should be. He will play the chain to the last of its links: "I shall know everything" (p.27); "I am not in the habit of setting myself limits" (p.90).

Voss sets himself apart from ordinary men and ordinary living by a belief in himself and his own divinity, hence he does not need the support either of organized religion or society, nor even of Laura’s love. He can aspire to the godhead only because he knows there is a god, a god that shapes his own future and enables him to travel without a map. Only those whose futures are uncertain require the "comfort" of a map; to one who knows his direction a chart is not required. For Voss both maps and compass serve the same function as that other "tool of great journeys": the Bible, they are only necessary for those whose lives are directionless without them. He can so bravely face uncertainty only in his certainty. Thus does the wheel of Theodora Goodman’s "dichotomy in life" turn full circle.

A novel such as this, written at the end of White’s period of disbelief and confusion, both with regard to a god and to his own place in things, is perhaps understandable only by an examination of its references to landscape. Yet an analysis of White’s use of landscape images does not necessarily lead to the discovery of his intent. One can never be certain, for example, whether he uses symbolism for purposes of self-examination or for literary effect, just as one cannot gauge at what point the writer and his books diverge. How much his books are factual, and how much fictionalized accounts of his own inner struggles, cannot be fully known. White’s personal beliefs at the time of writing Voss, however, are such as to suggest that, between Voss and his creator the distance is very narrow, as White’s own comment indicates: "... each of us retreated into his private faith, and there we have remained" (FG, p.145).

It is a private faith that both drives and leads Voss to embark on an expedition into the unknown and untamed desert where he can hope to prove and delineate the extent of his naked will-power, that thing which it pleases him to call his "royal instrument" (p.297). Voss must undergo many tests in order to achieve this goal. On the literal level one observes the tremendous physical and emotional strain of the explorer who is determined to cross a forbidding landscape. On the symbolic level, one
notes all the ingredients of a spiritual crisis wherein a single human being attempts to come to terms with his own nature and the might and complexity of the cosmos. Voss intermittently kills, for the "common good" (p.266), animals which accompany them, and this effectively tests his own ability to sacrifice the things he loves. When he kills Gyp, an event which causes him great pain because he is genuinely fond of the dog, he does so not merely to punish himself for seeking the company of another person, in this case Judd, an act which he equates with his own personal weakness, but also for other reasons. He wishes to gauge the reactions of his companions and thus to test their commitment to his plan. Voss, in fact, sacrifices both animals and humans to his own ends, but he is also equally ready to make sacrifices himself, even to die, in pursuit of his goal. He will cross the continent in the spirit if not in the flesh.

Voss takes six companions on the expedition and all are different from the ordinary people of the city for they are not afraid to see and experience the mysteries of their homeland, whatever their motivation for joining the journey might be. Of the six members of the party, the Christian ornithologist, Palfreyman, the intellectual poet, Le Mesurier, and the emancipated convict, Judd, all play very important roles. They might be considered the searchers of the expedition. Each of them represents elements such as religious faith, spirituality and the will to survive, which Voss has to confront, grapple with and in the end defeat. Their attitudes towards life are reflected in their responses to the desolate landscape, the harshness of the natural environment and their experiences during the course of the expedition, and these responses reveal their radical difference from one another and from Voss himself.

These differences are made clear in the ways Voss, Le Mesurier and Palfreyman perceive the Circular Wharf and its environments prior to their departure on the Osprey. On "a still, glassy morning", the Osprey is prepared with "a quiet conviction" (p.93) for sailing that suggests an almost religious sense of harmony, which is further emphasized by the following passage:

Life was grown humane. No one would be crucified on any such amiable trees as those pressed along the northern shore. On all sides of the landscape there was evident at present a passionless beauty that recurred even in the works of men. Houses were honester, more genial, it seemed, in the crude attempt to fulfil their purpose (p.93).

Voss, absorbed in the activity of preparation, is almost lost as an individual at this time, in much the same way as he will in due course be lost to life itself. He gives himself freely to the confined landscape around Circular Wharf with the same abandonment, as he will give himself to that greater country into which he prepares to go.

Frank Le Mesurier, less absorbed with the physical activity of disembarkation, is presented as "somewhat dandified" and gripped by an uncharacteristic enthusiasm,
which is free "of that cynicism which he usually affected" (p.98). He endeavours to communicate with Palfreyman who, absorbed in introspection, barely responds, but Frank is not perturbed. He is instead seized by "the radiant morning" (p.98) to the degree of being wholly optimistic. He laughs at his own "oyster delusion" (p.99), which allows him to believe in his own ability to "bring forth something of great beauty" (p.99). When Palfreyman still does not respond as generously as he might, Frank gives himself over to the morning and to new feelings about the town:

The morning, shimmering and floating, was for the moment pearl enough. Listening to the humdrum grind of enterprise, of vehicles and voices in the pearly distance, he was amazed that he could have hated this genial town. But with the impact of departure it had become at last visible, as landscape will (p.99).

Frank reveals his great potential to be an artist at this point, for he not only sees the world around him with renewed clarity of vision but is effectively nourished by it as well. He is a man for whom the landscape is present only as a thing before which his romantic temperament can flourish.

Palfreyman, however, still weak from a previous accident and "withdrawn to his own thoughts" (p.95), sees little of the landscape, preferring instead to wander in free captivity amongst the blunt-toed, hairy sailors, somehow certain in the knowledge that he can recover his strength "only really through [such an act of] humility" (p.96). Able to look "into the open pores of [a sailor's] skin" (p.98) he otherwise responds to his "strange surroundings" (p.96) with obvious indifference, as though those surroundings were of no real importance.

The essential difference between these three characters, Voss, Le Mesurier and Palfreyman, is therefore made apparent at the outset. Voss can be absorbed by the activity of the final day at Circular Wharf, even by the day itself; Frank, for his part, absorbs the morning until it becomes an almost active constituent of his fantasies. Palfreyman, however, loses himself to momentary studies of human skin; the humbling experience of a brief association with a sailor, who uses Palfreyman's humility as an excuse to confess past secrets or otherwise reflects on the need to "condemn the morality and love the man" (p.98). He is, in fact, lost to a broad vision of the world, choosing instead to contemplate spiritual issues or to absorb himself in the study of small natural wonders. He is, in many ways, a composite of those traditionally opposed social elements: the scientist and the Christian; these elements co-exist in an uneasy state of peace within him.

He joins Voss's expedition both as a Christian and as a scientist, but it is the Christian part of Palfreyman that makes the final decision because he goes with Voss by way of expressing his acceptance of the precept that the will of God is supreme. This
total surrender of one's own volition leads Voss to become suspicious of Palfreyman's faith, because such an act is alien and incomprehensible to Voss. His suspicion will later be used as a means of challenging both Palfreyman and the faith he adheres to. This challenge will not prove too difficult, because Palfreyman at times exhibits a tendency to be ambivalent about whether it is science or religion that principally concerns him. That he appears to value his beliefs more than his profession only seems to underscore the personal value of his science. White stresses this ambiguity in the following line: "Dedication to science might have been his consolation, if it had not been for his religious faith" (p.46). This sentence implies that Palfreyman may be uncertain about his faith, whilst at the same time it clearly indicates that he is also nourished by it. Indeed, Palfreyman's faith is his "consolation". This is further emphasized later in the novel when, at the time of crossing the river, Palfreyman wants to offer up a prayer to express his thankfulness to God. In his numb confusion, physical coldness and the unresponsiveness of his faculties, however, he cannot find the words:

... his mind began to grope after some substitute for prayer with which to express his thankfulness, when he happened to catch sight of a battered quart pot, and cracked and swollen saddle-bag. These objects, of simple form and humble purpose, that exposure to the elements had emphasized, strengthened his sense of gratitude and trust to the extent that he resolved to proffer their images to God, and was at once consoled to know that his intention was acceptable (pp.278-279).

This incident reveals Palfreyman's faith in God and this, coupled with his subsequent response to the loss of his specimens, suggests that he is something of an archetypal Christian, whose sense of guilt is at times greater than his sense of faith. Rather than view the loss of his patiently collected specimens as a misfortune, or even as a necessary sacrifice, Palfreyman interprets their loss as an act of removal for the purpose of "some form of retribution" (p.277). It is perhaps at this point that the Christian dimension of Palfreyman begins to dominate his scientific inclinations, and as such this event heralds the future.

