

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Self-discovery: Process, Progress and Realisation
in Some Characters of Patrick White:
An Exegesis of the Last Four Novels

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of
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by

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CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: <u>THE VIVISECTOR</u>	89
CHAPTER TWO: <u>THE EYE OF THE STORM</u>	101
CHAPTER THREE: <u>A FRINGE OF LEAVES</u>	176
CHAPTER FOUR: <u>THE TWYBORN AFFAIR</u>	245
CONCLUSION	312
BIBLIOGRAPHY	322

Introduction

The process of self-discovery with which White's illuminates engage has been the subject of critical comment from the beginning of his career. Few would deny its importance in any consideration of his work. It is not then with a new approach that I am concerned but with an attempt to follow his seekers beyond the bounds of their moments of epiphany. Such moments are not intended to lend themselves to intellectual scrutiny. White has said of them, "You can't explain those kinds of things rationally".¹ Rather they represent a part of the cumulative growth in awareness which is at the heart of the mystical visions. Extensive though criticism on White has been it has tended to concentrate on these heightened areas of his work rather than on the processes whereby those heights are reached. I have chosen to use a method of exegesis here because it does allow for a fine probing of the closely wrought ways whereby his protagonists are brought to their moments of affirmation. Immediately below the level of event with which the surface of the novels is concerned lies a metaphoric element which is made up not only of the symbolic function so apparent in his work, and of such devices as tone and structure, but also of the particular and frequently ambiguous voice of the novelist himself. It is this voice, so abrasive and yet often so prone to misinterpretation that has led to much of the difficulty for commentators on Patrick White. It is most apparent at those central moments in the text when the heightened tone of the work alerts even the most insensitive to the potency of the occasion. What is much less clear is what is being said. This lack of clarity stimulates the tendency on the part of the critics to categorize White and to fit him within a pattern of their own choosing, but it is also because the

¹ "An Australian Enigma", Melbourne University Magazine, Spring (1962). p.71.

epiphanies emerge from the preceding text and are prepared for by a density of fictional detail that is often carried over from one novel to the next. The spiritual experience is a part of the pattern of ordinary living within the text, and it is this pattern, both constant and delicately shifting, which contains the most trustworthy clues to the message that the complete work presents. In concentrating on this mass of significant detail there is however another danger, that of seeming to over-simplify; particularly as the means whereby White suggests this internal message can often seem close to the narrative progress of the text. It is with this in mind that I have tried, while attempting to make my analysis as straightforward as possible, to provide by the use of extensive footnotes an on the page summary of alternative readings.

The processes whereby White's illuminates are brought to self-discovery involve a bringing to harmony of the divided-self. I have tended in this study to refer to this dichotomy as the instinct and the intellect, not from any persuasion that in so doing I am precisely defining it but because in a series of works which by their very nature defy labelling it seems to come closest to such a definition. Such a theme could be and frequently is variously called, the flesh and the spirit, the animus and the anima, the dark side and the light side;² not that these terms are one and the same but they are a part of a recognition of a central polarity which sometimes distorts and sometimes enriches White's work. In Flaws in the Glass he writes of his own ambivalent sexuality, "I did not question the darkness in my dichotomy though already I had

² Throughout this work I frequently refer to Peter Beatson's The Eye in the Mandala and the explanation that he gives for the way in White in which the two sides of man's nature must first descend before ascending towards spiritual completion. "Any attempt" he says "to avoid the descent to fly upwards before the conditions of the lower world have been understood and experienced, will end, as with Icarus, in disaster". This argument is fully expanded in pages 9-23 of this work. Peter Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala. Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God (London: Elek Books Ltd., 1976). p.11.

begun the inevitably painful search for the twin who might bring a softer light to bear on my bleakly illuminated darkness".³ Here as elsewhere, he denies the cerebral side of his own nature. "There is nothing cerebral about me; if I have anything to give it is through the senses and my intuition".⁴ Rightly he claims that his greatest gift stems from "the instinctual colour which illuminates the more often than not irrational behaviour of sensual man".⁵ Yet deeply though he admires the instinctive and the natural, there is a sense in which it is alien to his own deepest responses. He feels himself to be a player of roles "the cast of contradictory characters of which I am composed".⁶ Such an ability is inherent in the compassionate understanding he brings to portrayal, but it is by its nature a cerebral quality. Those who live close to the earth, whose acts are instinctive and inarticulate are without the art, and the need, implicit in the ability to adopt a multiplicity of roles. The act of creation involves this unthinking wisdom, the "unknown"⁷ he feels the interviewers fail to find, but it also needs, and gets, the rigour of intellectual control. Both sides come together in creating that recognition of the spiritual which takes place when both the intellectual and the instinctive self are in final harmony.

³ Patrick White, Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1981). p.35.

⁴ Flaws in the Glass. p.236.

⁵ Flaws in the Glass. p.38.

⁶ Flaws in the Glass. p.20.

⁷ "This unknown is the man the interviewers, the visiting professors, the thesis writers expect to find, and because I am unable to produce him I have given up receiving them. I don't want to pretend to be me, as the poet Philip Larkin has said of himself in similar situations." Flaws in the Glass. p.182.

The problem lies in the changing form which such a constant factor takes. It varies from work to work, almost from page to page and can only be explored by a close content analysis which attempts to respond to "the particulars of the text"⁸ and which refuses to pin a momentarily satisfying label on to works and ideas which are frequently contradictory. The processes of self-discovery are central in works which, widely varied though they may be in subject, have a unity and vision which stems from a centrality of ideas and characterisation. The instinct and the intellect and the journey towards a unification of the needs they arouse in the individual is at the heart of this concept and it can be seen in almost its clearest form in the first three of the novels I have chosen to study, The Vivisector, The Eye of the Storm and A Fringe of Leaves. I have said almost, because it is probably most sharply defined in The Solid Mandala, and that rather tiresome pair Arthur and Waldo Brown. Instinct and intellect personified they may be but each needs the other to complete the mandala, towards which ideal all White's protagonists are struggling. It is tempting to see Arthur as the ultimate burnt one, "the fool" who travels the straight road to completion, like his predecessor Bub Quigley, but is it so? Arthur is not without the needs of the intellect, witness his continual poring over the pages of The Brothers Karamazov, nor Waldo without an instinct that holds his brother by the hand. Writing in Flaws in the Glass White says "I see the Brown brothers as my two halves."⁹ Perhaps it is the sense that in this novel the processes of self-discovery have been laid too bare that has conditioned my decision to avoid it in my analysis. It is the subtle and devious ways in which White brings his

⁸ John Barnes writes if "White is to be appreciated and enjoyed it must be through a sensitive and intelligently critical response to the particulars of the text and, above all to the tone". Patrick White: A Critical Symposium, ed. R. Shepherd and K. Singh with an introduction by John Barnes (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978). p.4.

⁹ Flaws in the Glass. p.146.

characters to a moment of realisation that inspires the most rewarding exploration. In Eddie Twyborn both halves come together and are united in a sensitive re-appraisal of all that has come before, an appraisal which is overshadowed and at times distorted by a new and vital relationship between the protagonist and his maker. It is for this reason that I have chosen to finish this study by a consideration of the latter work. Finally, in reading the vast mass of material which White's work has engendered, much of it, particularly in the early years, sharply critical, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that any author who has been the occasion for such a mass of contradictory criticism may himself be suggesting depths where there are only shallows, or at least be projecting a message so contradictory as to be impenetrable. It is not my intention to attempt to assess Patrick White in relation to other writers of whatever stature, or to attempt any finally qualitative judgement, but it does seem necessary to suggest that such a response may be stimulated by a lack in the writer and that the possibility should not escape us, nor be overpowered because of the insistence of the formidable voice which speaks from the novels. It is not however my own position, irritating White may be, abominably given to strained symbolism and dislocated syntax,¹⁰ but he is undoubtedly a major voice.

¹⁰ The quotations I have taken from White are frequently grammatically inaccurate, they are, however, precisely as they are printed in the text.

II

White in Context

I have thus chosen to concentrate on the novels of the 1970's and to make even that concentration narrowly defined. My thesis demands such a sharp focus not only on White's strategy of characterisation but on what seem to me to be key texts embodying the most sustained and intensely realised achievement of his career. The novels that I conceive as those of his middle period, The Tree of Man to The Solid Mandala, are themselves a massive achievement and many have regarded, and will no doubt continue to regard, two novels in particular, The Tree of Man and Voss, as his greatest work. While recognising their power and authority, it is my contention that they differ in kind from the novels of my choice. I am not, of course, intending to suggest that they are not also concerned with the central theme of self-discovery. On the contrary, Patrick White has barely a word in print that does not have such a quest at its core; but in the middle-period novels this is pursued within a mythic framework that involves the working out of material fundamental to European culture, particularly that to do with the great religious allegories. The Tree of Man, for example, signals on the first page its intention to establish a new Adam and a new Eve, tempted by the new offspring of the old serpent and set within an Antipodean paradisaal garden. Voss, the product as White himself tells us, of a meglomania inspired by Hitler, is also a consideration of Christ, a Christ who has to find humility and accept himself as a man. Again Riders in the Chariot is deeply involved with the crucifixion and with the suffering and persecution of the Jews. The wandering Jew in the person of Himmelfarb carries into the new world, encapsulated within him, the history of the old. White uses parody to echo in the treatment of his protagonist the persecution of Christ. The structure of the work, as Colmer has remarked, echoes this underlying theme and works through a familiar progression, "innocence,

experience, suffering and redemption".¹ The Solid Mandala then continues to explore the theme of saintliness begun in Riders in the Chariot, in the characterisation of Mrs Godbold. In the later novel it is Arthur Brown who is being so considered:

"This man could be my saint," says Mrs Poulter. "If we could believe in saints. Nowadays", she said, "we've only men to believe in. I believe in this man" ²

It is this predominately allegorical quality which separates these texts from those which have been my concern. The later novels are characterised by a lucidity of tone and a relaxation of the symbolic strain which has been a part of the middle period novels. The later works have at their centre questers who can be identified with White himself to an extent which is not the case in the earlier works, and their dilemmas are the dilemmas of everyday, even though it may be the everyday of an uncommon character.³ None of these later seekers is a figure from Christian myth let alone a Christ figure (though it may be fairly claimed that Hurtle Duffield as artist and vivisector shares the functions of God.) All focus on the need for the human psyche to find wholeness and harmony.

1 Colmer, Patrick White, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and Christopher Bigsby, Contemporary Writers (London: Methuen & Co., 1984), pp. 447-50. Later he goes on to point out that "the interlocking profusion of mythic detail in Riders in the Chariot is more representative of an unfinished jigsaw puzzle than the mystic unity of the sacred mosaic".

2 The Solid Mandala (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966), p. 31.

3 They are also marked by a diminution of the stridency which mars the middle period novels, particularly Riders in the Chariot and Voss, and they do not ask for the suspension of disbelief demanded by the vision of the charioteers or the telepathy shared by Voss and Laura.

Critical Approaches

The exegetical method necessitated by my thesis demands close attention to the mass of significant detail which surrounds the visions. Such detail is common to all the novels, including those of the middle period, but in the later works it is usually a part of a homelier and frequently more credible context than that which is found in the earlier moments of illumination. Hurtle Duffield's golden hen is scratching in earthly dust, it is the dark comedy of the band-aid which adds an edge of harsh irony to the visionary quality of Eddie's dying moments. Only by following the organic development of White's narrative (and by content extraneous to characterisation that may be suggested either by the texts or by my study) is it possible to keep the critical eye firmly on the frequently ambivalent and almost always ambiguous meaning which is at the core of the work. Because I shall thus deliberately proscribe width of reference I must here, before turning to The Vivisector, take brief account of those aspects of White's work, his critics, and his position as an Australian novelist which are of course necessary to any full understanding of his achievement. A consideration of some characteristics responses to White may also help clarify the reasons for my choice of method.

Wide though critical response to White's work has been, there are areas which are held in common by almost all his many commentators. Of these the one on which I want to concentrate is the tendency to distortion which arises from the need to cramp works which are concerned with the seething flux of daily living into a clearly defined and rationalised response. Understandable as the impulse towards such a task may be, in practice it creates a dead pattern at the expense of living disorder. In its most extreme form such a response appears in the many surveys which attempt to delineate the broad outlines of White's fiction and in so doing inevitably over-simplify the complexities of his vision. Two examples must stand in place of the many.

The first is from a general survey of Australian writing, Ken Goodwin's recent, A History of Australian Literature. Speaking of Voss, Goodwin says that he becomes after his death:

a part of the Dreaming, the creative power, the archetypal myth of creation. Laura puts it slightly differently: "Voss will not die", Miss Trevalyan replied. "He is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down eventually by those who have been troubled by it". 4

Such a monist reading fails, I believe inevitably, to take into account the wider context of the work and the flexibility and shifting nuance of its tone.⁵ It is within such an ironising or at least qualifying a context that White has chosen to locate the episode. The quotation ends, as does the novel, with the words:

'Come, come. If we are not certain of the facts, how is it possible to give the answers?' 'The air will tell us,' Miss Trevalyan said. By which time she had grown hoarse, and fell to wondering aloud whether she had brought her lozenges. 6

It is in one sense unfair to take as an example a critique which is concerned only to show in broad outline the main areas and interest of White's work. I have chosen it, however, because it encapsulates a prevailing tendency in criticism of his oeuvre to allow a process of selection which concentrates on what are seen as key moments, to distort the deeply ambiguous content of what is being said. Clearly Goodwin is right to see Voss as returning to the earth, and in becoming part of it, also to become a legend.⁷ Voss is now

- 4 Goodwin, A History of Australian Literature (Macmillan: 1986, London) pp. 171-172.
- 5 In all the examples that I have given I have deliberately chosen critics whose work on White is both intelligent and sympathetic. The many trivial and often denigratory examples that also exist are their own worst enemies; although they would prove an easy target it is not with individual inadequacies that I am concerned, but with a general trend that cramps and distorts White's abundance and necessary prolixity.
- 6 Voss (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957), p. 478.
- 7 Goodwin, p. 172.

surrounded by the silence of the grave, but even by Goodwin's own account he is also a part of the Dreaming and is now assimilated into a verbal culture, a complex religious experience which will continue to be transmitted by action and by word through succeeding generations. Goodwin also ignores the further irony, the "legend [which] will be written down eventually" is a part of written legend even as we read it. More importantly though, in the context of White's work as a whole, it is not in this instance in a high-toned register, or in slightly ponderous phrases that White makes his final statement of the novel; rather it is in the alternative register with the deflationary image of a middle-aged spinster sucking on a cough lozenge. For all the high drama of the fever-soaked beds from which Laura has projected her messages to a Voss embroiled in tension and danger, we have, from the beginning of the work, also been made aware that there is a level at which he simply bores her. "Oh dear, she was tired of this enclosed man"⁸ Here she turns from her role in the mythologizing of an Elect attempting to find spiritual wholeness, to her counterpointing concern with the mundane and the trivial. In so doing she is gently laughed at by an author whose comic gift is also a part of the message that he brings us. Here, as so often elsewhere, he is modulating between the mystical and the absurd. The trivial and the everyday are a part of the context of his spiritual seekers and as such must be accepted by them and by us. The needs of Laura's body whether they be those of sensual and sexual fulfillment in the form of motherhood, or a cough drop to comfort a sore throat, are also a part of wholeness and in the context of this novel they are a vital part of the lesson that Voss himself finds so hard to learn.⁹ Above all, the deflationary mode with which White has chosen to end his tale of a Messianic

⁸ Voss, p. 17.

⁹ It is not perhaps too fanciful to see the cough-drop as a comment on the use of the voice. Laura too, to continue Goodwin's analogy, is reduced to silence. It is, though, a silence conditioned by the cough rather than awe.

quest is also a final proof of what was lacking in Voss, an essentially humourless quester whose impulse towards self-denial too frequently leads to self-absorption.

The second of my examples is from William Walsh's Patrick White's Fiction. Here a similar limitation is apparent. In Walsh's account of Stan Parker's response to the gob of spittle in The Tree of Man he quotes extensively from the protagonist's conversation with the young evangelist.¹⁰ The scene directly precedes Stan's moment of illumination. The quotation ends:

Then the old man who had been cornered long enough, saw, through perversity perhaps, but with his own eyes. He was illuminated.

He pointed with his stick at the gob of spittle.

'That is God', he said.

As it lay glittering intensely and personally on the ground.