Up to this moment, Palfreyman's fascination for the small creatures of the natural world has distracted his attention from what, in religious terms at least, is man's greater responsibility: his concern for his fellow beings. This is not to imply that Palfreyman is unkind, for he is not, but that his love of other life forms supersedes his love of man. He reflects, for example, that "[h]e [is], in fact, happiest with birds", and that whilst others "[could] not bear to touch the folded body of a dead bird, [h]e, on the other hand, must learn to overcome his impulse to retreat from kind hands" (p.83). It is significant, however, that though this scientist can admit to himself that God's creatures are more pleasing to him than man, his love of them is manifested by his killing them. This is the essence of Palfreyman's ambiguity and it will prove his undoing.
Palfreyman’s confused sense of purpose and belief is further exemplified by his response when Turner shoots a bird and Palfreyman remonstrates with him for his cruelty:

Palfreyman was distressed.

'Poor thing,' he said, touching the dead bird with the tip of his toe. 'Do not tell me you never killed a bird!' cried Turner.

Compassion in the other had caused him to scent a weakness. Now he was perhaps even a gentleman’s superior.

'I have killed many, to my knowledge,' Palfreyman replied, 'and could be responsible for much that I do not realize' (p.332).

Coming from a man who is convinced of his love of God, yet devotes much of his life to the killing of the creatures of God’s world, this seems to indicate Palfreyman’s ambivalence, though in fact it is tantamount to Palfreyman’s admission that he is "resigning his part in the expedition" (p.332). That Turner killed the bird for no reason, in no way mitigates Palfreyman’s similar deeds as an ornithologist, and the latter appears to comprehend this.

Consequently, faced with the brutal evidence of man’s occasional rôle as violator of the landscape, his reaction is to withdraw his scientific labours from the Voss team. It is as though he had not, until this moment, fully realized the extent of his moral culpability, either to nature or to man. In this way, Palfreyman confronts a challenge to his faith and seems to feel that the latter is rather weak and that indeed:

There comes a moment when an individual who is too honest to take refuge in the old illusion of self-importance is suspended agonizingly between the flat sky and the flat earth, and prayer is no more than a slight gumminess on the roof of the mouth (pp.332-333).

Half way between the landscape and heaven, between the natural world that men inhabit and the domain of God, Palfreyman fears that his faith may not stand a final test.

This is certainly Voss’s perception of Palfreyman for when, in his arrogance and the dumb assurance of his own superiority, Voss exposes Palfreyman to the last great test, he knows the man will fail. Indeed Voss is so certain of this that he laments his thirst which makes it difficult for him to wet his lips, as he anticipates the defeat that comes when "the true condition of a soul" (p.341) is finally revealed.

Voss sends Palfreyman to a group of Aborigines in order to attempt to recover the lost compass. Palfreyman bravely tries to meet this challenge, saying: "I will trust my faith", but his voice sounds very weak (p.341) as though his faith itself were running out. Nevertheless he goes to meet his fate:

Palfreyman, who was certainly very small, in what had once been his cabbage-tree hat, had begun to walk towards the cloudful of blacks, but slowly,
but deliberately, with rather large strides, as if he had been confirming the length of an important plot of land. As he went forward he became perfectly detached from his surroundings, and was thinking of many disconnected incidents, of a joyful as well as an unhappy nature, of the love that he had denied his sister, of the bland morning in which he had stood holding the horse’s bridle and talking to Miss Trevelyan, even of the satisfaction that he and Turner had seemed to share as he shaved the latter’s suppurating face. Since it had become obvious that he was dedicated to a given end, his own celibacy could only appear natural (pp.341-342).

Palfreyman does not really commit himself to retrieving the instrument from the blacks, instead he seems to accept that he will fail, going over the more significant details of his life as if he knows that soon he will be dead. His belief in himself, if not his faith in God, is therefore insufficient to meet the challenge of the moment and yet he does not walk without some courage. This approach is not understood by the Aborigines, who are here portrayed as human representatives of the obstacles contained by the Australian landscape. Consequently, though Palfreyman greets them bravely and with humility, the outcome is inevitable:

If his faith had been strong enough, he would have known what to do, but as he was frightened, and now could think of nothing, except, he could honestly say, that he did love all men, he showed the natives the palms of his hands. These, of course, would have been quite empty, but for the fate that was written on them (p.342).

The fate that is written on his palms is that he will have to die and, whether through panic or courage is not certain, the blacks react by spearing him. This tragic episode does nothing to add to the reputation of the party’s leader, Voss, but does a great deal for the image of Palfreyman. Though he dies believing he has failed in the final test of his faith his faith is stronger at that moment than it has ever been. Where he fails, if failure is the word, he fails to understand that in this situation nothing could have saved him. In a way his is a kind of altruistic suicide, which is a crude and rather dubious parallel of another greater act, the only difference being that Palfreyman dies not decrying his god but decrying his personal inadequacy. He is more heroic at this moment than ever before in his life and it is Voss who feels the brunt of it, which might explain his somewhat blunt and churlish refusal to read the service.

The religious implications of Palfreyman’s death are underwritten by the landscape in a manner that suggests that Palfreyman has paid a price for his peculiar sort of arrogance, in much the same way as Voss will later do. In this, his love of God, his fascination with and destruction of such natural beauties as birds, and his inhibitions in relationships with his fellows all play a part in what seems to be a drama of heavenly retribution and heavenly forgiveness. In a sense, it is the natural world that kills Palfreyman, in the form of "a cloud of blacks" and it is the landscape, subsequently, that claims him.
And significantly it is left to the fool of the party, Harry Roberts, to fully comprehend this, for it is he who sees the "white bird" (p.344), which might be the dove, that symbol of peace and love, fly out of Palfreyman's open wound as his body is lowered down. That there is more to Harry's witnessing of the white bird, than to this Christian image of Palfreyman's death has been noted by Wilkes, who argues that Harry Roberts "interprets the death of Palfreyman in ... terms" of the Aboriginal belief in the transmigration of souls "and the distribution of the spirit through nature after death". This is a reasonable comment, given the circumstances of Palfreyman's sacrifice, and it can be further argued that the acceptance of his transmuted soul into the landscape is a manifestation of God's forgiveness for whatever damage Palfreyman may have done to those living creatures his science demanded that he kills.

Palfreyman is a complex figure in a novel full of complexities. A man who is a mixture of guilt and a peculiar understanding of his faith which leads him to a special act of martyrdom: he had fled from England because he could not cope with the responsibilities incumbent on having a crippled sister. Palfreyman's sister, "doomed to remain unique" (p.263) in her deformity, had attempted suicide in the desperate, somewhat Puritanic belief that God had stamped her with a "sign of His disapproval" (p.264) by thrusting her into the world with a humped back.

That Palfreyman's sister cannot wholly accept her deformity as a natural thing, but interprets it as having religious significance is suggestive of Palfreyman's own dilemma as a scientist and Christian. By the very nature of his work, Palfreyman is tied to earthly things, yet his choice of birds as a subject of study indicates that he aspires to the heavenly. He cannot save his sister from the self-destructive belief that she is cursed by God, just as he cannot save himself from the conflict between his love of science and his love of God. It was his failure to reconcile himself to this dilemma that bound him to his sister, to nature and to God in the endless circle of belief, doubt and guilt. He was a dead man, in Voss's eyes, the moment he left his country.

Yet this condemned man dies rather well and if, by dispatching him on an errand he could not possibly fulfil, Voss intended to prove the inadequacy of the Faith, Voss failed in this intention. Faith is not marred by an individual's weakness, only the individual is damaged. As Wilkes observes, Palfreyman is in a sense "a casualty of the faith he trusts in", but the belief itself remains untouched.

Voss's haste in burying Palfreyman and his refusal to read the service are perhaps the acts of a man who recognizes his failure to disprove the Faith. Consequently, Voss is

7. Ibid., p.169.
at his most inadequate at this time, allowing personal feelings to interfere with his duties as a leader, and significantly the party begins to break up almost at once. The death of Palfreyman is, therefore, perhaps one of Voss's greater moments of defeat, because his reaction so clearly demonstrates that he is both human and inhumane.

Palfreyman joined the expedition because he believed it was God's will that he should do so, but Le Mesurier joins because it was the will of Voss. Tempted by Voss's flattering of his youthful vanity, Frank Le Mesurier also accompanies the party because he has nothing better to do. Voss feels drawn to Le Mesurier realizing that if he, Voss, "were not obsessed ... [he] would be purposeless in this same sea" (p.33). In addition, Voss understands and identifies with some of Le Mesurier's essential qualities and Le Mesurier also feels he shares something of his leader's nature. However, Voss's initial attraction to, and empathetic feelings for Le Mesurier cease the moment he succeeds in tempting the young man to join the expedition. Frank, however, "thrilled by the immensity of darkness, and resent[ful] [of] the approach of those lights which would reveal human substance" (p.36), is unaware of Voss's loss of interest in him.

Frank's reluctance to be confronted by the realities of "human substance" is an indication of his romantic disposition, and his sensitive response to darkness shows him for the poet he is. Both these attributes prove fatal in the end, particularly the former because he is content to believe that Voss is "intended for [great] heights" (p.35) until it is too late. In this, he is a follower, a man with faith neither in himself nor in God, yet he is also one who seeks for some meaningful dimension in life, which he does through his passionate response to landscape and his passionate belief in Voss. For Le Mesurier Voss is a god and he is inflamed with a peculiar devotion for the man, which is illustrated by the intensity with which he views the landscape at Rhine Towers:

Already the evening of his arrival, upon scenes of splendour such as he had known to exist but never met, Frank Le Mesurier had begun to change. The sun's sinking had dissolved all hardnesses. Darkness, however, had not fallen; it seemed, rather, to well forth, like the beating and throbbing of heart and pulse in the young man's body, to possess the expectant hills (p.142).

It can be seen from this that Frank is a man with spiritual needs. These needs are exemplified by his emotional and physical joy at seeing "the darkness" well forth, by his willingness to follow Voss and by his habit of keeping a journal in which he writes "[a]ll that [he] had not lived" (p.142). Furthermore, Frank's response to darkness indicates a hollowness of spirit, which he longs to fill, but which is exacerbated by additional fears and inadequacies. Life for him is a thing to be written about, living itself presents a challenge he cannot really meet.

By keeping a journal in which he writes not of his experience but of his poetic responses to nature and to Voss, Frank acknowledges his inner needs and his basic lack of independence:
All that this man had not lived began to be written down. His failure took shape, but in flowers, and mountains, and in words of love, which he had never before expressed, and which, for that reason, had the truth of innocence. When his poem was written, it was burning on the paper (p.142).

Frank does not lack will power though and indeed it is Voss's recognition of this that leads him to choose Frank as the means to communicate with Turner and Angus during a particularly violent storm. At first, Le Mesurier attempts "to avoid collision with the approaching storm" (p.248), but then he removes his wind blown hat and so exposes himself to the full impact of nature:

At once his matted hair began to stream out, and as the wind encircled the pale, upper half of his forehead, he seemed to be relieved of some of the responsibility of human personality. The wind was filling his mouth and running down through the acceptant funnel of his throat, till he was completely possessed by it; his heart was thunder, and the jagged nerves of lightning were radiating from his own body (pp.248-249).

Le Mesurier, like Voss, seems to have the ability to take something of the storm's power into himself so that he appears to be enervated by it. Yet this merely illustrates the essential hollowness of Frank. It is as though he were a man without powers who, like a light bulb, cannot function by himself.

Yet in some ways, although he lacks power and strength, Frank is not unlike Stan Parker who could yield himself to the natural world. Whereas Stan flourishes before its reality, Frank cannot "burst out and rise to the heights of the storm" (p.250), and is instead reduced by it. He is, therefore, similar in some ways to Theodora Goodman of AS, who shrinks every time some part of her inner self is destroyed in the pursuit of greater understanding. But for Frank there is to be no greater understanding. Devoid of the advantage that an acknowledged faith can give and having also entrusted his spirit to Voss, Frank is therefore too weak to benefit from the storm. Consequently, in his moment of crisis, when he fully realizes the extent of his failure, it is to thoughts of Voss that he trusts. But even here he is defeated, for all he hears is criticism from his lord:

Frank, I will tell you, said his mentor, you are filled with the hallucinations of intellectual power: I could assist you perhaps, who enjoy the knowledge that comes with sovereignty over every province of illusion, that is to say, spiritual power; indeed, as you may have suspected, I am I am I am ... (p.250).

If, at this moment, there is any hope for Frank this hope is dashed to pieces by the wider sounds of the natural world. Unable to "split open rock, and discover the final secret" (p.250) Le Mesurier returns to camp a broken and defeated man. Afraid of truly living, trusting only in the power of words, which Stan Parker of TM is wise enough to reject, Frank is left vulnerable and hopeless, the sun in his chest, "frozen in his own moonlight" (p.251).
Despite his experience on the mountain and the culminating sense of failure, Le Mesurier nonetheless retains his "poetic disposition" and is able to experience momentary feelings of wonder in relation to the natural world, though it is as if he senses its mystery and power but cannot fully grasp it:

Now, from time to time, the rain would lift, literally, he felt, of something so permanent and solid. Then, in the stillness, the grey would blur with green. In the middle of the day the body of the drowned earth would appear to float to the surface; islands were breeding; and a black dust of birds, blowing across the sky, seemed to promise salvation (p.293).

He does not fully penetrate the mystery of nature, because he prefers the romantic to the realistic perception of the world. Therefore, when confronted by the need to cross a flooded river, he risks his life to save his poetic vision and is stunned by the subsequent meeting with solid earth, just as he cannot cross the river by himself:

Such an emotional intensity underlay this mystic crossing, that the intrusion of solid ground beneath his feet was a violent shock to the invalid. As the horse lunged free, the man was wrested out of his entranced state, and would have fallen into the mud but for the hands that were receiving him (p.278).

Just as Palfreyman is ultimately doomed by the faith he subscribes to, Frank is doomed by his art. In addition, his romantic illusion about Voss also betrays him. Taught by Voss only to expect damnation, he is therefore vulnerable to the thing he most expects. Truly one both "blinded and illuminated" (p.142) by the brilliance that he sees within the world, Le Mesurier is a victim of that human frailty that seeks from poetry and other people what he cannot find elsewhere. His spirituality is but a shadow of Voss's dynamism, a startling echo of the master's schemes. He puts his faith in Voss and the Muse and does not think to put it in the hands of God or even in his own hands. Only at the end does he begin to see his mistake. When at last, in extremis, he questions Voss about his plans, the answer he receives clearly devastates him, for it takes him to the heart of that "stone", which in the storm he could not penetrate: Voss is not a god, he is nothing but a man, who like so many men before and after him, can only "trust to God" (p.379). His faith reduced to the ashes of absurd delusion Frank lives out the grimness of his own prediction, which he made when Voss once asked him of his purpose: "I rather suspect ... it is something I shall not discover till I am at my last gasp" (p.34). When Frank cuts his throat, he does so knowing all too well that purpose which is his: he has to pay the ultimate penalty for investing his faith in another to the detriment of faith in himself and god. But this penalty is one that permits Frank to triumph in the end for "his last attempt at poetry" allows him "to climb out into the immense fields of silence" (p.381). At last, he can escape from the envelope of self. Art may fail before reality but the poet's soul is immortal.

Unlike Le Mesurier, Judd is prepared to invest only his experience in the
expedition, his faith is reserved for himself. A man of physical strength and manual
dexterity with the concomitant wit for survival, Judd, "the man-animal" (p.345), is a
threat to Voss from the start, as is illustrated by the following passage:

He was, in fact, a union of strength and delicacy, like some gnarled trees that
have been tortured and twisted by time and weather into exaggerated shapes,
but of which the leaves still quiver at each change, and constantly shed shy,
subtle scents (p.133).

Judd also represents the natural survivor, as is indicated by his behaviour at the river,
when the building of a raft becomes necessary: "... Judd began to fell some saplings, of
which there were few enough in the neighbourhood, and those none too straight.
However, he was able to hew down a bare necessity of timber" (p.276). By taking only
what he needs of the necessary wood, and this carefully selected for the purpose, Judd
demonstrates that capability which later leads to his becoming "the master of objects"
(p.290), and which in addition is the single source of Voss’s fears about the man. Voss is
aware from the outset that Judd is in some ways equal to himself, and he knows the
man’s potential for leadership, hence he remarks: "... stone cannot come together with
stone, except in conflict" (p.136).