The young man frowned rather. You met all kinds. (p.495)

Walsh comments:

The old man's utterance is not an observation capable of proof or disproof. It is the climax of a life and issues from a hard, worn wisdom. What he sees, and what the gob shares with God, is the quality of pure being.

It is a valid interpretation and within the confines of Walsh's intentions perfectly acceptable, but within the larger structure of White's novel it cramps and distorts the conclusions towards which the novel is working. In the text the moment is immediately followed by the arrival of Amy, who comes to her husband with the news that she has found the silver nutmeg grater lost since the visit of "that fellow who was selling the magnetic water". Stan is already moving towards death. "What was this irrelevant thing? He had forgotten".¹¹ Throughout the novel the growth, or failure in growth, of the Parkers towards spiritual understanding, has been

10 Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction (George Allen & Unwin: Australia, 1977) pp. 38-40.

11 The Tree of Man (New York: Viking Press, 1955), p. 496.

paralleled. Their strengths and weaknesses have been used as a means of documenting not only their own progress but that of one another, and at least as importantly, of their marriage. Walsh recognises this. Commenting on Stan's development from anonymous representative of the human race to family man, he adds:

What is wrong in the original pair works itself out in the corruption of the children. What is wrong lies, generally, in the connection of husband and wife; it is the product - must we not say the inevitable product? - of any such relationship. But if it is to be located more precisely, it lies in the wife. The husband is a good man with the special dignity of those whose life and work are a part of a more inclusive natural rhythm... The wife, on the other hand, is a sharper, neater intelligence and has a much higher degree of self-limited interest. 12

Valid though much of his observation may be, and it seems to me here to be loaded unfairly against Amy, my present point is rather that he fails to take this relationship into account when he approaches Stan's epiphany. The structure of the work allows the gob of spittle and the nutmeg-grater to be used as a means of identification and comment not only on each of the partners, but on their marriage. Set where it is in the text, the nutmeg-grater defines not only the limits of Amy's quest, paralleled as it is with Stan's, but also of Amy. It is valuable, delicate, frivolous and lost, as such it is a part of the escapist fantasies into which Amy has so frequently been drawn. She has had no valid use in her sparse and frequently meagre life-style for the ornamentation and pretentious triviality of the nutmeg-grater but it has been her Gold Coast,¹³ and has summed for her the world represented by Madeleine. It defines the limit of her imaginative consciousness, a consciousness which finally fails to extend her spiritual awareness beyond the boundaries of a world which must remain within her immediate understanding. It represents on the one hand her acquisitiveness

¹² Walsh, pp. 35-36.

¹³ The Gold Coast is identified with the theme of the quest, for Stan it is both a part of a need for wider frontiers than his life allows and an, as yet undefined, spiritual quest.

towards both objects and people, and on the other an instinctive perception which is drawn towards beauty. Just as she has earlier hovered on the edge of the quest for full spiritual understanding when she is attracted to the paintings of Mr Gage, and to the elegant stateliness of Madeleine, but finally fails to move beyond the limitations of her own understanding, so here she has failed to see that which has always lain right beside her door. The gleam of her little nutmeg-grater could have offered her the illumination that Hurtle Duffield's chandelier is to bring to him, but it has remained undiscovered beneath the white rose, itself a symbol of their marriage.

Stan's moment of illumination does not stand alone, it is poised against his wife's discovery. Further, just as Stan has earlier failed Amy through his inability to share to the full the sensuous life she offers, so he now fails to recognise the importance that the grater has for her.¹⁴ Amy's greed and Stan's aridity are held in tension. Stan in rejecting the sensual earthrootedness offered by Amy directly brings about the drought years. Amy fails to understand, even in these last moments, the spiritual quest in which Stan is engaged. Stan, in the same last moments, fails to recognise the vital and living force his wife could have been. In setting the episodes side by side but without interaction, White is making a further comment on a marriage which has not realised its full potential and has failed primarily in just that interaction.

The novel goes on:

Exquisitely cold blue shadows began to fall through the shiny leaves of the trees. Some boulders that had been

14 The episode under the mulberry tree clarifies this failure. Amy is clearly shown as fully integrated into the tree of life. "There was a continual opening and closing of the tree, an interplay of sky and leaves, of light and shade, so that she was mottled with it as well as stained by the juice." Stan rejects her, "he did not hold with kissing by daylight". In so doing he rejects the earthrootedness which she offers and which he needs. The Tree of Man, pp. 149-50.

let lie in the garden all those years ... assumed enormous proportions in the heavy bronze light. There was on the one hand a loosening and dissolving of shapes, on the other a looming of mineral splendours.

Just such a moment will occur again in The Eye of the Storm as the hold of the life force is removed from Elizabeth Hunter and she reaches towards death. For Stan too a similar use of language signals the loosening of the long hold of the earth over the flesh. As its power dissolves the spirit is released; but Stan's last thoughts are of another image which has permeated this novel:

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

The ants represent not only struggling humanity but also the mass of domestic detail which has been Stan's life, and to the sum of which he has tried so long to find an explanation. Stan, as he sinks into death, has finally realised that he cannot enforce a pattern on the mass of trivia and contradiction in which his life has been spent. Walsh ends his account of The Tree of Man with the words "what he sees and what the gob shares with God is the quality of pure being".¹⁵ But what Stan also sees, and finally comes to understand, is that all things are within that final sum.

I do not denigrate works which have added much to White scholarship, and to which I am frequently indebted in the following pages, but the very density of White's writing can seduce - or perhaps exasperate - the most perceptive of critics into the trap of singular categorising. He is both more, and at times less, than such works appear to suggest. White himself emphasises the importance of the mundane and the trivial in life, and by extension in the novel. His life has included, and needed, the growing of cabbages, the

¹⁵ Walsh, p. 42.

breeding of dogs, and the daily routine of housekeeping, and it is from these minutiae of everyday living that he creates the life on his pages.¹⁶ His words are carved out of the details of daily life and it is this living which is not only a part of the created splendour of his work, but is also at the centre of his visions.¹⁷ When Joyce creates an epiphany for Gabriel in "The Dead",¹⁸ it is a part, not only of a heightened moment of awareness of the spirit, but also results from his sensual enjoyment of flakes of snow, Wellington boots and the carving of a goose, nor is it lessened by the irony and misunderstanding that surrounds it. White's confluences are no less eclectic; they are further removed from commitment to the transcendental by disclaimers of the attainments of the intellect and his unease with the preciousness which surrounds high art, and as such they are, at least in part, a recognition of the need for the trivial and the homely and are also a reflection of his essential "Australianness". In the criticisms of writers such as Beatson and Patricia Morley, this pattern of ordinary living is submerged by the imposition of external creeds which, while justifiable and indeed helpful in the light of their chosen area of reference, are not finally true to the spirit of what White is saying.

It is this spirit, the essential essence distilled from a mass of significant detail, on which I want to concentrate. White's own regard for the primacy of the instinct should surely justify an attempt to give

¹⁶ Such a belief can be seen as an aspect of the Romanticism which so thoroughly imbues his work.

¹⁷ It is not only on their place in the visionary material that I am commenting; much of the power and interest in White's work stems from the potency of the intensely known domestic material which crowds his pages.

¹⁸ Joyce, Dubliners.

sufficient weight to that primarily intuitive aspect of his work. In so far as it is possible within the confines of an inevitably non-intuitive analysis, I intend to explore that in White which is non-rational even mystical; but my intention is to keep such an exploration firmly anchored to the ordinary even ~~the~~ the mundane, for White surrounds his mystical moments not just by an accumulation of daily living, but by an intensifying of the vision through which we perceive it. The illumination which he seeks for his characters is taken into the density of his prose, bringing to the forefront of his readers' awareness, everyday, often domestic detail, and enlarging and redefining it as a painter does.

Australia

Suspicion of intellectuality, unease with self-conscious artistry, insistence upon ordinariness, these are stereotypical Australian impulses. White is far from typical let alone stereotypical, but he is Australian to the bone. His instincts were bred there by Australian culture and his writing is potent when shaping intensely known material. Compare, for example, the loss of authority which devalues the Cornish scenes in A Fringe of Leaves with the precision and total credibility of The Vivisector's Sydney. Of course, White has transformed his country's literary culture too - modern Australian writers honour White whether they embrace or reject his looming presence - and not least in his breaking down of the barriers between 'realism' and 'non-realism' which had confined Australian writers and critics since the first explosion of national literary consciousness in the 1790's.

Adrian Mitchell ends his section on the novel The Oxford History of Australian Literature, "The chief consideration of Australian fiction has persistently been man's suspended disbelief in the world of his experience".¹⁹ It is with the desire to believe, to have faith in such a world that Patrick White has wrestled. In *Voss* and in *Ellen Roxburgh*, he has engaged most fully with the effects that the continent has on the human psyche; each needs, through the battle with the interior, to make a parallel journey into the depths of their own spirit. It is the aridity of the outback, counterpointed against the possibility that it holds for renewal and rebirth, that allows their particular processes towards self-discovery to reach fruition. In a radio interview in the early eighties, White referred to the interior as "noble but bitter",²⁰ it is just such a polarity that makes it a powerful metaphor in his work. Although it is through *Voss* and *Ellen Roxburgh* that he has explored this concern most fully, it remains a force in the portrayal of the majority of his

¹⁹ Adrian Mitchell, The Oxford History of Australian Literature, ed. L. Kramer (Melbourne: O.U.P., 1981), p. 172

²⁰ Meridian, 1982.

protagonists, no matter what the physical location of their imagined present. In the outback is to be found the stillness at the heart of the storm, the mystery and the emptiness in which the spirit can grow and be reborn. It is a place of extremes, a primitive and terrible landscape where the infinite can seem possible. It may well be that it is in this above all that Australia retains her power over Patrick White's imagination. It is not only that here in childhood his roots were planted, but perhaps more potently, that it is the perception of that vast brooding heartland that allows for the translation into the extraordinary for which he searches. However deep his abhorrence of the "ordinary" and the commonplace which he sees as imbuing so much of daily life, the power of the primitive landscape still allows room for extremes. For White and for most of her writers the unknown interior of Australia still generates the power that informs their work. Geographically, Australia's people are largely located in the cities that cling to the fringes of the land, but at least since the early days of the Bulletin when that journal gave the first voice to the values of the bush, the opposition between outback and city has shaped its literature. Such a concept is in part the age-old opposition between the values of opposing cultures that is the inheritance of all literatures that engage with frontier territory, but in Australia there are other and pervasive needs that lend the works their particular resonance. One is the need to which I shall return, that of finding a means to express the particularities of a continent that has no common ground with a culture and a language largely inherited from Europe. Ken Goodwin states:

Language with its often unrecognised cultural biases, tended to pull the settlers back towards British values. The land with its many phenomena unnamable in the English language tended to pull them towards a sense of national uniqueness. 21

²¹ Ken Goodwin, p. 1.

But the problem is not merely linguistic. Beyond the peripheral, tamed townscapes in which most Australians spend their days lies a vast and still largely unknown interior. It is not a familiar inheritance, as Europe is to her people. It is essentially unfamiliar and unknowable, and as such it lends an edge of insecurity to even the most settled life. Australia herself poses a challenging threat behind the façade of civilisation which creates the structure of modern daily living. The outback offers only death to all but her hardy initiates and, although the need to live off the land will never be a part of the life of the average Australian, the insecurity that such a recognition imposes shapes the consciousness of all her people, particularly her novelists.

White, in his fight against mediocrity and "the dreary dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism",²² is attempting to find a voice for such a continent, a voice which allows the emptiness to be heard behind the strident chatter of daily city life. Two of his seekers have battled directly with the untamed primaeval landscape of nineteenth century Australia. The twentieth century world which confronts most of his other protagonists is largely unchanged and suggests behind the ephemeral clutter of modern Australia the same silence and the same emptiness. It is a silence which imposes a judgement and heightens the sense of mediocrity which White portrays in that middle-class world he indicts in so many of his portrayals, particularly those found in *Sarsaparilla*. It is this element of judgement which has been found offensive in his work. He has been castigated for a hectoring arrogance and for a patrician contempt for a world he fails to understand and sufficiently regard. But it is primarily the contrast with the immensity and the silence of the land that in calling for a quality of endurance and imposing a sense of unchanging timelessness reduces so much of the city life portrayed in his pages to

²² Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son", Australian Letters 1, (3 April, 1958), p. 38.

the level of sterile absurdity. The paradox of a primaeval land with a "social history" of only a few generations for its settlers, comes together with this central void in creating an enigma that has affected all her most powerful authors. Writers as disparate as Keneally and Stow, Dark and Ireland, are all under the spell of a land which in its vastness and even in its aridity can be seen to demand a form which will give it full expression.

Joan Lindsay in Picnic at Hanging Rock uses as her central metaphor the mystery which surrounds the rock, and which is itself a paradigm for Australia. The rock cannot be known by a group of nineteenth century schoolgirls and their teachers. They, and their school, and particularly their headmistress, are at odds with the land itself. They are not integral to it rather they are imposed on its surface. They are not, and can never be, a part of it. The rigid timetables and the constraining corsets, the sentimental Valentines and the delicate organdies, are not familiars of a harsh and barren land. It is a message similar to that suggested by Forster in A Passage to India, and it lurks behind Australian art forms as disparate as Stow's To The Islands and Tourmaline, the paintings of Nolan and Drysdale, and even such cult series as the Mad Max films. It has at its heart a recognition both of the power of the land itself and an awareness of the void, the essential emptiness of existence.

The land creates a powerful metaphor which gives expression to a prevailing literary model, at a time when Australian writers were first seeking expression. The power of this urge, and the dominance of the heartland coming together, have remained the primary motif in twentieth century writing. In White it finds its clearest expression in the lonely despair and self-disgust, which so often grips his seekers, together with the symbol that appears throughout his work, that of the mandala. The mysterious heart of Australia forms a closed circle, which his initiates, wherever they may be located, seek to understand and to enter, and which

they can only fully perceive when they have resolved, at least temporarily, their own inner dichotomy.

Influences

I

White has something in common with the land itself. Australia's other writers have always to engage with the force which he exerts. It is this force which embodies his most powerful influence and as such it has occasioned both hostility and what can seem, at least to the outsider, to be grudging praise.

I have already said that White is not primarily an experimental writer, and his work does not therefore show a great deal of the directly traceable influence which is occasioned by those writers who are engaged with new forms. But to say so is not to suggest that his influence has been anything other than all-pervasive. He is simply there, and as such his influence must be taken into account by anyone writing in Australia today.²³ Novels such as Voss and The Tree of Man exemplify the pioneering spirit with which all frontier countries must engage. In writing The Vivisector White wrote if not the last word, then at least a finalising one. There is no longer a need for Australia's writers to continue to explore literary territory which has been so thoroughly worked. In so releasing them, White has released them also, for that step from national to universal which all literatures must finally take.

Such a force is not without its dangers. It is possible to trace in Australia's literary circles a distaste for the overwhelming, and at times overpowering, entity which White has created. The power and authority of his often recalcitrant voice can be felt to diminish those with whom he shares common ground.²⁴ In its most easily recognisable form this distaste

²³ he is also much involved in giving direct encouragement to the arts generally, and in particular to painting, film and the theatre. See also his award for new literature, the Patrick White Award, set up in 1974.

²⁴ The extravagant almost farcical level of his recent public speaking has done little to alter this situation, on the contrary it is a part of a need to avoid the "creeping death" of respectability and to avoid the role of "living public monument" which he feels threatens him. (Meridian, 1982).

can be seen in the hostility which greets his portrayals of Sydney life. Much of this distaste is a part of a culture which does, as Patrick White himself asserts, give undue emphasis to the ordinary. The outsider in such a community is inevitably greeted with suspicion. He is "a tall poppy", waiting to be cut down. As such he stands above the average. Australia's beginnings meant that she was populated by large numbers of immigrants who had, and hold, common ground. The leavening of the eccentric, the aristocratic and the gifted, so much the norm of established cultures has not yet been fully integrated into Australia's population. Such homogeneity has meant that he has never captured popular taste nor stood for the common man. His use of language and the themes of his work stand outside the comprehension and the needs of the majority of his fellow countrymen. Born as he was into one society, and giving his allegiance to another, he is representative of nothing for which the average Australian stands.

White, in common with his seekers, is an outsider, separated by his gifts, his homosexuality and his social status from those with whom he shares Sydney's suburbs. His political beliefs, at odds as they are with the privileged life lived by the class into which he was born, further separate him. The philistinism of the suburbs, so adroitly remarked in his fiction, is less understandably, or acceptably, reflected in much of the critical reception which his works have attracted in their homeland fervent though the denials that such a state still exists may be. Indeed, on a visit to Australia in the early 1980's, I was myself impressed by the sense that such hostility did still exist, particularly in Sydney.