Voss, at this first meeting with Judd, acknowledges his suspicion of the other man,
a suspicion that comes from his observation that Judd is not only physically strong but
has "some strength of silence" (p.148) which implies a sturdy sense of self. This is
further exemplified when, confronted by Voss’s curiosity concerning his way of life, Judd
simply responds: "My place is of no consequence" (p.148). In this, Judd displays a
remarkable acceptance of his environment that is akin to the unquestioning response of
Theodora Goodman, in AS, to her home in Meroë. But Judd also exhibits a certain
humility that comes from knowing one’s limitations. His awareness of these limitations
is emphasized symbolically by his making a telescope. He wants to see the stars, but
tells Voss that through this object he has rigged up: "... you would not see nothing. It
is too weak" (p.150). Yet Judd’s fascination with stars goes beyond a simple
demonstration of his limitations and instead establishes his acceptance of them. Having
reached a stage where he can acknowledge the natural world and his place in it, Judd is
free to pursue the reaffirming realities that lie beyond it. He is not, therefore, star
gazing in the romantic definition of that phrase, nor is he searching the heavens for proof
of the existence of God. He is, instead, approaching this interest out of the need to
ascertain his place in things. In a sense, Judd is a budding astronomer, whose desire to
be certain lies at the heart of his efforts to know the stars. This illustrates Judd’s
practical disposition and places him on a comparative level to Palfreyman. Judd has
none of Palfreyman’s reluctance to confront the void of space. He is firmly anchored to
the earth and he accepts its place in the plan of things and so can look beyond the world
out of nothing more than interest. He, therefore, shares nothing of Palfreyman's limited and somewhat romantic belief that "to understand the stars would spoil their appearance" (p.137). Voss, however, appreciates little of this, responding only to Judd's acknowledgement of his personal limitations. Voss is disgusted by this admission because he is not inclined to be so modest.

Despite Judd's self-effacing nature, Voss believes him capable of mutiny. He may be critical of Judd's humility but he knows his worth. Consequently, when at Christmas Judd suggests they halt the expedition in order to celebrate the event, Voss agrees despite his reservations. Wary of possible "snares" (p.196) that may result from this new feeling of union among the men, yet seeing "reflected in [Judd's] face, a place of large leaves and consoling water" (p.197), Voss does not attempt to interfere in the subsequent events, even though Judd quickly takes command of the situation. It is as though Voss can foresee the future and accepts it as inevitable.

Perhaps, Voss can also see Judd's will to live, which is in perfect counterbalance to his own negation of physical survival. On two occasions, Voss witnesses Judd's capabilities in relation to his needs to live and both occasions involve the slaughter of a sheep for food. Judd is not reluctant to expose himself to the necessary grimness of such a task, allowing himself to be "painted liberally with ... blood" (p.198), which is, of course, the essence of life itself. And Judd's ability to provide meat for his fellows is the same ability of the hunter to provide life for his dependants. Accordingly, when Judd butchers a sheep at Christmas he becomes "the centre" (p.198) of a circle, that Voss observes as being "enviable" (p.198). From this circle Voss is somehow excluded because Judd's circle is the ring of physical life.

As a convict, Judd had experienced the tortures of the flesh, which he endured with the combined strength of his body and his will to survive. He fears nothing of the dark side of life because he has experienced it already. Indeed life itself, for Judd, is a thing to be survived: "I will not die. Though I may not know enough to read" (p.247). In this, he is the perfect counterbalance both to Frank Le Mesurier, who is trapped by intellectual pursuits, and Voss, who is more concerned with proving and ensuring his own spiritual permanence.

Judd is in more senses in harmony with the natural world and he can accept the necessary conditions that are imposed upon man by the need to survive. Yet he is not indifferent to the fate of other creatures and indeed his respect for his own physical life is commensurate with his respect for the lives of natural things. He succeeds in keeping the cattle that accompany them alive by impressing "in their fixed eyes" (p.242) the reflection of himself and further contributes to the continuing survival of the horses by changing "horse frequently, to rest the back of the one he [has] been riding" (p.243). He
knows of course that the cattle are there only to be slaughtered for human consumption, just as the horses are there to facilitate the speed and comfort of the human explorers, of which he is one, but his deference to the lives of beasts goes deeper, in its understanding, than even these pragmatic considerations would allow. Judd has "life [within] his sleep" (p.244) and thus it is life itself he honours. This is exemplified by his interest in the things he sees around him:

Judd remained, besides, intensely interested in natural forms. For instance, he would pick at the black fruit of trees to release the seed; with the rough skin of his hands, he would rub a hot, white bone, whether of man or animal, as if to re-create its flesh ... (p.243).

Judd's love of life is the reason why he is so concerned by the loss of the compass, because it is the only instrument, in a territory without maps, that can partially guarantee a man's survival. But the compass also serves another purpose, as has previously been observed: it is an indicator of "direction". Judd's direction, however, is not the same as that of Voss, if Voss can be said to have "direction", for Judd is concerned with far more practical pursuits. It is this that causes Voss to feel his threat, and it is this that leads to Judd's refusal to continue the expedition, once it becomes plain to him that Voss intends to go on to the death. For Judd:

... his own fat paddocks, not the deserts of mysticism, nor the transfiguration of Christ, are the fate of common man, he was yearning for the big breasts of his wife, that would smell of fresh-baked bread even after she had taken off her shift (p.345).

Judd's mutiny is therefore that of a simple human soul who wants to live because he has a wife and sons and some small life with which he is content. In this, he is perhaps no hero but he is no coward either, he is just a man and thus has certain virtues that Voss has yet to learn and the chief among them is humility. And it is perhaps humility that saves him in the end because his fate, on leaving Voss, is to be taken into nature by natural man. That Judd lives on, twenty years and more after Voss had died, in the company of Aborigines suggests a great deal about the man. He shares with the Aborigines the desire to live and it is this shared desire that makes it possible for him to live so long in their company. There are few barriers between people once mutual survival becomes paramount. Judd's continuing life reveals the extent of the lessons that his previous period of incarceration has given him: he knows his world, he knows the land, he knows the cost of life. He is Stan Parker drawn another way, he learns Stan's lessons in his youth, that he might better live, where Stan only learns them in his age that he might better die.

If humility is an attribute of Judd it is absent in Voss, whose intention, in mounting his expedition, is to exercise his will (p.153) both against nature and against the Divine Power. Voss is a man who believes that the natural world should be wrought
by the will of man and that he himself is a god. In this, he is an individual marred by arrogance, an arrogance that is emphasized by a reluctance to love and a belief in his own self-sufficiency:

As for Voss, he had gone on to grapple with the future, in which undertaking he did not expect much of love, for all that is soft and yielding is easily hurt. He suspected it, but the mineral forms were an everlasting source of wonder; feldspar, for instance, was admirable, and his own name a crystal in his mouth. If he were to leave that name on the land, irrevocably, his material body swallowed by what it had named, it would be rather on some desert place, a perfect abstraction, that would rouse no feeling of tenderness in posterity. He had no more need for sentimental admiration than he had for love. He was complete (p.41).

Voss equates himself with the earth's mineral wealth and therefore denies his organic nature, with its associate emotions, and looks to the future in the certain belief of his own immorality; stones cannot die.

Like Voss, Laura Trevelyan is a person of considerable pride. Her pride manifests itself by a faith in her own intelligence, which prohibits a belief in God "in whose benevolence and power she had received most earnest instruction from a succession of governesses and her good aunt" (p.9). Despite her rejection of the suffocating "fuzz of faith" (p.9), Laura nonetheless retains some potential to look beyond the appearances of natural things as if for a certain truth, for example, "she ... believe[d] ... most palpably, in wood, with the reflections in it, and in clear daylight, and in water" (p.9). Laura's desire "to solve and know" is also a manifestation of her potential to learn from life, though it is in a self-contained, self-orientated manner that she seeks to do so. In this, she is not dissimilar to Patrick White himself, who ceased to believe in God in his late teens and who, "in ... early manhood ... was too egotistical ... to consider spiritual matters" (FG, p.143).

In this novel, landscape, "spiritual matters" and that human arrogance which seeks to challenge or deny the importance of both, are inextricably linked. In this sense, Voss assumes a metaphysical dimension, with the landscape featuring both as a place within and without. In support of this, Peter Beatson remarks: "If we open our minds fairly to the full impact of Voss we must admit that it is intensely, quintessentially a spiritual work", to which he adds:

The meaning with which White is concerned is the spiritual and ethical meaning of the inner life. We cannot approach his imagery externally; a study of the iconographic sources of his symbols, or an excessive insistence on the allegorical structure of the books, will obscure, rather than elucidate, his

message.\(^9\)

It is, therefore, important to discuss the beliefs of the main characters, Voss and Laura, and their individual failings, because here these psychological and spiritual matters cannot be overlooked.

Just as Laura has rejected God, Voss also rejects the notion that he should be deferential to a superior Being, but he is not indeed an atheist; he believes in the Divine Power, as his statement with regard to atheism attests. He further believes that the human spirit is imbued with the spirit of God. Yet though this is in some ways in keeping with the creeds of certain Eastern religions, Buddhism being chief among them, Voss does not approach this belief with the gentleness and modesty that is often an attribute of true subscribers to this faith. Instead, he interprets this view of himself as one containing God, in a manner that suggests that he is both superior to all others and destined for supremacy. He is, however, destined for the lesson of humility.