Less readily discussed, but perhaps more readily understood, is a distaste amongst writers and critics alike for the need to take White into account before setting pen to paper. It is this quality I had most in mind when I likened him to the land itself. He shares with the outback not only

a sense in which he is unknowable and a grave, often haughty, dignity, but also an ability to create in those with whom he comes in contact a pervasive insecurity. The literary world of which he is part is permeated not only by what he says, with its refusal to accept conventional, and comforting, standards, but also by the way in which his shadow falls across all who come after him and who struggle to find a voice with which to speak.

II

Whatever the influence White may have had on his fellow novelists, the influence of his works upon one another is strong. Each tends to build upon an element of its predecessor, but each can also be seen to have developed from an earlier, if frequently brief, working of the same theme.²⁵ In the novels with which I am concerned the first, The Vivisector, has a clear lineage, Hurtle Duffield has already begun his career in the person of Alf Dubbo, from Riders in the Chariot.²⁶ Inevitably both artists owe their original inspiration to White himself, as must by definition all fictive creations, but both share with him the further function of artist and visionary. As such they are a part of a distinguished literary heritage and can be seen to have predecessors as disparate as those in Carey's The Horse's Mouth, Iris Murdoch's The Black Prince and Mann's Doctor Faustus.

Clearly White shares a particularly close association with a protagonist whose function is so closely linked with his own, an association which is both a strength and, some have felt, a weakness; but in his earlier evocation of the artist, Alf Dubbo, he is limited in the power which he can give to his visions by the inevitable restrictions of the life-style of a protagonist who is both a "bloody abo" and a factory sweeper. White does, however, give to his portrayal both a convincing awareness, and a responsiveness to the power of Australia's interior, and an ability to communicate through paint the more intense because he is verbally both inarticulate and withdrawn. The problems come both from the choice of a protagonist whose

²⁵ Karen Hansson argues with some force that this effect is less observable in the later novels. The Warped Universe (Lund: CWK Cleerup, 1984), pp. 247-8.

²⁶ These two portrayals are not the only portrait of the artist in White's fiction. Mr Gage in The Tree of Man, is an earlier sketch and art in the dramatic form, is observed in Lotte Lipmann and Basil Hunter in The Eye of the Storm. The characterisations of Alf Dubbo and Hurtle Duffield are however, each part of the same way of looking at the problems of the development of the artist, and of the difficulty in finding a vehicle which depicts his vision with force and truth.

potential is so narrowly circumscribed (a similar difficulty is handled more successfully in The Tree of Man) and by the strained and overly coincidental vision of the charioteers.²⁷ The inevitably limited education of the aborigine is at odds with the all-encompassing breadth of comprehension White requires of his artist-visionary. It is this, together with the falsity of tone to be found in the apocalyptic passages, which lessens the potency of the myth which is a necessary part of the characterisation of Alf Dubbo. In *Hurtle Duffield*, White has largely overcome this dilemma. The piecemeal schooling experienced by the aborigine whilst living with the Anglican rector, Timothy Calderan, foreshadows the education undergone by Hurtle during his days in the Duffield household; but in this latter case the transference to the Courtneys enables White successfully to bridge the gap between the cultures which has hampered his development of Alf Dubbo. In each portrayal, White is clearly engaged in searching for an illuminate who can convey an essentially inarticulate but richly intuitive awareness through the sensuous medium of paint. His own much quoted aversion to "London intellectuals"²⁸ can without too much distortion be transferred to the visual arts. By that analogy it seems likely that what he finds stultifying in a writer would also damage his artist-visionary. A limitation by birth and inclination to the experience of the educated classes, will, he seems to feel, inevitably distort the artist's instinctual response.

Perhaps the most precisely locatable resemblance between the painters appears as they struggle with their final works, and equally final visions. Each battles against the limitation of time imposed by imminent death, each has perfected his art to the point at which art and vision are fused by a painter who has spent a lifetime achieving this final perfection. At this

²⁷ Walsh commenting on the visionary moments, says that White is apt "on occasion to offer neatness and gratuitous accretion in place of organic design." Walsh, p. 13.

²⁸ Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son", p. 38.

moment of fully realised and credible artistic vision,"the gap between signifier and signified between the event and the high meaning attributed, is minimal".²⁹

The moment of transcendental vision in The Eye of the Storm occurs during Elizabeth Hunter's visit to Brumby Island.³⁰ The genesis of the character of Elizabeth is not directly locatable to any one source or to any one previous incarnation, if there is a moment of inception it probably occurs as White crosses Kensington High Street thinking of his dying mother, a mother whom he treats with gradually lessening hostility throughout her portrayal on his pages. Similarly clearly locatable, is the setting for the work. The house in Martin Road, Sydney, overlooking Centennial Park, is only a few doors from where he has lived for many years. Probably the earliest literary evocation of Elizabeth Hunter, is Catherine Standish in The Living and the Dead, but the text which seems to me of more importance in the creation of The Eye of the Storm is the short story "Dead Roses". In this text, it is not so much the mother figure that White explores, as the relationship between mother and daughter. Anthea Scudamore and her mother are caught up in a ritual of daily living, in which the daughter struggles increasingly feebly against capture within an elaborate cocoon which would eventually bring about her living death. As such, there is no immediate and clear analogy with The Eye of the Storm, but at a less overt level much of the thematic material of the novel is already being worked out, and it is around this core that the later work is structured. Elizabeth Hunter could, with ease, have been conceived as another Mrs Scudamore, but she is not, rather she is an Anthea who has escaped the fate that overtakes the younger woman. In the relationship between Elizabeth Hunter and her daughter, it is Dorothy who can most nearly be equated with the Scudamores. The point of my comparison, is, however, in

²⁹ Colmer, p. 46.

³⁰ The setting is Fraser Island which will appear again in A Fringe of Leaves where it will serve a similar purpose.

the fact that the shadow of the earlier story lies over the later work. The novel considers Elizabeth Hunter's long struggle along the road to spiritual illumination, but it also contemplates the damage that she has inflicted on the way to becoming one of the elect. Her daughter and her son are what they are because Elizabeth Hunter is as she is, and her earlier life leaves her children at the same risk as that which finally engulfs Anthea Scudamore. In both works there is a central visit to an island. In each the island is used as a time of possible spiritual growth. Anthea Scudamore visits the island twice. On the first occasion she turns from a sexual encounter which could have released her from the grip of stifling daily routine, and runs to marriage with the elderly and suitably named Hessel Mortlock. She arrives at her bridal home to find that the roses decorating the rooms are dead. The symbol suggests her turning away from a vital and renewing relationship towards death in life. Later she returns to the island in search of an escape from the rigid propriety of her upbringing and marriage. It is a form of propriety for which White has always reserved his harshest mockery. There is a grotesque comedy in the portrayal of Hessel Mortlock and his mother-in-law, particularly in their scenes together, which has much in common with the characterisation of Mrs Poulter and Mrs Dunn in Riders in the Chariot, but which has frequently been seen as malevolently destructive, even spiteful. Anthea is destroyed by the safety of conformity. In turning to the barren security offered by Mortlock she is implicitly denying the passion Flegg could have given her. "I don't like what's nasty",³¹ she tells her mother, and in doing so condemns natural, renewing life and vigour. It is the icy grip of conformity which White explores so thoroughly here as elsewhere. It is a theme which he gives a further and moral dimension. For White the good are eccentric and inarticulate, the bad, narrow-minded and obsessed

³¹ Patrick White, "Dead Roses" The Burnt Ones (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), p. 65.

with triviality. Both Dorothy and Anthea use materialism to replace vitalism. It is risk which Elizabeth also incurs, but she is saved through her acceptance of the mystical lesson which the island teaches.

Dorothy, like Anthea, turns from sexual encounter on the island. In each work sexuality is equated not only with warmth and freely given affection, but with a rough casualness which, as so often in White, is shared with the randomness and possibility of the life force. In "Dead Roses" White is exploring space and silence just as he is later to do in The Eye of the Storm. The amplitude offered by life on the islands allows his characters the opportunity to listen to, and to engage with, silence, and to expand their thoughts into the space allowed in the natural world. Throughout White, it is the recognition of the need for non-communication as well as communication, for the absence of sound as an escape from a artifice and busyness, that his protagonists have to come to accept. The islands, the outback, the Monaro, all offer the ability to explore the life of the spirit unencumbered by the trivia of modernity. The natural world provides an indicator of the possibility of harmony and unity. Tidiness and an imposed structured ritual of daily living is in turn equated with aridity and worse, with a turning to materialism that includes not only the acquisition, but also the near-worship, of things. Anthea and Dorothy choose tidy conformity, Mrs Hunter escapes though the eye of the storm which frees her and sets her within the flux and living force of contingency. In The Eye of the Storm, White appears to have returned to the same basic conflicts that have concerned him in "Dead Roses" this time using to the full the larger scope of the novel form.

In neither A Fringe of Leaves nor The Twyborn Affair is there a clearly locatable derivation from earlier works but recurrent motifs are discernable as are less clearly defined areas to which White returns, often many times.

In A Fringe of Leaves this tendency is masked by the historical setting. Only in Voss has White used similar material, and indeed traces of Ellen's ordeal and growth through suffering can be found in Voss himself and in Laura. In Voss the connexion with Ellen is most clearly seen in the journey through the wilderness which both she and Voss endure. In the handling of Laura the relationship with Ellen is traceable through the theme of motherhood and also in the lessons of acceptance and humility with which both engage. As before in The Eye of the Storm the barren spaces travelled by White's protagonists allow him to dramatize silence. For both Ellen and Voss their ordeal in the outback is an apt metaphor for a similar journey into the mind. In Voss's case particularly such a journey allows White to develop that other favourite device the use of his protagonist as prophet. It is a role which White sees as all-encompassing, his prophet is not only seer but also voyeur. Ellen Roxburgh too is essentially an onlooker, an observer, and as such she is one apart. White feels that literature must be "burnt out" of the writer and it is this element of agonising pain and endurance that he imparts to so much of his work, and that most clearly unites Ellen and Voss. The outback offers the supreme opportunity for him to set his protagonists the ultimate test of the suffering that all, to a greater or lesser extent, have endured since Happy Valley. A vital aspect of this comes from the sense that his characters are apart. Ellen Roxburgh is not separated from the social and moral world of her origins as so many of her predecessors have been, but she shares with Voss an apartness which comes from personal choice and which the novel is concerned to explore and perhaps to set aside. In Voss the need to conquer the arrogance which leads him to choose seclusion, even

loneliness, is central to his characterisation, in Ellen it is handled differently. She is, and feels herself to be, set apart not so much by arrogance as by a fear of engagement allied to an insecurity of role. Voss is marked out by a ruthless determination to follow a path of his own choosing, Ellen on the contrary, has to be led from the wilderness. She has to learn to set aside the roles suggested to her by others and to find the essential self which is the Ellen of the spirit. Both need different paths to find illumination but both travel the same terrain. The connexion between the novels is, however, more complex than these analogies seem to suggest, and is found in the fascination which the mixture of allegory and real-life holds for White. In both novels it allows him to use as seekers, figures whose psyche does not stem entirely, or even primarily, from his own. Each mythic, yet flesh and blood, figure has been presented to him complete. In neither case, of course, is his character's historical counterpart used without emendation, on the contrary both differ markedly from the earlier figure and in the case of Voss more than one stimulus has been used. It is simply that the spark, the core of creation, is already alive. Discoverable facts and physical characteristics can be used as a spur to an imagination that in its creation of the seekers is commonly turned inward.

In A Fringe of Leaves White is also continuing to work out the theme of the island and its influence, previously remarked in The Eye of the Storm.³¹ The actual location is again Fraser Island and in it, he probes the areas of myth and possibility he seems to find offered within its closed shores. It is an island that shares with that of Prospero the potential for growth included within the process towards self-understanding. Like Australia herself it is bound up with the recurrent symbol of the mandala.

³¹ Duffield also has a spiritual experience on an island, this time in Greece.

In A Tree of Man White had attempted to examine the life of an ordinary woman. In Ellen Roxburgh he again takes the life of "an ordinary woman," not set apart from her fellows, as so many of his earlier seekers have been. Further, Ellen shares with Amy another quality which separates them from many of Patrick White's other major protagonists. Neither is consciously a ~~seeker~~ in the sense that Stan Parker and Voss have been, or even as Hurtle Duffield and Eddie Twyborn will be. Neither of these later visionaries is consciously seeking spiritual illumination in the sense that the former pair have been, but they share with White's other protagonists a constant and frequently painful need for wholeness and harmony. In neither Ellen nor Amy is this is apparent, indeed with Amy it is questionable whether it is there at all. Both women are also at risk of the self-limitation that comes from possessiveness. In Amy this is most clearly defined in her constant need to see into the innermost thoughts of those whom she wishes to possess. In Ellen, it is shown through the process of spiritual and emotional growth in which she gradually learns to shed the stifling and stultifying bondage that possessions and possessiveness can bring.³² In The Twyborn Affair Eddie too is to be concerned with role-playing. He has in common with Ellen an experimental quality. Each protagonist is essentially pliable, each is involved in a search for identity that is secure from the imposition of the needs of others. In Eddie's case such an insecurity of role is to take an extreme form, during the course of the novel role-playing in all, or most of its manifestations, is closely examined. It is as if White in turning from one text to another is finding himself with material through which he has not sufficiently worked, and with images which have stimulated others to form in their stead. Eddie too has an earlier evocation this time in Theodore

³² Both women also share a further quality which White appears to define as greed, in both he also explores the processes of adultery.

Goodman in The Aunt's Story. The novels share an uneasiness for reader and, one suspects, writer alike, one which is located in the fragmentary and the bizarre. In each this central quality echoes the rumblings of war, which permeate the texts, in neither is it fully under control. It is not however primarily in fiction that Eddie's closest analogue can be found, neither is it with previous work, rather it is with White's self-portrait Flaws in the Glass. The image that emerges from the mirrors that recur in both works is closely aligned. The stumbling path which each follows to self-discovery and truth is lit with the same flickering light and beset with many of the same pitfalls. In sharing so many of the same characteristics as his author, Eddie Twyborn can be shown to be directly linked with all that have gone before. In all his work White is exploring not only the vast array of characters from whom he feels himself to be composed, but also the theatricality which is a vital part of the world created on his pages. Eadith Trist in setting up her whore-house, is setting up also a stage on which she can view the antics of her clients. White too, is not only exploring the characters with whom he is engaged, but acting out a fantasy in which they are taking part. As he sits at his desk in the house overlooking Centennial Park, and picks up a pen, he is setting in motion a drama which he views with the eye of a voyeur, as well as that of a compassionate creator. It is this quality which has led so many to see him as essentially disengaged and it is this element combined with theatricality which invades not only his themes but also the tone of his language.

Language

It has not been a part of my intention in this study to give close consideration to White's style. In general I have confined myself to noting where particular stylistic effects and idiosyncracies have supported aspects of my main concern. Before turning to my chosen works, however, it seems appropriate to look briefly at the ways in which these central themes characteristically emerge from the text. At least since the publication of The Tree of Man, White's linguistic mannerisms have occasioned considerable hostility. A.D. Hope established a response characteristic of many critics of the period with his notorious dismissal of the novel as "illiterate verbal sludge."³³ The main force of the criticism seems to lie in what are seen as affectations, an often puzzling use of syntax and a tendency towards strained symbolism. It is not my concern here to defend White from these charges, except to point out that there are alternative viewpoints. Even as early as 1963 Heseltine found White's style to be "a direct function of his deepest response to life".³⁴ Certainly his style, clearly, and dynamically, reinforces the basic tenets of the text.

In the following passage chosen, if not at random then certainly from amongst many equally suitable, certain typical characteristics immediately appear:

Waldo could feel his brother's larger, fleshy hand in his thinner, colder one as they stumbled in and out of the grass down what remained of the brick path. The wind drove reasons inward, into flesh. They were reduced, as always, to habit. But stumbled, even so.

Only the old pot-bellied dogs appeared convinced of the mild pleasures they enjoyed, frolicking and farting, though

³³ A.D. Hope, The Sydney Morning Herald, 16 June, 1956.

³⁴ H. Heseltine, "Patrick White's Style", Quadrant (Winter, 1963), p. 61

somewhat cranky with each other. One of them - Runt - lifted his leg on a seedy cabbage and almost overbalanced.

His brother was breathing deeply, Waldo saw.

"Which direction are we going to take?" Arthur asked.

"There's only one."

"Yes," said Arthur, "but after Terminus Road?"

"Why, the main road - the direction of Barranugli."

Sometimes Waldo would look at his brother and try to remember when he had first been saddled with him. But could not.

"Why the main road?" Arthur asked, fretful today.

He blew out his red, fleshy, but to no extent sensual lips.

"Because I want to see life," Waldo answered brutally. "You don't want to deny me that?"

Arthur said: "No."

Waldo was punctured then. He continued on, a thin man in a turned-down stiff, grey felt hat. What he should have answered, of course, was: Because, on the main road, if anything happens on any of those hills, there will always be plenty of cars to stop. It depressed him he hadn't been able to say it.

"I like the side roads best," said Arthur. "You can look at the fennel."

He had difficulty with his words, chewing them to eject, but when he did, there they stood, solid, and for ever.

There was the sound of Waldo's stiff oilskin nothing would free from the weathers which had got into it. Waldo's oilskin used to catch on things, and he always expected to hear it tear. On that gooseberry bush, for instance. Which had not succeeded. Arthur had advised against it - Sarsaparilla was too warm - but Waldo had planted the bush. To demonstrate something or other.

On the broken path Waldo's oilskin went slithering past the gooseberry thorns. The wind might have cut the skins of the Brothers Brown if they had not been protected by their thoughts.

First and most obviously the use of the road, a favourite metaphor in White, enforces the processes of characterisation in the brothers. It is used as the marbles are elsewhere, as a means of commenting on the central dichotomy, (that between the instinct and the intellect) which fatally divides them.

Waldo at the mercy of an intellect which has almost engulfed his instinctual awareness chooses the main road. His brother, in whom instinct

is paramount "Like(s) the side roads best" he goes on "You can look at the fennel." The freely growing fennel, found untamed on the edges of the lanes suggests the pastoral; the innocent and rejuvenating qualities of the countryside, ~~with~~ which Arthur is equated. His brother's choice of a main road running to the aptly named "Barranugli", from which he can "see life" epitomises his habit of allowing an abstract concept to stand in place of the values of the natural world.³⁴ He is an outsider waiting to "see life" rather than to live it. The first words of the passage further endorse this sense of failure to find a shared path. They emphasise the disrepair which engulfs both their relationship and their house. The next line "The wind drove reasons inward into the flesh" typifies the mannerisms that irritate, or have irritated, so many of White's critics. In it he conflates the physical fact of the wind chilling the flesh with the emotional and intellectual responses of the two old men. (The final line of the passage functions similarly). Character vision and narrative vision merge uncomfortably and, at least out of context, irritatingly. Similarly inflated, when subjected to close scrutiny, are the lines, "which direction are we going to take?", followed by "There's only one." The words establish the desolate tone which is a characteristic of the passage, lightened or at least adjusted by the prevailing irony. This use of tone and mood is further endorsed by such terms as "thinner", "colder", "stumbled" and "reduced". Equally characteristic is the way in which theme and mood are reinforced by the use of the "old pot-bellied dogs", their responses to one another and to the day precisely, perhaps over-precisely, parallel the behaviour of the two men. The words used to describe the dogs establish both the mood and the particular flavour of a White scene. It is the repetition of such favourites as "farting", "cranky" and "seedy"

³⁴ See also Waldo's acquisition of the dog, Runt. Again he is allowing a concept to stand in place of a felt response. Indications of a gentler kind are also present in the text ~~though~~, as here "Because on the main road if anything happened.."

together with over-used mannerisms like "there was the sound of Waldo's stiff oilskin" that gives ammunition to many of his critics, a response which is heightened by the tendency for them to appear in passages where the writer is examining the function of the unacceptable and the distasteful in the whole of the completed mandala.³⁵ In White, true wholeness and harmony must encompass the descent into degradation before it is possible for the spirit to ascend and it is this need which governs the tone of such passages as the above.

It is the predominance of this largely thematic material which gives the passage its particular flavour. The voice of the author is ever present, manipulative, even intrusive. The language is never dramatic in the Joycean sense. Rather the author asserts, almost bullyingly, his primacy over the text and his reader.

In sum then, the characteristics of White's prose have little, indeed nothing, to do with elegance. On the contrary they are often deliberately clumsy. Look for example at "He blew out his red, fleshy, but to no extent sensual lips." Or at sentences which are not sentences, such as "On that gooseberry bush, for instance." They are parenthetical interventions, and as such echo the interventionist policy of an author whose authorial voice must remain dominant. The heavy use of adjectives is apparent from the first sentence, indeed the quality of the sentence is governed by the adjective and by the dominant mood. There is little attempt at individuation of dialogue and a conscious denial of fluency in favour of what seems to be a deliberate brusqueness. The narrative shifts awkwardly and jerkily from the author to one and then the other of the characters. The register shifts equally suddenly and at times disconcertingly.³⁶

³⁵ In the chapter on The Vivisector I examine the function of "Dreck", in this novel too, it plays a considerable part.

³⁶ Sudden shifts in register are a feature of White's prose.

Irritating though these mannerisms may be they do, however, accurately reflect the characteristic voice of their author. The point I have been making in the choice of this passage is not one of selection but one of representativeness. The overwhelming movement of virtually all his prose is from the particular to the universal. In this passage he takes the everyday triviality of the Brown brothers' excursion and translates it into a metaphor for their journey into life. In virtually every page he has in print he is similarly occupied. The detail of a character's clothing, mannerisms, movements, starts from a precise evocation which frequently startles attention through an element of the grotesque, the clumsy, even the absurd, and modulates into the mystical. This effect polishes his prose into a rough sparkle that lightens it with flashes of a brilliance which is central to the message with which the work is concerned. It is this last point which is fundamental to White's use of language. Clotted, even inarticulate though his language may be, it contains and endorses the themes with which he is concerned. Nowhere in his prose is he content to simply move his characters on, always he aims to conflate the absurd, the comic, the everyday elements of his characters with their aspirations, and in so doing conveys the world he is creating into the **consciousness of his** readers.

I

My pursuit of that razor-blade truth has made me a slasher.

Flaws in the Glass, (p.155)

Duffield's dilemma is the dilemma of the truly alive. He is involved throughout his life with the resolution of the warring aspects of artist and vivisector. The artist is "The Divine Vivisector". (p.269)¹ He can create and he can destroy. He shares the functions of God. His purpose is the pursuit of truth.² It is a role which he shares with his author.

Am I a destroyer? This face in the glass which has spent a lifetime searching for what it believes, but can never prove to be, the truth. A face consumed by wondering whether truth can be the worst destroyer of all. Flaws in the Glass, (p.70)

Echoes of the theme reverberate through the novel in a series of recurrent images. The destruction of the bagful of cats and their resurrection, in "Infinity of Cats", (p.370) the razor-blade eye of the vivisector, the broken glass, which, so often crunching beneath the feet of the protagonists, can also blaze in the symmetrical perfection of the chandelier. But to see only so far is to miss the essential truth with which White is concerned. Duffield is by no means the only vivisector in the book. John Beston rightly cites two others, "God and Mrs Courtney",³

¹ All references in this chapter which give a page number only will be to Patrick White, The Vivisector (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1970).

² Brissenden gives a commonly held view when he finds the sacramental aspect of art to be a theme running throughout White's work. "The notion that both the creation and the interpretation of art are in one sense sacred activities is an essential element in the view of the world presented in White's work". He goes on to point out that the scientist and the artist can be seen as occupying opposing poles. "The artist lies for the improvement of truth while the scientist at least attempts not to". R.F.Brissenden, "The Vivisector: Art and Science", The Australian Experience: Critical Essays on Australian Novels, ed. W.S.Ramson (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), p.311.

³ John B.Beston, "Patrick White's The Vivisector: The Artist in Relation to His Art", ALS 5 (2 October 1971). pp.168-75.

nor is he the only artist, in "one of these fits he remembered May Noble his fellow artist". (p.178)⁴ But to widen the arena thus far is still to treat the book too narrowly. Similarities may be found with all those who have emerged in his earlier pages as "burnt ones"; indeed in many of its aspects it can be traced in all those White regards as instinctively alive. "Every man has a genius though it is not always discoverable. Least of all when choked by the trivialities of daily existence".⁵

A vital part of Hurtle's dualism is to be found in a concern akin to that explored by Lawrence - the need to resolve the contradiction between the urge for shared and reciprocal personal relationships and the danger of damaging the innermost, vulnerable, and sometimes isolating emotions.⁶ If Duffield allows his affections to warp his instinctive judgements he will have damaged this inner truth and in so doing contaminated his art:

The truth in what she [Hero] said didn't help. He could help neither of them, and must resist anyone else's entry into that void in himself which would blaze eventually with light, if he was to be favoured again.

(p.386)

⁴ Patricia Morley claims Caldicott as another. "The letter of Caldicott the pathetic little art dealer who makes a tentative pass at Hurtle reminds us that any sensitive person is an artist in his personal relationships". The Mystery of Unity, Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), p.218.

Brissenden adds the Courtneys to the list. "He [Hurtle] is in a very real sense their work of art". p.310

⁵ Patrick White, Voss (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd., 1957), p.38.

⁶ The analogy Björkstén makes is with Doktor Faustus. "Like the composer Adrian Leverkühn, Hurtle Duffield carries through his philosophy to its ultimate consequences. He too sets aside real contact with living things and people and love in order to dedicate himself to intensive artistic creation". Ingmar Björkstén, Patrick White: A General Introduction, English Ed., (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976), p.94.

The loss implied by Björkstén is a part of the lesson Duffield has to learn but White is also concerned with the more positive qualities in his choices and would agree with R.D.Laing when he says "I would wish to emphasize that our 'normal' 'adjusted' state is too often the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of our true potentialities". R.D.Laing, The Divided Self (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Inc., 1965), p.12.

It is this need to protect the integrity of his response which leads to his failure to meet the demands made on him, and in turn led many critics to see him as callous and self-regarding.⁷ White's evident sympathy for, and empathy with, his protagonist coupled with a failure to observe fully the complexity of Duffield's response to those close to him, meant a tendency on the part of his readers to see him as merely an autobiographical reconstruction, as, that is, excuse-making on the part of the artist.⁸ Although such a view is no longer widely held, sufficient weight has not yet been given to the breadth of the exploration in which White has engaged. He is not concerned only with the perception of the artist, which can be a part of all those instinctively alive, but also with the cruelty of the vivisector. White makes this clear not only in the interweaving of underlying themes, but in specific reference. Beston's

⁷ In 1970 the Swedish Academy decided that it could not award a Nobel Prize to "an author whose latest work elaborates on the not at all attractive conclusion that the artist steps over dead bodies in order to give free sway to life, that he consumes people as the raw material of his art". Björkstén, p.62. Such a response is given fuel by White's comment in Flaws in the Glass, "I tell myself I must not hate human beings", (p.204) but is somewhat softened by a remark made by Dorothy Green after an interview with him in 1981, in which she applies Theodoro Adorno "His love of people as they are stems from his hatred of what they might be". In this she seems closer to the current critical response. "Patrick White's search for truth", National Times (Sydney) 8-14, November 1981, p.54.

⁸ Colmer writes of Duffield as "one whose artistic calling justifies all manner of selfishness, cruelty and manipulation of others". He goes on "White says that the novel 'is about a painter, the one I was not destined to become - another of my frustrations'". John Colmer, Patrick White, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and Christopher Bigsby, Contemporary Writers (London: Methuen & Co.Ltd., 1984), p.55. Patricia Morley sees it more sympathetically. "The Vivisector tends to create such a powerful empathy between Hurtle and the reader that it is easy for us to shrug off (as the artist does, before his stroke) the criticism levelled at Hurtle through the fictional situations". "Doppelganger's Dilemma: Artist and Man: 'The Vivisector'", Queen's Quarterly 78 (Autumn 1971), pp.407-20. In an interview given in 1976 White lent more credence to those who claim this as autobiography. "My painter is pure fiction. Or let us say that if he is anyone he is me, as I always wanted to be a painter so much more than a writer. Unfortunately I couldn't paint, and I could write. Perhaps in this book I am working off the longing to paint". Elizabeth Riddell, Australian (1 August 1976), p.15.

examples lie on the surface of the novel, but there is another buried a little deeper. During the pivotal scene at Ironstone Gorge which brings to a climax Hurtle's early formative years, Nance Lightfoot recalls her first sexual encounter. It took place in the idyllic setting of a rare childhood holiday. She and her family camped beside the sea. Lulled by the soft air, Nance romances of the strange man, later wrongly encapsulated in Hurtle, who will take her virginity.⁹ Her dreams are promptly dissipated:

I learned about it but it was Dadda who taught me. It was the hooks he taught me with first. As he dragged 'em out of their pink gills. 'They don't feel nothin', he said, 'not if you're quick, fish is made for us to eat'. Course I loved fish. I was always hungry. I loved that fresh fish tastun of the sea after the rancid salt mutton at home. But the hook frightened me, she said, all ways. Dadda said: 'All you gotter do is not think about it . . . He [Hurtle] wanted to participate in Nance's life as he hadn't before, although he had been her lover. He knew every possible movement of her ribs, every reflection of her skin. He had torn the hook out of her gills; he had disembowelled her while still alive; he had watched her no less cruel dissection by the knives of light. (pp.256-7)

It is the relative insignificance of Pa Lightfoot as a character that is important here. He is so minor a figure that he only appears through his daughter's reminiscence. His vivisectionist qualities are not therefore a further aspect of characterisation as is the case in Mrs Courtney. It seems then a fair assumption to see him as representative of a trait. While it may be unduly destructive to equate fatherly affection with brutal rape it seems at this point that White is emphasising only one aspect of a dualistic concern. He is saying here, as elsewhere, that while actual physical rape by one member of a family upon another may be rare, the essential qualities of the rapist are to be found within us

⁹ Nance Lightfoot conceives of Hurtle as the "unprofessed factor" discussed by Beatson, p.167. In the characterisation of Nance the source of further mystical and spiritual awareness is to be found in romance. Hurtle is to her as Madeline is to Amy Parker. Hurtle inevitably fails to fulfil a dream in which he only participates through accident. "It was that old digger's coat you was wearun I got a sight of it it had the green look of old pennies as I'd always imagined and nothin you did nor said would 'uv thrown me off", p.257.

all.¹⁰ We are all guilty of plundering the core of innocence and truth to be found in those closest to us. In The Vivisector White uses the life of Hurtle Duffield to exemplify the pressures which cause even the most sensitive to participate in such brutality. At almost the end of his life Hurtle is still searching for a means of sharing in such innocence without damaging its core. Aware of the dangerous attraction his "spiritual child" (p.469) has for him he persuades his sister to live with him and thereby protect him from his own desires. "At least by his sister's presence Kathy Volkov would be protected from debauch and himself from destruction". (p.468) Seemingly deliberately Rhoda refuses her help and he and Kathy become lovers. The further and universal quality of this is suggested by the fact that it is the child who provokes the situation. "At least he was technically, the passive one; he could console himself morally with that: he hadn't attempted". (p.483) It is not however in the specifically sexual act that his self-disgust is aroused:

"Don't you like me?" she asked between mouthfuls. From amongst the wreckage of what he had aspired to, he didn't. He had hoped to love, and not possess her. (p.484)

To equate Duffield with the artist and through him with God is to see only one of his functions. The necessity for the artist to keep the integrity of his art is essential to this book as elsewhere, but it is only a part of a wider and continuing concern.¹¹ White is using the

¹⁰ Beatson rightly states that "White's characters, explicitly or implicitly, are groping to find some satisfactory answer to the existential or ontological question: who am I?" p.145. White, however, comes even closer to Laing's position in this novel, when he appears to feel the threat in family relationships as akin to that discussed by Laing in The Divided Self, where he sees the individual's "own true possibilities" as "being smothered, strangled, murdered". What the family wants from the individual he says is "a compliant false self", p.193. In Flaws in the Glass White writes of a similar impulse "knowing in my irrational depths what it is to commit a murder, or be murdered". p.34.