From the beginning Laura perceives that she and Voss share a common characteristic: "Arrogance is surely the quality that caused us to recognize each other" (p.185), she observes. In addition, because of their own ability to be self-sufficient Voss and Laura are linked in isolation from other people. The process of humiliation that Voss and Laura must experience, if they are to survive and develop as spiritual beings, is a process that is gradual and inexorable and one that will bind them to each other for the rest of their lives. This is perceived by Laura very early, when she comes to believe that "[it is] necessary ... to humiliate herself in some way for the German's arrogance" (pp.73-74). When she further adds "I will learn to pray for you" (p.90) she begins the process of humblefication that will lead to the development of spirituality.

For Voss, whose god "is above humility" (p.90), Laura's offer of prayers is a thing he cannot condone. He wishes to impress himself upon the unknown continent without the aid of anything or anyone, such is the extent of his arrogance. Yet if humility is something Voss is intent upon avoiding he is nonetheless open to experience it. Indeed this process begins as early as Rhine Towers:

Just at evening, Voss had gone down to the river of ghostly trout. He was purged since yesterday, possessed even of some of the humility which Palfreyman extolled as a virtue. Standing by the brown waters of the friendly river as it purred and swirled over the stones, and looking back to where the house was fastened, so it appeared, to the bank, with much hopefulness and trust by human hands, the man was drawn nostalgically towards that strength of innocence which normally he would have condemned as ignorance, or suspected as a cloak to cover guile (p.152).

Voss is purged by the "brown water" and made to feel humble by the sight of a human

---

habitation whose existence is rendered precarious by the vastness of its natural surroundings. In such a world man cannot loom large.

It is at this point that Voss writes his first letter to Laura and, while he again requests that she does not pray for him, he is sufficiently humbled to entreat her to "join [him] in thought, and exercise of will, daily, hourly, until [he] may return to [her], the victor" (p.153), which amounts to the same thing. Thus he relinquishes his pride to a small degree; from that stance that sought no assistance he now looks to another to aid him with her positive thoughts. This is only the first of many experiences that Voss must have before his vanity is completely eroded. There is no doubt, however, that by admitting Laura into his consciousness Voss has partially lost his self-sufficiency and rendered himself both vulnerable to feelings of loneliness and accessible to the lessons he must learn. This can be seen by his reaction to the landscape:

Isolation made that rather humble light both moving and desirable. So the days began to explain. Grasses were melting and murmuring. A child laid its cheek against him. The sun, magnificently imperious, was yet a simple circle that allowed him to enter, with the result that he was both blinded and illuminated (p.142).

Laura's process of developing humility is one that takes less time. It begins when she offers to pray for Voss, as has already been observed, but it does not end there for like him she must continually learn. She is, however, more open to admit those frailties of her personality that stand between herself and a spirit of modesty. In her first letter to Voss she confesses, for example, that she is "a person quite pitiably weak in character" (p.185). Yet she nonetheless derives a kind of contentment from this acknowledgement, which too is a sort of vanity.

Her process of humbling is further exemplified by her ambivalent feelings towards Voss, whom she sees both as a "destroyer" and as a "saviour" (p.185). In this, she acknowledges that some part of her must be sacrificed to accommodate her spiritual bond with Voss and also that it is only by this bond that she and he can hope to be saved, as is illustrated by her suggestion that they "pray together for salvation" (p.186). Laura, of course, is saved from much of Voss's arrogance by being a woman. Limited by this fact in her aspirations, she cannot impress herself upon the desert in any actual sense, she can only impress herself upon Voss. Voss, she says, is her desert and in this she is stereotypically true to her sex, which is further emphasized by the contentment she derives from the admission of weakness. Despite the social limitations imposed upon her as a woman, however, having "been kept very carefully [and] put away like some object" (p.74), Laura does not lack the personal resources to meet emotional challenges, being described as one of the "few stubborn ones [who] will blunder on, painfully, out of the luxuriant world of their pretensions into the desert of mortification and reward" (p.74).
Laura's strength of will is the essence of her inner resources but there are many indications that suggest that nature also provides her with a certain degree of sustenance. Though confined by the demands that society makes upon her as a woman, so that, unlike Voss, she is not free to explore the country, she nonetheless periodically explores the "country" of her home: "Most days she walked in the garden, amongst the camellia bushes ..." (p.54), as though in search of some respite from the tediums of confined living. Unlike her cousin Belle, whom "[t]he boisterous wind" (p.59) can fling about, Laura is more subdued in her responses to nature, seeing it both as a place of refuge from difficult social situations, hence her walks in the garden on the night of Bonner's party, and as a subtly threatening place, where darkness, "close and sultry as savage flesh, distant and dilating as stars, would prevail by natural law" (p.85). Yet for Laura, the natural world can also prove enervating and liberating:

The gay day of wind and sharp sunlight had pierced the surface of her sombre green. It had begun to glow. She was for ever flickering, and escaping from a cage of black twigs, but unconscious of any transformation that might have taken place. This ignorance of her riches gave to her face a tenderness that it did not normally possess. Many tender waves did, besides, leap round the rocky promontory along which they were stumbling. There was not distinctly the sound of sea. As they trod out from the trees and were blinded, Laura Trevelyan was smiling (p.59).

However, Laura is often more preoccupied with matters pertaining to her inner life than with her physical response to nature.

One of the most significant spiritual milestones in Laura's "desert of mortification" is "passed" at Rose Portion's funeral when she recognizes that "terrestrial safety is not assured, and that solid earth does eventually swirl beneath the feet" (p.235). From this time she begins to perceive that there is something which transcends the material existence and to accept that there is a spiritual dimension to life that survives after physical death:

As I stood there (I hesitate to write you all this, except that it is the truth), as I stood, the material part of myself became quite superfluous, while my understanding seemed to enter into wind, earth, the ocean beyond, even the soul of our poor, dead maid. I was nowhere and everywhere at once. I was destroyed, yet living more intensely than actual sunlight, so that I no longer feared the face of Death as I had found it on the pillow (p.239).

This episode is akin to the experience of Stan Parker in TM when, as the result of a flood, he realizes that even the earth cannot contain the dead forever. Faced by the knowledge that solidarity is not assurance, Stan accepts the existence of some power that is beyond his control. He does not, however, pursue his understanding of this, whereas Laura does. Laura's experience at Rose Portion's funeral is also very like Theodora's, in AS, when Theodora kills the hawk and becomes "as negative as air" (AS, p.74). So is physical significance lessened by some meeting with Death.
This insight into human spirituality enables Laura to communicate with Voss even after their written correspondence ceases. Convinced that the spirit can exist "everywhere", transcending her actual, physical location where "tender rooms [are] like transparent eggs, from which the protective shell [has] been removed" (p.329), Laura renounces self-pity and begins to pray for Voss, whose destiny is beyond their control. Thus the physical separation of the two paradoxically connects them, and they converse with one another telepathically, "expressing inexplicable ideas":

So we are riding together across the plains, we sit together in this black night, I reach over and touch your cheek (not for the first time). You see that separation has brought us far, far closer (p.216).

The journey that takes Voss into the centre of an unknown and hostile continent is also a journey that takes Laura Trevelyan into the heart of her own continent. Both search, whether knowingly or not, for an immortality that can only be attained through sacrifice. The price of truth is high and since both are destined to pay it theirs is indeed a "true marriage" (p.217).

Laura, however, is all too aware that in Christian terms Voss is guilty of the sin of pride and, believing that "[w]e cannot share one throne" (p.239), she also acknowledges the extent of that sin. Accordingly, she fears for Voss, in his arrogance, and though reflecting that men, by virtue of their sex, are "entitled ... to a greater share of pride" (p.239), she nonetheless desires to see Voss humbled. Yet she too must be humbled and this is achieved by no less than the sacrifice of her health. So intense is her psychological and emotional involvement with Voss that she comes to experience his adventures and adversities vicariously, to the degree that she eventually falls ill, with the result that, through medical intervention, she loses blood and most of her hair. Nature is therefore shown to be stronger than Laura’s personal resources. Unlike Voss, however, Laura must not die for she is intended for something else: to be the symbol whereby the lessons of humility are made manifest. Laura must "come to God" before her health and spiritual development are assured and her final acknowledgement of the Divine Power, whose aid she seeks not for herself but for Voss, is her final act of submission. Subsequently, through prayer and suffering, Laura is reborn to the attainment of a strong spiritual faith.