¹¹ Buitenhuis writes: "This romantic view of the artist surely received its death blow in Europe with Cubism in painting and Joyce in fiction. But Patrick White can go on writing as if the news never reached him". Peter Buitenhuis, "Gritty glimpses of Heaven and Hell", Globe and Mail (8 August 1970), p.11.

attempted resolution of the dualistic aspects of the nature of the artist as a means of illuminating the human condition. Hurtle Duffield's need to reach an equilibrium between the forces of the intellect and those of the instinct must be considered in the context of this further aspect of dualism. In this work the instinct can most nearly be equated with "that void in himself which would blaze eventually with light (p.484), and the intellect with the pressures that society, and his own desires as a social animal can exert on him. At first sight the second of these equations seems questionable, particularly as it clearly links sexual response with the intellect rather than the instinct. Further, his artistic and sexual needs are complicated by the ways in which both are linked to the eye of the vivisector, and, by extension with guilt. Beatson connects Hurtle with Voss and with Elizabeth Hunter in finding that for all three guilt "is an essential rather than an accidental aspect of their natures".¹² Guilt is a part of both the intellect and the instinct, it corrupts but it also creates. The creativity which White explores is that of the artist, but it is also that of the individual. It is too easy to misconstrue the implicit meanings to be found in his work precisely because they strike at the areas of our deepest fears. It is easier to accept Hurtle's difficulties and perversities as those of the artist alone. And certainly it is true that the extra sensitivity and perception of the artist, together with the need to protect his art, does exacerbate an already almost insoluble problem.

While critical opinion has tended to allow Hurtle's function as an artist to obscure this further dimension, it has been right in seeing that the need to reconcile the dual aspects of his nature lies at the heart of

¹² Beatson goes on to sum up the viewpoint of many critics when he says: "There is in fact a profound metaphysical and temperamental ambivalence running through White's novels. The necessity of embracing the body is coupled, from his earliest books, with a deep aversion to it", The Eye of the Mandala, pp.34-47.

the meaning of this work. There is, however, no clear and concise definition with which to label this fundamental dichotomy. It is a division which in its broadest sense could be seen as the Apollonian as against the Dionysiac, but which functions in the course of this novel in a multiplicity of ways which can include the mundane and the trivial:

The grocer would have liked to assess the stranger's [Duffield's] status but it wasn't easy. Too many contradictions: good clothes, not old either, probably very good before sloppiness set in; good hat too, of an excellent felt, the band of which had been allowed to get sweaty; made-to-order brogues with white scars in the tan, and laces tied anyhow. (p.265)

In the context of the novel the length of the hair and the cut of the coat are used to exemplify that measure of reconciliation between the dual aspects of his nature which Duffield has succeeded in reaching. It is a reconciliation which is endorsed at this point by the use of the house which fronts on to Flint Street and backs onto Chubb Street. He is to live there for the rest of his life. Chubb Street is used throughout the novel to represent instinctual life, an embodiment which is also made with clothes in which "sloppiness had set in". Flint Street, at least partially, represents the intellect.¹³ Here however a further complexity must be considered, for both aspects of his nature have another and further dimension which may be loosely linked with the class struggle. Chubb Street, through its working-class associations, can be clearly seen as typifying that side of Duffield's nature which stems from his Cox Street beginnings, and which through its rootedness can be seen as responsible for the vitality which supplies the driving force behind his art:

¹³ Kiernan points to a different equation but one which fulfils a similar function. "Sunnydale, with its Boudin, octagonal room, library of Australiana, and garden, stands in contrast to the Duffield House with its piles of empty bottles under the pepper tree, the fowls and the rusting stove in the back yard. Memorably the two houses embody Hurtle's two selves: the natural Duffield and the social Courtney, and express his conflicting impulses to surrender to the flow of life, or to impose his will on experience and control and shape it". Referring to Chubb Street he goes on: "This setting externalises his awareness of himself as Duffield/Courtney . . . [it] is a quasi-pastoral retreat from the drab anonymity of the city". Brian Kiernan, Patrick White, ed. A.N. Jeffares, Macmillan Commonwealth Writers Series (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980), pp.104-106.

The back staircase to his house opened on Chubb's Lane. Here the clothes line and corrugated iron took over; ladies called to one another over collapsing paling fences; the go-carts were parked and serviced, and dragged out on shrieking wheels. In the evening the young girls hung around in clusters, sucking oranges, sharing fashion mags, and criticising one another's hair as though they had been artists. There was a mingled smell of poor washing, sump oil, rotting vegetables, goatish male bodies, soggy female armpits in Chubb's Lane. (p.274)

At other points in the novel he recharges his creative force through mingling with the life of the streets. More fully in The Vivisector than in any other of his novels Australian society at every level is explored and characterised." It is made clear throughout that such moments have a validity and force which is necessary not only to Duffield, but also to White himself. But the house is a symbol of a two-way process. The quotation goes on, "the two faces of his house complemented each other; one taken away might have upsed the balance: together they made what was necessary for his fulfilment and happiness". The intellect in this novel has an element which can also be equated with the middle-class habit of luxury, and which returns again in The Eye of the Storm. An earlier usage, that seen in The Solid Mandala, most particularly in Waldo Brown, occurs here but not usually in the person of the central protagonist. Here it is found most obviously in Olivia Davenport, a character who has much in common with Hermione Roddice, and in areas of the characterisation of Rhoda and Hero. For both Olivia and Hero there is also a specifically sexual element which bears a close resemblance to Lawrence's attack on "sex in the head". In Duffield the opposition to the instinctive is most nearly found in the continuing fascination exerted by the possibilities to be found in middle-class living. It is, however, important to recognise that Duffield is a successful artist, successful not only in the worldly sense but also in the eyes of his creator. It is this that separates him from his predecessors, and emphasises the need for a necessary tension between the valid function of the intellect and its misuse.

In the early chapters of the book, Hurtle is impregnated with the essence of a certain attitude to life:

She [Mrs Courtney] opened two big wardrobes in which her dresses were hanging . . .

'Don't be afraid to touch, darling', she coaxed and cooed, 'if it will give pleasure' . . .

In fact, Mrs Courtney did something unexpected and very strange. She suddenly moved her hand to the nape of his neck, and shoved his head in amongst the limp dresses. The sensation was at first one of blinding, then of a delicious suffocation as his face was swallowed by the scented silky darkness, through which Mrs Courtney's voice continued somewhere rustling.

As he went out he heard Mrs Courtney, their mother, lower her voice for her maid, and say: 'Were you surprised at what I did? Children are like puppies, you know. And a new puppy can be attached to his owner by teaching him to recognize the owner's scent. Or so I'm told'. (pp.90-91)

Throughout Duffield's life Maman, and in a slightly different context, the fields of Mumbelong, are used to evoke the continuing pull of an ethos which is frequently antagonistic to the other side of his nature, that approximately represented by Ma Duffield and Chubb Street. Thus Hurtle's dualism is frequently clarified by the use of external contrasts. Ma Duffield represents an earthy vitalism which links her with Alma Lusty, Amy Parker and Mrs Godbold, while Maman is most usually used to emphasise a middle class acquisitiveness and false gentility.¹⁴ This is, however, no simple equation. There are affirmative values to be gained from the Courtney side of his nature. Mumbelong, particularly, is used throughout to symbolize the freshness and innocence of childhood and the re-creative sources of nature. We are not to be offered a simple black-and-white opposition between two attitudes to life, one of which is right and the other wrong. It is not even sufficient to say that White is showing us both elements which deserve our sympathy. Rather it is, as always, a resolution of opposing values which he seeks, through the person of his central protagonist. Thus when Mrs Courtney thrusts the

¹⁴ "White has a deep conviction, which for the most part he manages to express without lapsing into the conventional sentimentalities, that unaffected goodness is more likely to be found among the members of the working or lower middle class than among the wealthy, the established, the sophisticated or the intellectual. He admires the vitality and directness of lower-class life, but he hates the vulgarity and mindless emptiness of 'mass' culture just as he despises middle-class snobbery and nouveau riche pretentiousness". Brissenden, p.315.

head of her newly acquired "son" amongst her scented dresses she is indoctrinating him with a set of values which contain a purposive intellectual and cultural tradition, just as it also holds certain dangers. Through his transposition to the Courtney household Hurtle is able to make contact with an aesthetic world, which would otherwise have been closed to him.¹⁵ While it is perhaps true to say that there is insufficient evidence in the novel of Duffield's awareness of other artists, we are given scenes during his life as a Courtney which show not only his developing artistic sensibility, but also his opportunities to learn to use the tools of his craft.¹⁶ None of this potential would have been open to him in the closed circle of his beginnings. Neither are we intended to see Cox Street as necessarily able to maintain contact with a fruitful and vigorous instinctive life:

He loved the feel of a smooth stone, or to take a flower to pieces to see what was inside. He loved the pepper tree breaking into light, and the white hens rustling by moonlight in the black branches, and the sleepy sound of the hen shit dropping. He could do nothing about it, though. Not yet. He could only carry all of it in his head. Not talk about it. Because Ma and Pa would not have understood. They talked about what was "right" and "honest", and the price of things, but people looked down at their plates if you said something was "beautiful". (p.17)

But it is his early immersion in a way of life which has its roots in the essential necessities of living which has enabled his art to develop. White sees wealth as tending to cushion and devalue experience. He makes

¹⁵ "He is not only fascinated by the glimpse he is given into this new world of beauty, order, colour, and sensuous richness, but also he recognises it immediately if subconsciously, as a world to which he belongs". Ibid., p.317.

¹⁶ "I had imagined that if I could acquire the technique I might give visual expression to what I have inside me, and that the physical act of painting would exhilarate me far more than the grinding away at grey, bronchial prose. . . . Some painters have told me that Hurtle Duffield is not a painter, others that he is". Flaws in the Glass, p.150.
"The Vivisector (1970) shows White at the height of his powers, displaying a glittering constellation of gifts. . . . The mode is examined through an intensely conceived and powerfully realised experience of the art of painting". William Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), p.96.
 "It is hard to think of another novelist who could with equal success transpose the experience of one art into the medium of another". Ibid., p.102.

this theme most explicit in the scenes at Ironstone. At the point that these occur Hurtle has just made the second of the three major breaks in his life. In the first he is taken from his parents by blood and transplanted to the more obviously cultured climate in which he is to spend the rest of his childhood.¹⁷ In the second he seemingly heartlessly rejects his adopted family, and after an unrecorded spell of war service returns to Sydney, where he lives for some time in squalor and poverty. In the third he breaks with Nance and with his own "self-love".

Again the two sides of his nature are being contrasted, this time by a complex use of time shifts. The luxuries of his time at the Courtney's are followed by the degradation of his life as the "ponce" of Nance Lightfoot. This rapid juxtaposition is also a part of Duffield's development as an artist, but the point that is important here is that he recognizes his need to break away from the cloying effects which can be the result of the comforts brought by wealth:

He decided to get up early the following morning; in fact, he was seldom seduced into lingering on the ridge of potato-sacks on which he had woken. An intensifying golden light was dusting the pelt of that lean animal his body. Stroking, scratching it, he was so detached it owed him nothing but its captivity under a roof. His tactile mind was the part of him he cosseted: encouraging it to reach out, to cut through the webs of dew, to find moisture in the slippery leaves, the swords of grass, before the sun had sucked it up. (p.229)

Later, when Duffield has reached a point nearer to equilibrium, he no longer needs to plumb the depths of degradation, as experienced at Ironstone, as an antidote to the dangers of luxury, but he continues to keep alive the Chubb Street element in the house which fronts on to Flint Street. White appears to be reminding us that materialism, in its various forms, is a constant danger, most specifically to the artist,

¹⁷ The atmosphere of his Courtney childhood seems "cultured" in more than one sense. Alongside the possibilities, and they are deliberately tentative, of a wider educational background than would earlier have been possible, was a sense of the hot-house, of an artificial cushioning.

whether it attacks through the flattery of dealers and admirers, or through the emasculating comforts to be found in the homes of the middle-class. The Chubb Street image is at the heart of his recognition of a similar dichotomy within himself:

The Puritan within me has always wrestled with the sensualist. As a child I felt ashamed of my parents' affluence. I was aware of a formless misery as well as material distress the other side of the palisade protecting the lives of the favoured few.

(Flaws in the Glass, p.151)

It is the need to combat this easeful living, in its widest sense, that leads to much of the seemingly heartless behaviour for which Duffield is blamed. For it is not only through the comforts of materialism that a loss of integrity can occur, but also through the soporific effects which affection, as well as fashionable praise can cause. To see this division as a class equation is disastrously to over-simplify. It is more nearly an attitude of mind, which, because it is frequently dependent on wealth, is usually the prerogative of the middle and upper classes. This attitude is itself a further division of that aspect of the over-indulgence of the intellect to be seen in Waldo Brown, a wallowing in luxuries which can create a separation from the life-force. Similarly, it is not that White is saying that a life of poverty necessarily results in an increase in instinctive awareness, but rather that a lack of material comforts, while creating deprivations, can also create a closer bond with those needs which are at the roots of our being.

II

The novel opens with a seemingly naturalistic descriptive account of the small child, Hurtle Duffield, his family life, and its immediate surroundings. It is, in many ways, the most lyrical, and also the most traditional, opening of any of White's novels. Its simplicity reflects the clear-sighted and unambiguous response of its child protagonist.

The first paragraph immediately introduces the theme of apartness. "The fowls were fluffing in the sun: that crook-neck white pullet mummy said she would hit on the head if only she had the courage to: but she hadn't. (p.7)¹⁸

As so often before the work is to concern the outsider, the non-conformist, the one who will suffer because he is not prepared, or not able, to accept the conformity of "the Great Australian Emptiness in which the mind is the least of possessions".¹⁹

The child Duffield is set against a background which, from the first, contains two strongly contrasting elements; elements which are to be suggested by the opposition between the two mothers. Thus our growing awareness of Hurtle's struggles to obtain the completeness which a resolution of his dualism will eventually bring, is created most explicitly, by the contrast between the two aspects of his life. Hurtle's two mothers are used to establish two opposing life patterns. Mrs Courtney, evokes a way of life, which, while containing areas of sensitivity unknown in the work-a-day world of Cox Street, also

¹⁸ The immediate application of the white pullet is clearly to Hurtle, the outsider, the artist, but later it will become apparent that it is also to the deformed Rhoda who is through suffering given instinctive awareness.

¹⁹ Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son", Australian Letters, 1 (3 April 1958), pp.37-40.

incorporates hypocrisy and selfishness. Mrs Duffield continues the tradition of the earth-mother first found in Alma Lusty and later to be followed by Nance Lightfoot. Her love for her son includes a sensual rapport, and repose, which Hurtle is never to find so satisfactorily again, and which he continues to seek:

He began to smooch around Mumma. 'Oh I'm exhausted, Hurt dear!' She sighed, but laughed, and took him on her lap in spite of the next baby inside. 'You're too big.' She wasn't complaining . . .

It was so beautiful on the grey splintery old veranda towards sunset.

'Will I be a gentleman?'

'That's up to you'.

'And handsome?'

'I hope not', Mumma shouted. 'You're bold enough. Anythin more would be too much'.

After they had fought and kissed together, she sighed and said: 'It's the edgercation that counts'.

It sounded solemn, and he didn't altogether understand what it meant, nor want to. Not as the sun and the sunflowers were melting together, and he lay against Mumma's white soapy neck.

(pp.12-13)

Her inarticulate awareness also encompasses, not only the recognition that Hurtle is gifted beyond the ordinary, but a fear for the pain that his gifts may bring. Her pride in her talented son does not blind her to the dangers which are inherent in being "different". White is careful, however, to make this perception credible in a character verbally ill at ease. Her awareness is imparted through action which in turn conveys both a surface brusquerie and an inner tenderness. The element of pride, which, conversely, also exists, is from the first associated with the "gentlemanly". Hurtle is felt to have inherited his talents from his paternal grandfather, as he inherits, if in a slightly changed form the name Hertel:

'Well', He [Pa Duffield] might sweat it out at last, 'How many lessons'll the parson take to turn you into a gentleman?' And once he added, as a surprise; 'the parson wouldn't like to admit, but you might get more of it from your dad. It's the blood, see?' (p.16)

All that remains of this heritage is the contents of the box which father and son examine in the quiet of the Sunday afternoons, times in which they reach their only moments of rapport. The box contains Pa Duffield's

attempts to bring into a harsh and functional present, mementoes from a vanished but gentler past. The locket, the hair of the sister buried at sea, the photograph of his mother "her hands spread out against her skirt", together create a visual record of an inarticulate man, a man who through this shared experience bound up in chosen objects is stumblingly moving into the realm of the artist. Through the means of a few relics he is also a communicator and a reservoir of felt and remembered experience.²⁰

When Hurtle leaves Cox Street to go to the Courtneys', Pa Duffield gives him a ring which is a signifier of his lost aristocratic inheritance. It is identical to one owned by Harry Courtney and thus suggests a common ancestry.²¹ During the final scene with Nance Lightfoot, Hurtle is to throw the ring away and with it presumably the last traces of his beginnings. It is as Nance searches for it that she falls to her death. Significant though these moments seem intended to be, and it is also at this point that Duffield destroys his self-portrait, during the rest of the novel the items are largely forgotten. It may be that White loses interest in his original intention, certainly there is

²⁰ The importance of these ritualistic almost mystical occasions in the life of the young Hurtle is endorsed by the account of a similar experience in Flaws in the Glass. In White's case the ceremony is shared with his mother's black handyman, another of the important figures in his childhood. "I loved Sol The more important, the mystical tie with Solomon Rakooka, arose from his having sailed the seas and called at foreign ports, where he had collected a variety of objects kept in a box in the small brown room opening on our backyard . . . Sol used to bring out his box and we sat together on the step going through his treasures. pp.22-23;

²¹ Baker finds in the hawk's head engraved on the ring a kin-ship with the crypto-eagle who aspired to soar in A Fringe of Leaves, and sees both as exemplifying what he refers to as Romantic Prometheanism. "Duffield's Romantic heritage encompasses both an aristocratic grandfather whose strenuous questing to the centre of Australia (p.5) culminated in a 'stroke' The willingness to undertake the painful journey towards the 'core of reality' or 'the silence' where 'truth breeds' (p.535) beyond the Babel of human voices and conventional values is emblemized by Duffield when he adopts the posture of the tortured Prometheus whose liver was torn out daily by Jove's eagle". Robert S. Baker, "Romantic Onanism in Patrick White's The Vivisector", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 21, pp.206-207.

some loss of clarity in the handling of the material. It is clear in the larger context of the novel that Duffield's vitalism is seen as a part of his blood heritage and is closely related to White's Chubb Street idealism in which the daily concerns of the working people are literally "rivers of life". (p.579) But at this point the issues are confused by an implication of nature rather than nurture. Elsewhere, White seems to want to associate a controlled, intellectual sensitivity of response, however ironically motivated, with the middle-class ethos of the Courtneys, while retaining an instinctive awareness for the Duffield side of Hurtle's nature. The implication that he is actually a part of the fairy-tale heritage of undisclosed "blueblood" tends to confuse without adding to the thematic intentions of the work, except perhaps by suggesting that Hurtle's dualism was from the first inherent in his nature, a fundamental need at the heart of the artist, and is merely exacerbated by his upbringing. Certainly it is the "Parramatta Road" grandfather who has given his grandson the enquiring mind which enables him to benefit from his subsequent education. That this potential is present from the beginning is indicated by such incidents as Hurtle's precocious self-taught reading and his aptitude in his Latin lessons with the rector. It is these lessons which result in the first use of the "two voices" which are a further sign of a fundamental dualism:

So Hurtle Courtney Duffield gave up at last. He stood in the street, the two languages he knew fighting for possession of him. At the worst, though brief moment, when it seemed unlikely he would ever succeed in communicating through either tongue, he heard himself blubbering. (p.128)

22 White's early experience at Cambridge appears to have been the catalyst for his tendency to see dualism as symbolised by the use of two languages. In his own case, and partially in Hurtle's, he seems to see the widening of the possible aspects of self which the use of more than one language may encourage, as a stage on the way towards self-understanding. "I did not question the darkness in my dichotomy, though already I had begun the inevitably painful search for the twin who might bring a softer light to bear on my bleakly illuminated darkness. Looking back, the two languages I read at Cambridge were in some sense complementary, and part of the blundering search for a means of self-expression and fulfilment". Later he says "Language troubles have widened the split in my nature", Flaws in the Glass, pp.35-41.

Hurtle's later attempts to synthesize the two aspects of his nature, at first emerge as a recognition that they both exist. They are also an early indication of his awareness of the need to appear to fit into the surroundings in which he finds himself. Already the need for the sensitive to protect the innermost core of innocence and truth which lies within is being made apparent. It is this core which must be retained undamaged if the ultimate union with the unknown is to take place.

Just as the two mothers are used to clarify this fundamental dichotomy, so they are also intended to illuminate White's concern with family relationships. The two families of which Hurtle forms a part are used to show how incidental to Hurtle's needs and responsibilities are the effects of the blood-tie. Rhoda, particularly, emphasises this theme.²³ She is Hurtle's sister, a term which he uses at times ironically and at times with the rights which affection has brought:

He [Hurtle] hated Rhoda, the reflection of his complacency: when, Rhoda, the reality, not Kathy Volkov, the figment, was what he had been given to love. He did, of course, love her, because she was his sister: or he would learn to under the dictatorship of the past. (p.529) 24

That this is largely an affection produced by a shared past and a later sense of responsibility is shown in the antipathy found in their early

²³ The similarities between White's families are frequently commented upon, "a typical family in White's novel: a dominating mother, a father who provides money and a brother and sister who are at opposite poles". Björkstén, p.95.

²⁴ "Even with Rhoda with whom, for all their malicious differences, he had an intimate, intuitive understanding - 'because total love must be resisted: it is overwhelming, like religion' (p.184)", Walsh, p.100. "In the long run, however, he realizes that Rhoda, the reality who contests his complacency, not Katherine Volkhov (sic), 'was what he had been given to love. (V p.529)", Veronica Brady, "Patrick White and The Question of Woman", Who is She?, ed. Shirley Walker (St Lucia Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1983), p.180.

meetings.²⁵ There is, however, a sense in which they are both outsiders, and are, therefore, related by suffering. Both are also, in a sense, artists. Rhoda through the humiliation and pain of her deformity is forced up against the bare bones of her own experience in a way which relates to the artist-vision of her brother. Her eye shares some of the steeliness of the vivisector. Further she learns to play the part of the wise fool, a role she shares with Lotte Lippmann. Both bring uncomfortable insights to their audiences. She is also a part of the motif represented by the cats, itself clearly linked to the visionary. Her first introduction shows her with a kitten, an animal which is soon to be run over, and she is both representative of suffering humanity as portrayed in the bagful of cats, and omniscient in her self-imposed task of rescuing and feeding Sydney's strays. Hurtle's vacillating feelings for Rhoda are shown most clearly by her recurrence as a subject in his painting, particularly in the 'Pythoness' series. She and her mother are also the first to appreciate Hurtle's potential as both vivisector and artist. It is through their reactions that the fear and aversion that his artistic needs can arouse in others are first made apparent. After the suicide of his tutor, Hurtle turns to paint, to record and explore the experience. Mrs Courtney is the first to see it:

As though to illustrate her change of mind she went and wrenched at the switch beside the door. They were both wincing in the sudden light. Then he watched her get the horrors. 'You abominable child', she almost screamed. (p.101)

It is not however his first wall painting:

She [Ma Duffield] left off shouting and began staring at the wall. It was the wall where you had drawn the chandelier. You had never been able to rub it out, to make room for other things; it was still there though grubbier. You had drawn over it what Mumma called 'the Mad Eye'. And now you were staring at each other eye to eye, through the stable door, only Mumma couldn't see; she was looking frightened and again like Mumma. (p.70)

²⁵ An echo of this is found in Flaws in the Glass. "The siblings fought bitterly till reconciled in later life by blood and childhood in common", p.4.

Both mothers are disturbed by the vivisectionist qualities they recognize in the painter; for both, the fear stems primarily from the awareness of separation from the child they think of as their son.

Related to this is the pervasive theme of bought affection. Hurtle is sold by his parents for the explicitly stated sum of 'five hundred pound'. Hurtle's awareness of this is restated continually. Later a similar transaction occurs with the use of 'Alice-Soso, the aboriginal daughter'. When she becomes a nuisance to the Pavloussis, she is sent back to the settlement with an accompanying cheque. Her return to her natural mother is seen as significantly related to the treatment of the equally inconvenient cats. Peter Beatson comments:

The drowning of the Pavloussis' cats by the disillusioned Cosmos impels Hurtle to paint 'Infinity of Cats' which continues the line of thought begun in 'Lantana Lovers'. It shows the parallel between the plight of these unlovely animals being drowned in the name of love by a wilful human being, and the plight of himself and Hero in particular, and humanity in general, being cast into the ocean of existence by an equally arbitrary Deity.²⁶

The young Duffield is literally 'hurtled', from the arms of one set of parents to those of another. The omniscient Deity presiding at this point in his fate is the power of the cheque, a power enforced by fear and conversely affection. His love can be bartered. Sympathetic though White may be to Ma Duffield, and he is less kindly to Pa, he does not obscure the basic rejection which occurs when the parents accept money in return for their child.²⁷ Similarly, it is made clear that the desire for a son on the part of Alfreda Courtney is fundamentally acquisitive. Amongst the grandeur of the Courtney household Hurtle can be matched to his setting as the 'crookback' Rhoda cannot.

²⁶ Beatson, p.145.

²⁷ Walsh sees this rather differently, "his father's desperate, unavailing opposition, and with his mother's anguished but absolute support". p.98.

Such a depiction of the nature of love casts considerable doubts on Hurtle's responsibility for reciprocation; for we are not being shown his frequent failures to return affection as an entirely, or even primarily, negative thing. His need to keep his inner self inviolate is established in the wider context of the loves and needs of the characters that surround him. White is at this point reconsidering, or rather re-illuminating, the problems which concerned him with Stan Parker. We are not intended to see Hurtle's failures in affection in a vacuum, but rather as a part of a commendable refusal to use others in the socially acceptable setting of close relationships. Only those characters in the work who are themselves free, Mrs Volkov, Cutbush and in some measure, Rhoda and Kathy, are able to offer affection without the strings of reciprocation attached.

Both the fathers in this situation are seen as basically ineffectual. Harry Courtney is to appear again, almost unchanged, as Alfred Hunter in The Eye of the Storm. Too little attention is paid to him for the reader to be wholly sure of his role, but he seems intended to epitomize a kindly squirearchical element in the middle-class ethos.²⁸ Hurtle's scenes with him almost all take place out of doors and occur against a background of earthy naturalism, whether through its association with animal life, natural beauty, or a shared, almost coarse, manliness. Like Stan Parker, he fails to establish a moment of spoken communication with his son, but he does feel free to refer to his deepest feelings in the letters which he sends to Hurtle during the latter's war service:

²⁸ Throughout White's fiction the reader is left with a strong sense that family relationships are firmly based on White's own. Flaws in the Glass bears this out, particularly with the parents, and further in that there is a strong sense of lost opportunity in the relationship between father and son. "I would have liked to tear off the rabbitskin glove he was wearing and hold the sunburnt hand to my cheek". "I might have loved Dicky had I dared and had we been able to talk to one another". pp.14-15.

I am writing to you in the office after breakfast: it is cold but dry, winter weather. I went down at sunrise and forked out their ensilage to a paddockful of sturdy young Angus bulls I am proud to think I bred. Life on the land continually offers a sense of creation, power I hesitate to say: omnipotence. Standing on the dray under the winter sun this morning, I found myself longing for the time when you will inherit Sevenoaks and experience this for yourself. (p.178)

Hurtle does not inherit Sevenoaks. In fact, he never sees it.

His father's omnipotence, with an irony Harry himself realises, is closely followed by a stroke. It is not possible to inherit the values for which Hurtle spends his life struggling. Harry Courtney, like Alfred Hunter, retreats in his last years to his estates. His wife, in common with Elizabeth Hunter, has an aversion to the countryside that is only mitigated in the latter case by the process of growth experienced during her husband's fatal illness. Relatively rare in this novel though White's references to the rural life may be, where they do occur they appear to be used with affirmation. "This country of the mind", (Flaws in the Glass, p.14). But it is hesitant. It seems that White wishes to establish a sense of comfort and continuity through the recreative sources of the 'refreshed landscape', but wishes them to be set against a more realistic assessment of individual fulfilment. Elsewhere he is more astringent:

In spite of so much that was heartening in the way of humble human contacts, trees growing, shrubs flowering, and the books I wrote chiefly as an escape, I expect into a more vital world, I hated the years we spent at Castle Hill. It was too oppressive. In that clay hollow, freezing in the winter, breathless in summer, amongst the heavy argot-bearing paspalum, hassocks of Cape weed, rusty rye grass, Patterson's curse. I was constantly ill with asthma. We seemed almost waist-deep in weed.

(Flaws in the Glass, p.139)

In spite of the caustic tone here, the refusal of Elizabeth Hunter and Alvira Courtney to share in this aspect of their husbands' natures can be seen as implying a lack of visionary awareness. Writing of his own life he says, "Till well into my life, houses, places, landscape meant more to me than people . . . it was landscape more than anything which drew me back", (Flaws in the Glass, p.16).

The continuing association between Harry and Angus bulls, despite the sense of symbolic strain it creates, allows an equation to be made between the need to breed the perfect bull and the need for Hurtle to inherit Sevenoaks. The theme of the artist is played here in a minor key, but the struggle to perfect the line associates Harry with creativity in an affirmative yet also a destructive sense. It is the artificial concomitant of art which is used here, as well as the praiseworthy struggle of the artist towards perfection. As such it prevents him from participating in a natural order already devalued by the 'buying' of a son. White is, however, through the care with which he characterises Harry's gentleness and lack of obvious acquisitiveness able to retain the reader's sympathy, while, conversely bringing him to realize that Harry too is forcing Hurtle to a pattern of his own choosing. Hurtle the artist, and perhaps also the man, is forced to reject the love of his second family. While it is easy to recognize the reasons for those reactions which find Hurtle unnecessarily destructive, the damaging nature of the love that is offered has not always been noted. Hurtle does not leave the Courtney household through an insensitivity of response. On the contrary, his decision is provoked through an incestuous scene in which Alvira uses the affection brought about by their shared relationship to attempt seduction:

The house was so warm, so suffocating, smelling of dust in spite of a team of maids, he could have choked on his way to his room. The half darkness through which he was climbing seemed to be developing an inescapable form: of a great padded dome, or quilted egg, or womb, such as he had seen in that da Vinci drawing. He continued dragging round the spiral, always without arriving, while outside the meticulous womb, men were fighting, killing, to live to fuck to live.

He looked round, half expecting to see the womb had been split by his thought; but the darkness held. . . .

She didn't wait for him to turn, but said in a congested voice: 'Tell me what it is that makes you unhappy Hurtle. I have a right to know'. . . .

She had put on a gown she sometimes rested in, and to which she would refer as 'that old frightful idiosyncrasy of mine': a field of fading rose, its seed-pearl flowerets unravelling from their tarnished stalks. She had done her hair sleeker than he had ever seen it, which made her head look smaller, almost school-

girlish. Of course her eyes were older than any girl's. But not old. They seemed to have been refreshed: he saw them as unset jewels in shallows of clear water.

'Tell me what it is', she ordered him for the second time. 'Try to forget I'm your mother'.

She was obviously disturbed. Alfreda Courtney tended to avoid matters of importance, . . .

Till here she was: taking the plunge.

'But you're not my mother'. He didn't know which of them he was rescuing

'You're right', she said, frowning, or twitching. 'You're not my son. If you had been, I wonder whether you would have loved me more - or less'. . . .

Her fingers 'still quivering and preparing to discover', were playing on the skin of his arm.

'Give me-' she said, 'let me hold your head'.

She didn't wait for a reply, but took it in her hands, as though it were a fruit, or goblet. She began gulping at his mouth: they were devouring with their two mouths a swelling, over-ripened, suddenly sickening-pulp.

He spat her out.

(pp.170-172)

Nor is he intending the incestuous nature of the act to be its greatest danger. Secure in his room after his rejection of Alvira, Hurtle undresses his "hatefully immaculate body". (p.172)²⁹ The inference is the opposite of that which follows his first sexual encounter with Kathy Volkov, itself a direct parallel to the present scene. This time Hurtle's failure occurs through his rejection of an act, which, while in this context justifiably "sickening" may also contain an element of humanity.³⁰

²⁹ In this Hurtle is akin to "the young man", participation involves the potentially hurtful, an exposure of his inviolate self. "The painful part about the need to participate in life does not amount to simply being alive but to being forced to participate in the process of exposure". May Brit Akerholt, "Structure and Themes in Patrick White's Four Plays", A Critical Symposium, ed. R.Shepherd and K.Singh with an introduction by John Barnes (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978), p.52.