Voss’s final humiliation occurs only towards the end of his life when, having exercised his will to the degree whereby he places himself in a situation he cannot get out of, he finally admits, to himself and others, that all he can now do is yield his fate to God. Faced with the reality of his intrinsically human limitations, Voss at last cedes his spirit to its maker, he is not adequate to the task of full control.

The relationship between Voss and Laura is fundamental to their mutual process
of humiliation. Voss, for example, is less self-contained once he accepts his need of Laura's love. This is emphasized when, after receiving her letter, he has a turbulent night of dreams, the night of "consummation" (p.188) after which he wakes to find himself wanting "to be told, in that voice, what to do next" (p.188). Already therefore, though Voss has not permitted his feelings for Laura in any way to interfere with his plans, he has nonetheless capitulated in some part of himself to the woman. He may hesitate to openly proclaim his dependence on anyone; he may defer that moment when he must depend on God; but in his heart he knows he depends on Laura virtually from the start of his travels, and accordingly: "He lay thinking of the wife from whose hands he would accept salvation, if he were intended to renounce the crown of fire for the ring of gentle gold" (p.213).

Laura's pride, which emanates from her confident intellect, is equally weakened by her love for Voss, and as these two suffer independently, so their complementary features are emphasized to the degree whereby they become indivisible. This fusion is expressed with recourse to the landscape as it appears to Voss after the rain storm. Crossing the flooded river, sacrificing animals, food and instruments, Voss acknowledges that water and the light, two irreconcilable elements, become one:

Now, liquid light was allowed to pour from great receptacles. The infinitely pure, white light might have remained the masterpiece of creation, if fire had not suddenly broken out. For the sun was rising, in spite of immersion. It was challenging water, and the light of dawn, which is water of another kind. In the struggle that followed the hissing and dowsing, the sun was spinning, swimming, sinking, drowned, its livid face, a globe of water, for the rain had been brought down again, and there was, it appeared, but a single element (p.282).

These elements are here employed as representations of unity within the natural world. This harmony reflects both the spiritual unity of Voss and Laura and Voss's state of mind; he begins to resolve the dichotomy of life and to approach humility. Similarly Stan Parker in TM is humbled by a storm, but his reaction is rather more personal and passive, for to him the world within the storm is a thing of wonder and he can only respond to it with prayer. Praying, as yet, is the last thing Voss is willing to do, because for the greater part of his expedition he prefers to trust in himself. His self-confidence is such that even when he is ill and attended by Judd, who retains his physical strength, Voss is not humiliated by his own debility (p.212). Indeed he is moved to reflect that he has "felt more exposed on some less physical occasions", although he "despis[e] all sickness" (p.212) almost as much as he despises Judd for his compassion. Therefore, the lessons whereby Voss is intended to be humbled are, in the main, forgotten almost as soon as they are learned, such is the degree of his arrogance. Even the Christ-like Palfreyman fails to moderate Voss's inflated self-image. When
faced by Palfreyman's sacrifice the German feels moved only to observe, with some
disgust, that: "Pious peasants wore their knees out worshipping similar effigies ..."
(p.343).

Gradually, as the expedition proceeds, however, Voss's arrogance begins to
diminish, and this diminishment is directly proportionate to the hardships he must
endure. In the desert, where

[t]he days were possessed of a similarity, of sickness, and rain, and foraging for
firewood, as they dripped slowly, or blew in gusts of passionate vengeance, or
stood quite still for intervals of several hours, in which the only sound was that
of passive moisture (p.284),

most of his companions lose control over themselves, beginning to hate one another, and
abuse the animals. Voss, on the other hand, seems to acquire greater respect for his
fellow human beings as is demonstrated by his being seized by a "feeling of
homecoming" when he returns to the cave. This sense of belonging greatly affects Voss,
who interprets it as an indication "of great frailty, both physical and moral" (p.285).
Significantly, he turns to nature at this moment of weakness, "preferring to keep
company with the gusts of rain [rather] than to expose his weakness to human
eyes" (p.285).

Through testing his will power, Voss comes to perceive within himself those
human frailties which are common to all. Shocked by this discovery, he feels secretly
envious of Laura and Palfreyman, who are selfless in their faith in God, but nonetheless
he remains adamant that he will not be tempted into turning back. Consequently, he
must confront an even greater humiliation and this occurs when Harry Robarts, Le
Mesurier and himself are taken by Aborigines. Harry asks Voss, "Lord, will you not
save us?" and Voss, faced with his own inability to further shape his destiny, is impelled
to respond, "I am no longer your Lord, Harry" (p.366), whereupon he proclaims to Le
Mesurier that he yields himself to God. Clearly he has now finally given up challenging
life with the strength of his will. He has pursued and investigated all possibilities and
now must recognize that there are things and circumstances that are beyond his control.
Therefore, he says: "I do not withdraw .... I am withdrawn" (p.380) and by so saying
acknowledges that his life is "bound by the threads of ... fate" (p.389).

The final stage in Voss's subjugation is shared with Harry Robarts. Harry is a
simple character, living solely to keep a "belly full" (p.40), he does not question the
circumstances of his life, nor the meaning of life itself. He is, in fact, a natural in the
most personal sense of the word, asking no questions of life, but simply living. He is
similar, in this, to Bub Quigley (TM), who is ageless, simple and ignorant but is at one
with the natural surroundings. Harry is also like Chuffy Chambers (HV) who is treated
as a "loopy" (HV, p.25) but is quite talented in playing the accordion. All these
somewhat archetypal innocents or fool figures live in what might be thought to be a "desirable state of mind", one of "nothing more than air or water" (AS, p.134), a state which Theodora Goodman, with her limited sense of self, perpetually seeks. Such characters are intended to convey the reality or truth of life which is otherwise a thing that can only be experienced subliminally through intuition. In Voss, it is Harry Robarts who sees the real spirit of Palfreyman fly out of his wounds in the shape of a white bird, and it is Harry who can also make the leap, from white to black vision, and comprehend the significance of Jackie's understanding of the comet. Beautiful to the last, in his special way of seeing, Harry dies happy and his death leads Voss to the final act of submission where he can proclaim that "he love[s] this boy, and with him all men, even those he hate[s], which is the most difficult act of love to accomplish, because of one's own fault" (p.382).

By this last admission, Voss has now liberated his spirit from the confining influence of his intellectual arrogance and, in a sense, he has freed himself from the shrunken frame as well. This is suggested by the dream he has on the night preceding his death. Caught up in this "cool wind of dreaming" (p.392), Voss begins to feel regenerated and in a vivid sequence of events seems to find himself riding into the "prevailing pearliness" (p.393) of morning, with Laura by his side:

As they rode, the valleys became startling in their sonorous reds, their crenellations broken by tenuous Rhenish turrets of great subtlety and beauty. Once, upon the banks of a transparent river, the waters of which were not needed to quench thirst, so persuasive was the air which flowed into and over their bodies, they dismounted to pick the lilies that were growing there. They were the prayers, she said, which she had let fall during the outward journey to his coronation, and which, on the cancellation of that ceremony, had sprung up as food to tide them over the long journey back in search of human status. She advised him to sample these nourishing blooms. So they stood there munching awhile. The lilies tasted floury, but wholesome. Moreover, he suspected that the juices present in the stalks would enable them to be rendered down easily into a gelatinous, sustaining soup. But of greater importance were his own words of love that he was able at last to put into her mouth. So great was her faith, she received these white wafers without surprise (p.393).

This experience encapsulates his past life in Germany; the rigours of thirst and hunger he has recently endured; his psychological relationship with Laura; the lesson of his life, which stems from his arrogance, and lastly his love for Laura. It is as though Voss died at this point, or at least as if his soul departed from his flesh.

On the morning of his "execution", though physically he is responsive to the degree where he can admit that, "[h]e [is] ready ... to expiate his innocence" (p.394), Voss's decapitation is portrayed as a mere formality. Indeed, after Jackie has flung Voss's head "at the feet of the elders", it is described as a thing having little connection with Voss himself, a thing "like any melon" (p.394). Yet this act is the means by which
Voss impresses himself on the landscape for "his blood ran out upon the dry earth, which drank it up immediately" (p.394).

Voss is brought to this end by his own efforts. At the outset he is convinced of man’s supremacy in the natural world, viewing nature as a thing to be sublimated before the power of human will. In addition, rejecting the virtues of humility, compassion and faith in God, as being responses and characteristics of the weak and feeble-minded, he has set himself above his own humanity and thus thrown a gauntlet at the feet of fate. Arrogantly certain of his own divinity, he has thrust the image of God-made-man back into the face of the Almighty. He is Adam writ large and Adam has his fall. As such his death at the hands of the Aborigines, however contrived this death might be, is little else but the death of manipulative Man in the grip of nature itself, the Aborigines, here, being but symbolic manifestations of the earth as it strikes back.

Had he ever lived in reality the life of this arrogant and selfish man would have given little of benefit to anyone, but his death is significant. It is significant because it sets the seal on his immortality, for it is sufficiently mysterious to arouse public interest and curiosity: mystery being a part of the stuff of which history and myth are made. It is also significant because a nation needs its heroes or, in more immediate terms, because Laura Trevelyan needs a hero. Her life is given a precise meaning by virtue, both of her vicarious sharing of Voss’s adventures and ultimate sacrifice and of her being known by others, to have once associated with him. She thus moves into the realm of spiritual inviolability, becoming "[a] woman, of the mysterious" (p.438), who is "recognized ... on account of her connexions and the material glories of the past" (p.437).

Voss, for his part, would perhaps have been destined to be remembered only as "that mad German" (p.436) but for public confusion about his death which follows Judd’s, the re-emergence from the desert, coupled with Laura Trevelyan’s somewhat enigmatic, ethereal dignity which, if it does not smack of sainthood, at least has an aura of martyrdom about it. Voss’s death is therefore a triumph both for the nation and for Laura, but it is a personal triumph too, due to the hardships that precede it. By shedding his physicality, through deprivation, he also sheds that fabric of his arrogance and imagined divinity and it is this process that "saves his soul". Hence Laura’s observation: "When man is truly humbled, when he has learnt that he is not God, then he is nearest to becoming so" (p.387), and perhaps she is right.

If Laura is right, then it must be stated that Voss is also right. Venturing to the interior determined to prove his divinity, he dies humbled and as spiritually whole as it is possible to be and in this way proves, not that he is God, in any accepted sense of the word, but that he is equal to all. One whose death proves his immortality and thus his "divinity", one whose life proves his humanity, he leaves the stage as "divinely human"
to rank among the gods. In this way, the words of Laura Trevelyan are demonstrated with all their awesome ambiguous implications: "Man is God decapitated. That is why you are bleeding" (p.364).

Voss's death may be seen as the only penalty that can be exacted by the natural world and by God for that presumption that compels him to believe he is the master of them both. Yet his death is distinguished from a mere act of supernatural retribution by the fact of the fame which proceeds from it. His individual failures are rendered insignificant by the triumph of immortality, and that this seems assured may indicate that his sins have in some way been absolved. Consequently, he achieves his principal ambition, to "become the centre" (p.169) of the Australian landscape, because his memory is destined to be preserved by both its white and black inhabitants.

The landscape is variously used in this novel. At the outset it is seen by Voss as a place of great "subtlety" (p.11), a passive place which he feels impelled to penetrate in order to establish the presence of man. Conversely, he gains most of his inspiration and strength from those parts of the country that are "untamed". He feels at odds with himself when he is surrounded by the trappings of "civilization", which are of course little else but manifestations of man's presence. Essentially, therefore, Voss is ambivalent in his attitudes towards the natural world and man's place in it. He seeks to conquer the landscape, that others may settle it, but at the same time looks to the "unconquered" to inspire him:

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 (p.18).

There is ambiguity even here, however, for White suggests that whilst Voss is clearly influenced by the natural world, it is also influenced by him, in very immediate ways:

Then he threw up a little pebble, which had been changing colour in his hand, turning from pale lavender to purple, and caught it before it reached the sun (p.62).

In addition, there are occasions in this novel when images of nature appear to be very threatening indeed, particularly in relation to Voss: "The moonlight returned Voss to the room. As he was moved back, his bones were creaking, and his skin had erupted in a greenish verdigris" (p.177). On this occasion, the light of the moon has the malevolent power to anchor Voss in a body that bears all the hallmarks of putrefaction and on another occasion, witnessed by the Bonners, the sun also assumes a malevolent guise: "... and the German, walking into the sunset, was burnt up" (p.73). These images of "sun" and "moon" suggest two things: the first is that nature poses a threat to man; the second is more subtle and involves the notion of distance. When placed in
the nineteenth century Australian context it is distance that attracts man but also impedes his progress, but it is nature, particularly the nature of the Dead Centre, which effectively repels and defeats him. Voss is both attracted by and fearful of the unknown distant void of Central Australia, and it is perhaps in response to fear that he seeks to conquer the forbidding landscape. He also, of course, subscribes to the particular view that man has some supremacy in the world and therefore feels it essential to demonstrate this. His journey is an obvious attempt to establish mankind as the rightful ruler of the natural world and in such a scenario it is inevitable that it should become a spiritual odyssey too and that at best he should only half succeed. In the physical contest, between man and nature, only nature can win.

Despite Voss’s intellectual beliefs in relation to the subordinate rôle that the natural world should play, in the drama between man and the earth, he is not in spiritual conflict with the landscape. Indeed, throughout this novel, White contrives to portray Voss as a being who is almost part of nature, or at least on intimate terms with it, often to the detriment of his associations with civilized life:

Unseeing people walked the sandy earth, eating bread, or sat at meat in their houses of frail stone foundations, while the lean man, beneath his twisted tree, became familiar with each blade of withered grass at which he stared, even the joints in the body of the ant (p.27).

In addition, Voss is somehow liberated by natural elements, hence ”[g]ritty winds tended to free him”, for example. His feelings of freedom are also increased as he rides towards his great venture:

... the track exhilarated Voss by day. He no longer rode consciously, but was carried onward by sensation. He was touching the bark of those trees that were closest to him .... He was singing, too, on his own language, some shining song, of sunlight and of waterfalls” (p.143).

This image of nature as a source of liberation is also extended to include the notion of sanctuary. Thus, when confronted by the coarse and vulgar Brendan Boyle, Voss ”was drawn closer to the landscape, the seldom motionless sea of grass, the twisted trees in grey and black, the sky ever increasing in its rage of blue ...” (p.169). Regardless of the benefits Voss receives from the natural world he, nonetheless, desires to ”become the centre” (p.169) of the landscape and this is the cause of his death.

Patrick White seems to be saying here that one cannot hope to conquer nature and, this being so, the only sensible recourse is to learn to live with it. Something of this can be seen in Laura Trevelyan’s progressive change in attitude and response towards the landscape. Initially alienated from Australia, Laura eventually learns to refer to it as ”our country” (p.446), but this process of reconciliation is long and arduous. She is not unresponsive to certain aspects of the natural world, though at first she allows herself to be distanced from it, by the trappings of her domesticated environment. She
is, we are told, "held back, dreaming, in her moss-green jacket" (p.71). Her capacity for "dreaming", however, is an indication of her potential, as are those episodes in which she turns to natural things in order to gain some sense of peace. After Voss leaves in the Osprey, for example, she and Belle, unable to "resist the force of that afternoon" (p.122), find solace "in the shaggy arms of the honest trees [and] in the bosom of the all-possessing wind" (pp.122-123). That the nature she seeks out, at first, is the domesticated variety which might be found in any garden, only serves to illustrate the social limitations imposed upon her.

Laura's attitudes to things "naturally Australian" begin to alter almost from the moment she meets Voss and she becomes progressively accepting of them the further Voss progresses in his doomed attempt to conquer the continent. From the stance of one who prefers camellias to "the scurfy native paperbarks" (p.54) Laura shifts to the position of one who seeks intimate contact with these same trees:

Sometimes Laura Trevelyan would tear the bark in scrolls from the native trees, and attempt to unroll them before they broke, or she would tear the leaves, and crush them, and smell them, in her hands smelling of ants (pp.226-227).

As her sufferings increase she begins to be more and more drawn to the landscape that, to all intents and purposes, has "devoured" her love-object, Voss, and indeed the more distanced Voss is from her the easier it becomes for her to feel love for the country. Thus in her final undelivered letter to Voss she writes: "I could now lay my head on the ugliest rock in the land and feel at rest" (p.239). And it is after she is reconciled to the death of Voss that Laura is also wholly reconciled to Australia, to the degree that she can feel "perfectly at home in the environment to which she [is] no longer expected to belong" (p.410).