³⁰ Writing in Flaws in the Glass of his relationship with his nurse Lizzie Clark for whom he felt a deep and lifelong affection ("All the genuine love in me was directed at this substitute for a mother", p.14) White refers to an element of their relationship which seems to support the affirmation which is found here and which appears to have been the genesis of the early hint of incest between Hurtle and Alvira "Suddenly Maman went: 'Mm-mm-hmmm!' rising to a high note. She sucked in the chocolate so quickly his tongue almost followed it", p.128. In Flaws in the Glass he writes "I don't know how she won me over, perhaps by the wet kisses she planted on my unyielding mouth, drawing me out of myself until we were united in a common wet", p.15. In neither case does he seem opposed to a heavily sexual element in a relationship traditionally exempt from such expression.

His rejection allows him to remain inviolate at the expense of another. It does not lessen our awareness of the destructive nature of Alvira's act to recognize that it was also an outward sign of a deep and pitiful need.³¹ There is also a suggestion that the sexual act itself might have brought a measure of fulfilment and increased awareness. White is indicating, on the one hand, that it is necessary to participate to the full in the sensual areas of our natures and conversely, that by doing so we damage others and ourselves. Throughout the scene there is a deliberate juxtaposition of imagery in which specifically sexual response is allied to reference to motherhood and the womb. Beatson goes further than this:

The driving force of The Vivisector is the displacement of spiritual need into sexuality. All the women in the book make demands on Hurtle which begin as erotic, but eventually reveal a hidden factor that carries them into another dimension. Mrs Courtney looks through, rather than at, the men in her life. She is hunting for something which is still couched in purely sentimental or spiritual terms, something that is not yet understood as spiritual. This impulse drives her, after her marriage has dried up, to make incestuous movements in Hurtle's direction, and finally leads her to marry the young Julian Boileau.³²

By her action Alvira effectively breaks her relationship with her son, just as Mumma had done when she accepted money in return for love. Thus those who find White's characterisation of the mother figure excessively cruel are in a measure right. The mothers at this stage of his fiction are cruel, but he is not inventing, he is merely heightening the cannibalistic trait which is the potential for us all. By A Fringe of Leaves, he has succeeded in expurgating the particular form of the mother which has haunted him since The Living and the Dead. Elizabeth

³¹ Baker in discussing her "prolonged seduction" of Hurtle finds no measure of sympathy for her: "Her idealism masks a childish appetency, a desire to consume in the safety of her ordered sanctuary coupled with an urge to smother the few traces of life that manage to insinuate themselves into the mausoleum of Sunningdale. Alfred Courtney's desire to consume extends to Duffield himself to whom she exclaims, 'I could eat you up!', (p.40)" Baker, p.214.

³² Beatson, p.45.

Hunter has been her culmination and reclamation, but in Ellex Roxburgh he treats head-on the theme of cannibalism and in doing so releases his heroine for non-possessive love.

Ma Duffield and Alvira Courtney are not monsters, nor is sympathy withheld from them. They act through their own, and in Ma's case, also her child's deepest needs, for the urge for a fully reciprocal relationship is balanced insecurely on the edge of the need to dominate and destroy. The potential for flagrant breaches of affection is seen as the opposite side of a love which can offer comfort and companionship. Thus Rhoda and Hurtle finally succeed in living together in an, at least partially complimentary relationship because they are aware, both of the need to respect each other's privacy and of the further and unspoken element in their communications.

The texture of White's work itself enforces this need for a heightened level of awareness. While the reference to such violent deeds as those mentioned above are quite explicit, they are incorporated within a deliberately unemphatic framework, through which the reader is largely enabled to accept the enormity of the actual situation. Thus in the early dialogues between Mr and Mrs Duffield, the pressures which lead to their final decision are shown with sufficient clarity for the reader to be able to accept, and to a large extent sympathise with their final act of betrayal. But this should not negate the sense in which it is a betrayal even though it is also a sacrifice. The frequent religious allusion in The Vivisector should be sufficient to suggest the Judas-like implications of the sale. Similarly Hurtle's relationship with Alvira from the first embodies a measure of incestuous sexual response:

She came up close and began ruffling his hair: he felt dizzy from the smell of her dress, and her too underneath. 'Harry will love you', she said. 'He loves a manly, forthright boy'. (p.34)

Against this background their final scene loses that element of the bizarre which might otherwise engulf it.

In both of these shattered relationships there is also involved an element of rebirth. Hurtle is rejected as a son, but is more steadfastly set on the road to becoming an artist.

In this work it is, particularly in the first section, the ties of the family which help to embody the major theme of the need to co-ordinate the artist's instinctive vision with intellectual rigour. We are shown the young Hurtle attempting to maintain a responsive reciprocal affection for the two families with whom he is brought in contact, while also nurturing and beginning to express, the growth of sensitive awareness which is from the first, a vital part of his nature. While the second of these needs may be, in some respects, the peculiar responsibility of the artist, the first has much in common with a more general human condition. Both are closely related to the need to achieve that unity of being which will come from the resolution of the warring aspects of his nature.

With his severance from the elder Courtneys comes a major change in his portrayal. Although Hurtle's growth as an artist has been of importance from the start, it is only at this point that it begins to dominate the entire mode of his living. While he was a part of a family situation, with all the reservations, which White implies, his art was to a large extent subservient to a pattern of daily living imposed by, not only the Courtneys, but also the way of life for which they stand.³³ By the beginning of the second section this has been brought to an abrupt end.

³³ Kiernan sees his rejection of the "Courtney past . . ." as the desire of the Romantic artist to lose himself in experience, to debase himself and be born again through his art, associated with the disillusionment of the 'lost generation', the search of the avant garde for new forms of expression and, eventually, the emergence of modern painting in post-war Australia". Kiernan, p.105. As Flaws in the Glass shows it is also a transference of his own sense of separation from his family.

III

'e believed a human bein' must purge 'imself of 'is own evil
Ham Funeral. II i

From the particular of the family situation we are to be brought to the universality of the artist's predicament. Characteristically White emphasises the change by a stylistic development. As in the beginning of The Tree of Man the universal is suggested by a process of distancing signalled by the use of the definite article. The first two paragraphs of the new chapter begin, "the young man". (p.174) For the first time we momentarily stand back from Hurtle. His childhood is over:

The young man continued to drift, forgetting and remembering. The sound of the grass reminded him it had always looked dead and white. He passed a bench in which one of his feet had caught, between the slats when he was a little boy. (p.175)

With the end of childhood has also come the end of luxury:

Languages you can't understand give you a headache finally, and the chitter of knives and forks in grey water, in a greasy sink. At the caff-eye.

There were prawns too, in his parcel. He tore off the shells and flipped these off his fingertips. The prawnflesh was beginning to turn, but he ate it. (p.175)

Maman's elegant food and carefully accented French is thus contrasted with the world of "Dreck".³⁴ Hurtle is to pluge into an orgy of self-abasement and, conversely self-indulgence. It is only through this reversal of former standards and absorption in his own physical and spiritual propensities that he can begin to reach an equilibrium between his two selves:

Of course he really loved it. He loved the elegance. He loved himself. Himself gathered into the corn-coloured folds of Maman's dress. However much of a coarse, thickset, moral scavenger the present showed, a lyrical onanist of the past hadn't been altogether suppressed. Here he caught the two of them in flagrant delight, in his own unlikely body, in paint. (p.246)

34

In 1929 a poem called "Orchard Row" appeared which since Cantrell's article has been generally attributed to White. Leon Cantrell, "Patrick White's First Book", ALS 6 (1974), pp.434-436. Heavy though its debt to Eliot is, it is the earliest embodiment of a continuing theme which reaches its apotheosis in this novel, that of "Dreck". I quote it in full, as it is not readily obtainable. See over.

"Orchard Row."

"Heat; heat;
And Orchard Row,
Sweltering in its greyness
Beneath a lid of burnished copper.
The peeling stucco
Of a past century
Secreter incessant herds,
Pulsing communities of vermin.
Children,
Grimy with the street,
Play at hop-sotch on the pavement,
Or marbles, within small chalked circles.
Squalor,
All is squalor,
Everywhere the stench of cabbages
And overflowing garbage tins.
Women,
Blowsy and be-shawled,
Sweat and swear in the tenements,
Or drink porter -- and swear again.
Ho, beldam!
Your geranium
Will not exist on cabbage-water.
It is already dead with the stink.
A child is dying up there;
One less in purgatory, so ring bells
And take out your frowzy finery.
The mother
Is peeling potatoes
By a lead sink. The room is hot,
Hot as the very bowels of a ship.
Potatoes
And children
Have killed the mother. Her soul
Lies dead within the live flesh of her body.
Heat; heat;
Everywhere heat;
And down below, the mad Messiah,
The man with the wild eyes and flowing beard,
Cries out.
The children scatter.
"I am the Resurrection and the Life";
And the mother peels potatoes.

P.V.M. White."

Thus the primarily intellectual world of the Courtneys gives way to the sensual orgiastic world of Nance Lightfoot. She represents for Duffield both a need and a danger. It is through her that he achieves his first work of art; "Electric City" which remains to the end a major feat, the embodiment of both the physical and the carnal, for Duffield it forms a catalyst. His over-powering sexual encounter with Nance releases the full flood of his artistic powers. She also takes the role formerly held by his 'mothers'. She is both lover and provider. She sustains all his physical and many of his emotional needs. Within hours of their meeting she offers to keep him.³⁵ Throughout this period of his life he is supported by her earnings, and by the money advanced to him by his other admirer, Caldicott. Caldicott is the antithesis of Nance. His sexuality, like Olivia's is subjugated to his intellect. "Poor spinsterly Maurice C, his intellect inviting a rape which discretion would not have allowed his body". (p.250)

But sustaining though Duffield's first meetings with Nance might be, they also threaten his absolute integrity as an artist. To give himself completely in a relationship with her would result in an imbalance. "Alternately repulsed and inspired by the sexual dimension of their relationship, Duffield, despite his acknowledgement of Nance's positive effect on his painting, symbolically breaks their emotional-sexual tie when he paints an androgynous self-portrait".³⁶ He needs the sustenance and completion offered by her physically but he must also retain his individuality. Not to do so would be to sink into a life of spiritual apathy akin to that found in Jim Lusty. His needs are, at

³⁵ Such a use of a prostitute invites considerable irritation from his critics. "The pairing of artist and prostitute smacks so much of schmaltzy romantic fin-de-siècle bohemianism that White obviously runs an extraordinary risk in using it". Brissenden, p.321.

³⁶ Baker, p.118.

this point, almost precisely those of the "young man". Just as the young man must first embrace the carnal values typified by Alma, before he is able fully to realize the spiritual completion to be obtained through the visionary girl, so Duffield must first explore every aspect of his physicality before he may allow his "psychopomp Kathy to guide him across the river, into the endlessness of pure being from which memory couldn't look back". (p.627)³⁷ At this period of his life Duffield turns to the comfort and promise to be found in the enduring qualities of the common-place. In each of these characterisations it is the use of furniture what Colmer calls "bedrock reality" particularly tables, which seems best able to represent this trait.³⁸ But it is a comfort which can be illusory. "The table at Ironstone, solid in appearance, but unstable on acquaintance, was too painful to think about". (p.273)³⁹ Although the early relationship with Nance results in an enriching release, it is followed by a period of extreme degradation which culminates in the smearing of his self-portrait with excrement:

He began very patiently and seriously to smear all that he repudiated in himself. He thought he knew every inch of that painted board, till working it over now. With enlightened fingertips. As he worked, he bubbled at the mouth, wondering what would be left. (p.259)

³⁷ "Alma Jagg's body breathes life into the cold frozen ground causing nature to regenerate: then she lies back and crushes the growing flowers. She is a lifegiving source and a death-bringing agent, simultaneously fruitful and barren", May Brit Akenholt, p.53.

³⁸ Colmer, p.56.

³⁹ Throughout his work White draws on the solidity to be found in crafted things to represent that which he seems to feel most nearly approximates to the "real", Flaws in the Glass, p.28. Here its use is far more satisfactory than it has been in earlier works. "Duffield can more convincingly discern Platonic or transcendent forms in the regenerative world than can a number of characters in earlier novels. Duffield's statement 'take an honest-to-God kitchen table, a kitchen chair. What could be more real? I've had immense difficulty reaching that core of reality', (p.404) his perception of the essential form of a table that runs like a motif through White's work, seems much less hermetic and more in character than when it comes from Will Lusty or Stan Parker". Kiernan, p.107.

The theme of re-birth, first seen in the break-away from the mothers, seems at this point to call for Duffield's active participation. The focal point is formed by his essentially narcissistic, and therefore life-denying, attempt at the portrayal of his own features. "There his Doppelganger was leering at him out of a distorting mirror. He took a brush and extenuated the rather too desirable mouth into a straight line". (p.249) White seems to be saying that it is necessary for him to recognize his Doppelganger in order to be able to resist the otherwise misunderstood reactions of his own nature.⁴⁰ He must be able to view himself externally as a separate entity. During the whole of this period he is submerged in an extremity of self-awareness. It is only by working through the variations of self which his painting exposes, or perhaps creates, that he can be released from the morbidity of introspection and, conversely, from the dangers of lack of self-awareness. That he comes to view this period with loathing is shown by his final treatment of the painting.⁴¹

This part of his life is brought to an end by the death of Nance, in circumstances which are never entirely clarified but which contain a hint of murder.⁴² The death of Nance also brings about the death of his narcissistic self. One step towards completion has thus been achieved:⁴³

⁴⁰ There is however also a sense in which Patrick White could have said of Hurtle as he says of himself, "The puritan in me has always wrestled with the sensualist", Flaws in the Glass, p.151.

⁴¹ "Lantana Lovers under Moonlight" recalls this time and expresses the emotion which surfaces later, during Duffield's conversation with Cutbush. As Baker points out the painting is used "to register a radical alteration in his sensibility". Baker, p.120.

⁴² There are references throughout the work of which the following is an example: "not least his own black horror kneeling beside his murder", p.291.

⁴³ It is, however, worth noting that Nance dies searching for his hawk-head ring, a symbol as Baker points out of "a sought for balance of mind and nature". Baker, p.119.

All through the nightmare of police and ambulance which Nance's death brought on, there was something real pricking at his mind, something he had forgotten to do, until, finding the axe in his hand, he began to hack. But the board on which the self-portrait was painted, turned the blade. The axe too blunt? Or was he too weak in his present condition? He scraped a while ineffectually at the board, its surface still encrusted with his own faeces as well as paint. Then he took the scarred monster, eyeing him to the end, and threw it out as far as he could over the gorge his lungs straining. It clapped and clattered at first, before bowling rather tamely down, only occasionally whamming against the side of a tree, then drowning in total silence.

At least in this instance nobody would enquire whether it was murder or suicide or accidental death. (p.263)

The implication is not that Hurtle literally kills her, but that he causes her death through his withdrawal from their existing and potential, love. Neither is he yet ready to face his own all-seeing eye. At the moment that he is, he dies. Their shared love has not been truly reciprocal, for while Hurtle has needed the total physicality of their compassionate mutual abandonment and degradation, he has also needed to remain apart; an onlooker using rather than involved in, joint sexuality. At this stage in his portrayal Nance has justification for her accusations against him:

'That's the trouble, Hurtle', she slowly said. 'That's what you aren't. You aren't a human being'.

'I'm an artist'. It sounded a shifty claim. 'You're a kind of perv- perv-ing on people - even on bloody rocks!'. (p.233).⁴⁴

It is through Nance, and to a lesser extent the other women he loves, that Hurtle is able to make contact with the material he needs for his art, "birds sat longer on branches, their eyes brilliant in unstuffed bodies, while liquid tremors exerted the hitherto listless leaves". (p.233) For his vivisector's eye sees into, but can also strike lifeless that with which he comes in contact. Nance's sensuality

⁴⁴ Patricia Morley points out that Duffield's relationship with Nance foreshadows that with Hero. "Both Nance and Hero level what amounts to the same accusation: that by attempting to act as pure artist rather than a human being, Hurtle is using people as source material rather than encountering them as persons. The colossal pride which supports the voyant theory of the artist is a form of narcissism, and this self-love falsifies even the artistic vision to which it aspires". Morley, p.410.

brings with it rootedness and contact with the life-force. "Those who live also create".⁴⁵ Through her the inanimate can become animate, the painterly eye can be brought to see with compassion. It is through her that he can participate in the life he records. "Both Nance and nature are essential to his work anchoring it to the world of sense experience".⁴⁶ But against the positives to be gained from Nance must also be set the dangers. She has the simplicity and directness to be found in all White's "earth-mothers", but, like Amy Parker, she is also possessive and she lacks insight. Their relationship is subject, as is his childhood, to the crippling demands to be found in family life. As with the mothers, only a violent resolution to their affection can free him to explore the full potential of his art.