In Voss Patrick White presents the reader with two characters who embody the dichotomous perceptions of the alienated European in Australia, and these perceptions he duly proceeds to demolish. Laura Trevelyan initially rejects the Australian landscape, clinging to the emblems and fragments of civilized British life, only to be brought to the point of unconscious acceptance by a lengthy process of suffering. Voss seeks to subdue the continent by imposing his European will upon it, only to die in defeat. That he achieves immortality in the process is in this context irrelevant, the point being that nothing practical results from his venture to the interior. He has blazed a trail to a desert but only left the stain of his blood upon it, which in practical terms again, is a limited success, to say the least. On a less concrete level, Voss contains at least one major lesson, and when one views this novel as the culmination of its author's struggle to come to terms with his native land, then this message is clear enough: we are accepted wholly when we ourselves can accept and it is through acceptance that reconciliation is made possible.
It is this lesson of acceptance and reconciliation that most clearly illustrates White’s own perceptions with regard to himself and his place in things. They are the perceptions of one who knows at last his god, his country and his place as an author within it.

By writing a book about a man who would be God and one who is destined to leave his mark in the hot heart of the continent, White is demonstrating that he has reached a point of synthesis, both spiritually and literally. This spiritual accomplishment is illustrated by the acknowledgment, through Voss, that men must in the end yield themselves to God for they are not entirely gods within themselves. This is best seen in the revenge that God’s agent, Nature, extracts from Voss. White’s literal accomplishment is demonstrated much more subtly. He seems to be vicariously dashing into the interior to leave his own kind of mark, through the writing of a book whose main character is at least partially dedicated to this end. White himself has never seen the “red heart”10 and indeed is apparently not inclined to do so, yet it is to that heart that he penetrates in order to make two personal statements and they are the statements of a man who truly accepts his country. The first can perhaps only be made symbolically, by the sacrifice of the life blood of a fictional European in the centre of the continent: I am here and here I mean to stay. The second statement is far more subtle but no less significant: we all, of European descent, are here only under sufferance and we survive here at the expense of some part of ourselves and, as Judith Wright has observed: "... in surviving we ... [live] on Australia’s terms rather than our own."11

10. Please note Sidney Nolan’s comment in “Sir Sidney Nolan: A successful artist would have no trouble being a successful member of the Mafia,” Good Weekend, reported by Duncan Fallowell, 12 May, 1985, p.6.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that Patrick White's use of landscape reflects his personal struggle to come to terms with Australia. In this context his novels represent a private odyssey towards the author's acceptance of and reconciliation with the wholly Australian dimension of his own personality. In the course of achieving this end, White has created a number of characters, each of whom reflects aspects of alienation or uncertainty, and he places these in situations where they are brought into conflict with the landscape.

In *HV* the characters are wholly alienated from the natural world around them and from the circumstances of their own lives. They dream of escape but in the main they lack the will for positive action. Only Oliver Halliday can finally break away but there is little sense of triumph in this act since his departure from Happy Valley is a sign of resignation and defeat. Running away solves nothing in the end, for the landscape will endure. In *LD* the natural landscape is almost entirely subdued by the urbanity of the characters and the cities in which they live. Here the characters pursue the meaning of their lives in isolation from each other and in disharmony with the natural world. In such a setting all things "natural" are either only subliminally perceived as objects from which some spiritual sustenance may be obtained, or used as mirrors and measures of an individual's frustration or inner torment. It is in the urban landscape that White looks for inspiration, and in the end he has produced only a monument to defeat. *LD* is the work of a man at war with himself, who is as far from being reconciled to Australia as it is possible to be. Having effectively failed to come to terms with the Australian landscape that continually haunted him at this time in his life, it is perhaps predictable that at his third attempt White should choose both Australia and Europe as the principal settings for his next novel.

Theodora Goodman, in *AS*, combines an unconscious acceptance of her native environment with a desire to reject it in the interests of self-awareness. Accordingly, through a combination of circumstance and deliberate choice, Theodora leaves Australia on a voyage of self-discovery, a voyage that takes her to Europe and America and so parallels White's own travels. In Europe, Theodora is confronted by an alien landscape to which she can only respond by surrendering her sense of self. Constantly reminded of
images of the landscape around Meroë, Theodora is only reconciled to its loss at the expense of her reason. In this state Theodora returns to Meroë imaginatively though she is physically separated from it. Patrick White was en route to Australia when he wrote the final part of AS and this may account for this choice of ending. Having "marooned" Theodora in America he yet contrives to bring her home in mind, if not in body.

The setting of TM is not unlike the Australian settings of HV and AS and all three closely resemble White's recollection of the country in the Monaro, where he spent an early period of his life. Once again, in TM, the individual character's peace of mind and awareness of place is measured by his interaction with the landscape, though there is a greater sense of intimacy in this interaction. Theodora, of AS, is intimately involved with the natural world while she is living at Meroë, but this intimacy functions only on an unconscious level. In TM, however, this unconscious interplay between a character and the landscape evolves, through the process of direct commitment, to the final act of acceptance. Stan Parker is a farmer who, by definition, must interact with the land at a deeply personal level, but at first this interaction is a passive process on his part. It is as though he is nothing more than a piece of flotsam on the sea of life. Yet Stan is blessed with a searching nature, and is clearly in pursuit of a sense of place. However, unlike all the other characters in White's novels to this point, Stan does not consider escape as the means of achieving this end. Instead he turns to the landscape as a source of knowledge and spiritual growth and in the end comes not simply to discover his place but to discover his god as well.

It is TM that best expresses the final resolution of White's personal conflicts in relation to his place in things. There is something of a new confidence in the manner in which he treats the landscape and this is emphasized by the calmness with which Stan interacts with it. In addition, Stan's acceptance of his life and his discovery of God at the end directly reflect White's own experiences. It is certain that White came to an understanding of God at the time of writing this book and seems also to have finally accepted the Australian landscape. In a sense, TM represents the final act of an intense and personal drama involving the author's search for his place in things, and in addition it is a manifestation of his ultimate choice.

By giving Voss an historical setting, White has placed himself in a strong position to re-examine what may well be dimensions of his former alienated perceptions of Australia, in the light of his final decision. Once again, he has created a number of characters who are variously estranged from the Australian landscape and he has pitched them into battle against it, and he appears to have done so in the certainty of their defeat. It is through the personalities and tribulations of Voss and Laura that this process can best be seen. United at the outset by their mutually recognized arrogance,
these characters seem doomed to suffer: pride, after all, comes before a fall. Accordingly, they duly do suffer and the process is long and grim. Voss, confident in himself to an inordinate degree, seeks to impose his will upon nature and at the same time issues a special kind of challenge to God that can only result in death. In this respect, the Australian landscape faces the threat of violation and it is inevitable that it should come to strike back.

It is against this background of conflict between God and man, and nature and man that Laura Trevelyan's rôle is exacted. Bound to Voss by virtue of vanity and an almost hysterical devotion, she is brought to the brink of death only to be saved by her willingness to subdue herself to God and the need of selfless prayer. It is this process of subjugation that finally leads Laura to accept the Australian landscape, which she initially rejects, and it is through acceptance that Laura is able to be reconciled to Australia itself and to her place within it. Similarly, Voss must also be subdued if only in order to be reconciled to his own humanity. That in both cases these psychological and physical defeats encompass aspects of personal triumph is perhaps only to be expected; in the normal run of things triumph is only triumph when underwritten by defeat. Voss must die in order to be reconciled with God and thus to achieve immortality and Laura's arrogance must perish in order that she too can become reconciled to God and so achieve spiritual inviolability.

In this novel, Patrick White has successfully combined two of his principal preoccupations: that of the search for a sense of belonging and that of the search for God. In essence, he had found both during the writing of *TM*, but he clearly felt obliged to demonstrate it and this is best illustrated by the final solution in *Voss*. Both God and the landscape are employed variously to this end and the end is obvious enough: neither nature nor God can be conquered by the strength of the human will alone. This is the resolution of White's personal search for a sense of faith and belonging, a resolution that could only have been stated so clearly at the end of a novel whose purpose is to synthesize and review the more significant dimensions of that search. White seems to be saying, in *Voss*, that at last he has reached the point where he can accept God, accept Australia and accept his place in things. This acceptance is the key to his total reconciliation with the Australian landscape and henceforth it will be used not as the means of measuring his characters' conflicts but as the ground upon which these conflicts are to be fought.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Novels Discussed


Works Consulted


Beston, John B. "Dreams and Visions in *The Tree of Man*." *Australian Literary Studies*, 6 (1973), 152-166.

---------. "Voss's Proposal and Laura's Acceptance Letter: The Struggle for Dominance in *Voss*." *Quadrant*, 16 (July/August 1972), 24-30.


Brady, Veronica. "In My End is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of *Voss*." *Southerly*, 35 (1975), 16-32.


Fallowell, Duncan. "Sir Sidney Nolan: A successful artist would have no trouble being a successful member of the Mafia." *Good Weekend*. 12 May 1985, pp.6-10.


**Background Reading**