⁴⁵ Patrick White, The Ham Funeral, in the collection entitled Four Plays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965), act 2, sc.8.

⁴⁶ Baker, p.219.

IV

He remembered another occasion when he had risen from the dead, by seminal dew and threats of moonlight, in conversation, repulsive, painful, but necessary, with the grocer Cutbush: and now was born again by grace of Mothersole's warm middle-class womb. (p.421)

The meeting with Cutbush begins the next section of the work.

During the interim Duffield has changed from a young to a middle-aged man. He is now a painter of considerable repute, and lives in the house between Chubb Lane and Flint Street. We rejoin him during his first meeting with Cutbush, and are therefore not aware of the mental state from which their interaction produces a release. The process by which the reader perceives the regenerative theme in which Cutbush, Mothersole and Mrs Volkov are to form a part is cumulative and is closely linked to the previous use of the mothers. We later come to realise that the moments of rebirth of which these characters form the catalyst follow a period of mental and spiritual aridity, in which his art is inextricably intermixed with his spiritual quest.

At this point in the novel the need to resolve the antipathy between instinct and intellect takes on a different emphasis. The paintings themselves come to the forefront of the work, and it is in his battles with his subject matter that Hurtle's attempts to achieve equilibrium are most explicitly observed. The process by which the search to encapsulate his art also becomes the quest for the ultimate experience is a gradual one. We come to see that as Duffield moves into the last phases of his life the need to resolve the antagonistic sides of his character has become primarily religious. As in The Solid Mandala and The Tree of Man, the central image is to be seen as a fully achieved circle, not so much closed, as complete; a circle which will be

symbolised in his art.⁴⁷

It is through his painting that Boo Hollingrake, now Olivia Davenport, returns to his life. Strangely it is his celebration of triumphant sexuality "Marriage of Light" which most appeals to "the cool and practised" (p.289) Olivia:

Suddenly the outer Mrs Davenport seemed to soften, as though she had become engrossed in a private vision. 'This is the painting which appeals to me, I sometimes think, more than any I own'. She liked to stress ownership: or she chose her words carelessly: or they interpreted meanings differently. In any case she had dismissed him as she advanced on her 'Marriage of Light'.

She was mouthing: '. . . all that I understand as beauty' If she had known poor bloody Nance.

'. . . in the morning when they open the curtains - that's its best moment'.

In her conventual room.

'. . . after they've left me I lie looking at it. At my "Marriage of Light"'.
 In that narrow bed: even now grinding against the pillow.

(p.292)

In Boo Hollingrake, as in White himself, what is being expressed is deeply ambivalent. A recognition of the sexual demands of the human body are coupled with a deep aversion to such needs.⁴⁸ Elements of Olivia's portrayal prefigure that of Eddie Twyborn, particularly the way in which this metaphysical ambivalence is mirrored by bi-sexuality.

⁴⁷ Although the Mandala image is not used here with the centralising force which it is given in The Solid Mandala it is still used with a suggestive power. The following quotations are typical of its re-occurrence: "Hero - this is my great friend Hurtle Duffield. My two dear friends: it's rather like bringing together the two halves of friendship - into a whole", p.326. Later, in an extract which is reminiscent of The Solid Mandala, "The shipowner appeared fascinated by the whorled marbles which he kept turning in their mahogany sockets", p.336.

⁴⁸ Such an aversion is the subject of frequent critical comment. Writing of the love-making of Hurtle and Nance, Walsh remarks "Its expression suggests intermittently that the sex is being looked at with an observer's disgust at the antics of caged monkeys". He goes on "I sense a degree of over-heatedness in the description of the sexual activity which betokens on occasion some flinching distaste in the writer". Walsh, p.101. Björkstén goes further in feeling that White sees both love and sex as destroyers. He adds "The Vivisector also confirms the impossibility of bodily love". Björkstén, p.96.

"For Olivia Davenport was dressed in a man's black suit, its austerity barely holding out against the luxury of her figure. Over her travesty she was wearing a long bottle-green cloak kept together at the throat by a silver chain". (p.377)

Mrs Davenport is used during the course of the novel to achieve a variety of ends. At times her characterisation can seem contradictory, as indeed can her importance as a character; for while there are long stretches of the novel where she is largely forgotten, there is also a sense in which she serves as a unifying, and indeed elucidating, factor in the understanding not only of Duffield's portrayal, but in the work as a whole.⁴⁹

Her first and most obvious function is as the antithesis to Nance. Nance's feeling for Duffield was largely centred in physical expression, although at times she had an intuitive grasp of his subject matter, but Olivia is able to understand and therefore completely own his art:

But even more disagreeable than the lack of understanding she must bring to his house, to his manner of living, was his suspicion - no, the certainty - it was downright shocking - that Olivia Davenport understood his paintings. (p.296)

There is, however, a sense, as has already been indicated in the previous quotation, in which her response is less than complete. The inference is that her habitual filtering of response through the intellect rather than the instinct has robbed her of her feminine gift of vitalism. Her sexuality has been channelled into a rigidly intellectual response which can only be expressed through the safety of an artistic awareness, which, in such a narrowed context can itself become stultifying. Confronted by "Lantana Lovers" a painting she "understands", she fails to reach a level of perception with which her friend is familiar:

⁴⁹ "She is more than a mere tool or neutral means. She contributes her own thrumming nuance to the musical action of the novel".
Walsh, p.108.

She [Hero] might have shot him. He began laughing uncontrollably, teeth almost chattering: to find that, in spite of the distance between them, there was a point above the lantana from which they were able to communicate. . .

'Tell me what it means', she asked, looking at him seriously. 'But, darling', Olivia shrieked, 'you're supposed to know!' Having mastered several hundred characters of Chinese, she couldn't bear to think she hadn't learnt the language her friend was talking with her friend.

Hero calmly said: 'No. I don't know. That is, I know in my insides what it conveys to me. But I don't know the painter's intention. It is probably something quite different. All right. I accept that. But the painting also has something for me personally'. (p.349)

The continuation of the exchange makes it clear that Olivia does know. She perfectly understands the painter's intention, but she fails to "know in [her] insides what it conveys to [her]". She is without instinctive understanding, and therefore is without the potential for the cumulative growth in awareness which is at the heart of the mystical visions. Such moments are not intended to lend themselves to intellectual scrutiny. White has said of them "You can't explain those kinds of things rationally".⁵⁰ Olivia herself helps to clarify this basic theme. At this stage in the novel, her role as Duffield's lover is largely filled by her surrogate, Hero. Her own sexuality seems satisfied by a type of voyeurism which includes the position of procurer. But it was not always so. Her potential for full expression is shattered by a series of disastrous love-affairs. In their early years it is Olivia who, as Boo Hollingrake, both stimulates and rejects Hurtle Courtney in his first adult sexual encounter:

Now looking at him, she put her hand just below her throat above where her dress began.

How it felt was not all that important, because almost immediately after, he was discovering so much more of Boo Hollingrake. . . . Above and below she was both mobile and contained, but if he closed his eyes he could float with her amongst the fern roots in the porcelain bath, guzzling the golden fruit right down to the crescent moon. (p.157)

⁵⁰ Brian Davies, "An Australian Enigma: Conversation with Patrick White", Melbourne University Magazine (Spring, 1962), p.71.

Their love-making results in a solitary orgasm for Hurtle, which is life-denying and as such akin to the masturbatory imagery found throughout the work. For Olivia it is to be her last even partially instinctive act. Immediately afterwards she learns of the death of her lover, Andrew MacFarlane. Noticeably all her men, with the exception of Hurtle, die. MacFarlane's death is linked to her own death in life. Her moment of infidelity to a childhood love is shot through with the blood of his death:

While Hurtle remembered the black knees, the square hands, the live hair of an older boy, in the bony cheeks signs of the blood which would run, which was still running, under the Monstera deliciosa. Boo laughing for the blood-bath. Hurtle Courtney, you kill me! They hadn't, but might have, killed Andrew MacFarlane between them. The sloshed blood looked glitteringly fresh on Boo's throat, on her lashing thighs. (p.161)

It is a moment which will be explored more fully in The Twyborn Affair where sexual and instinctive love is permeated by the rumblings of war. The next time we meet Boo she is "making a collection of Tasmanian bush-flowers - pressed", (p.166)⁵¹ an irony which is our first indication that she has abdicated from the claims, and the pain, which may be the price of that total involvement which is the requirement of instinctive life. "I've lost my appetite for suffering", (p.298) she tells Duffield when he questions her about her abortive marriages. With the rejection of suffering comes the loss of the ability to participate fully. Her withdrawal into the controllable safety, and aridity, of purely intellectual response drives both her husbands to despair:

He was convinced I had some secret I was keeping from him - perhaps the secret. As he became more degraded and desperate, he began to feel that if I joined him in taking the drug, I might share the enlightenment he suspected me of having. So to pacify him I took to cocoa. And couldn't share my "secret". I couldn't even share his degradation. I failed him in this too! Oh he died most horribly, in every way unsatisfied! I don't want to think about it'. (p.300)

⁵¹ The making of collections, and dead ones at that, prefigures a motif later to be fully explored in the characterisation of Dorothy Hunter in The Eye of the Storm and Anthea Scudamore in "Dead Roses".

Thus she is both contrasted with and allied to Duffield, for he too is involved in the death and despair of the women he loves. The weapon with which he inflicts pain is not, however, indifference, bred from withdrawal but rather truth. Both his art and his inner and inviolate self combine in the necessity to search out the truth whatever the cost in terms of pain:

He realised his heart was beating as it used sometimes while he found the courage to speak the truth in front of Maman. His repeated downfall was his longing to share truth with someone who didn't want to receive it. Was it why he had failed so far in love? (p.375)

It is the truth in his painting which drives Hero to her attempted suicide. Her action follows from the clarity of vision which Duffield's art has made possible and is not negated by the element of playacting with which it is informed, but there is also a sense in which it results from it. The painting portrays her in the act of taking her own life, but it is her sight of it which precipitates her action. Thus the vivisector is one with God. He can create or he can destroy:

God the Vivisector
God the Artist
God

(p.412)

Either possibility depends upon the vision of those who observe. Hero's vision is obscured by the interpretation which she gives to the events which take place. She is immersed in the degradation into which she has plunged, not for the sake of reaching a fundamental truth but for the experience itself. She has tried to separate the dual aspects of both her own nature, and those of the natural world. Thus when her idealised version of the abbess, or the hermit, is confronted by the reality, she retreats into a disgust which denies their further human and spiritual possibilities. In this she is compared to her husband. His disgust is roused by the abandoned pleasure she takes in their mutual sexuality in the early days of their marriage, and as such it replaces the idealism

of his first attachment to her.⁵² Her own instinctive life has become a trap which prevents her reaching beyond, into a state of equilibrium. She comes to see the hermit "For the words he spoke - which I have never been able to remember - not their meaning - I hear only the sound of them". (p.406) Her response is thus contrasted with the earlier moment in which she has responded to "Lantana Lovers". Her failure is the reversal of that suffered by Olivia. She has cut herself off from an intellectual awareness which could have raised her above the world of "Dreck":

It was Hero who might have drunk the ouzo. She was drunk, but with her disillusion and helplessness. He tried to support her. Hadn't she been his mistress, more than that, his creative source? He would have liked to point out the scaly sea, like a huge live fish, rejoicing in its evening play, but he might have mumbled like the vanished saint. Perhaps he might have done a drawing; but Hero only understood the visions of her own inferno. (p.406)

When we last see Hero, she has turned away from the spiritual experience for which she has searched, "Dreck! Dreck! The Germans express it best. Well, I will learn to live with such Dreck as I am: to find a reason and a purpose in this Dreck". (p.408) She is to die of a cancer which symbolises the eroding aspect of a carnality which denies the spirit.⁵³

Behind Duffield's relationship with Hero and Olivia is the enigmatic figure of the shipping millionaire. His characterisation sheds

⁵² Beatson sees Pavloussi's rejection as causing her to feel "that she has been rejected by, and is unworthy of, God, [which] converts her innocent 'blasphemy' into a deliberate programme of self-destruction, aimed as much at God as at herself. As her self-inflicted contamination increases, so does her desire for a redemptive miracle", Beatson, p.46.

⁵³ In Flaws in the Glass White seems to be going further in finding the acceptance of "Dreck" not only a vital part of the pursuit of a final harmony but a means of increasing the sweetness of recognition. "Any true Grecophile will understand when I say that the unsinkable candour and the smell of shit which precede the moment of illumination makes it more rewarding when it happens. Flaws in the Glass, p.157.

further light on man's relationship with God and on the nature of love. An equation is made between his power over his dependants and the actions of God:

'God - is cruel! We are his bagful of cats, aren't we? When god is no longer cruel many questions will be answered'. . . .

'What I do believe in', she cried, 'is my husband's goodness, because I have experienced it. You will not believe in it because of a bagful of cats.

He loved the cats which he killed. Yes, he killed them. Why do we kill what we love? Perhaps it is because it becomes too much for us - simply for that reason'. . . .

Their indecently resigned struggles inside the bag must have been observed and judged from a distance by the shaggy god from under his black, heavy eyelids. (p.367)

The central symbol of this section of the work is to be found in the bagful of cats and is concerned with a probing of man's relationship to God. It asks the question are we to God no more than his cats are to Pavloussi? Is man no more than a fleeting experiment to be destroyed when interest flags? In an interview in 1969, White seems to confirm this view:

I myself am a blundering human being with a belief in God who made us and we got out of hand, a kind of Frankenstein monster. Everyone can make mistakes, including God. I believe God does intervene; I think there is a Divine Power, a Creator, who has an influence on human beings if they are willing to be open to him.⁵⁴

But to accept that view in this context is to accept Hero's estimate of her husband Pavloussi's action in destroying the bagful of cats and ridding himself of an unwanted adopted child, it can seem merely a whim, a reflection of the apartness of the rich, an amorality of the kind commented upon by F.Scott Fitzgerald.⁵⁵ Boo Hollingrake is also a part of this charmed world where money substitutes for emotion, a motif suggested

⁵⁴ Craig McGregor, "Patrick White", In The Making (London: Nelson, 1969), pp.218-222.

⁵⁵ Beatson connects the drowning with "Lantana Lovers". "The drowning of the Pavloussis' cats by the disillusioned Cosma impels Hurtle to paint 'Infinity of Cats' which continues the line of thought begun in 'Lantana Lovers'. It shows the parallel between the plight of those unlovely animals being drowned in the name of love by a wilful human being, and the plight of himself and Hero in particular, and humanity in general, being cast into an ocean of existence by an apparently equally arbitrary Deity". Beatson, p.145.

from the beginning of the work by the price set upon Hurtle and, by extension, the artist.

There is however affirmation. The artist is himself a promise. Duffield can offer no comfort to Hero, and he himself explicitly rejects the conventional doctrine to which she turns for revelation. But the failure is in her, she wishes to make her own terms and is not "willing to be open to Him". Yet for Duffield the comfort is there, in a pantheistic concept of the natural world, and in the vision which follows upon the reconciliation of the disparate aspects of his nature. These visionary moments are fleeting, but as the work progresses they become both more frequent, and more explicitly spiritual.

The section ends with a moment which recalls the "crook-neck white pullet" of the opening pages. Again the analogy is with the artist himself: "The golden hen flashed her wings: not in flight, she remained consecrated to this earth even while scurrying through illuminated dust".

(p.409)

V

'Rhoda', he said, 'it's hard to put - but I'd like to tie the end of my life to the beginning. I think, in that way - rounded - it might be possible to convey what I have to'.
(p.467)

It is an ageing Duffield whom we next meet, deflated by the casual words of the girl at the small-goods counter, "But an elderly gentleman like you ought to take care of himself". (p.410) From the depression into which she has plunged him he is rescued by another of those moments of seemingly casual contact, which in the context of this novel are seen as sufficient to produce a moment of spiritual re-birth.⁵⁶

Again a stylistic device draws attention to the importance of the occasion. This time it is not an effect of distancing, which is sought, but one of immediacy. The reader is drawn into a momentary intimacy with the subject. "You couldn't help looking at him . . ." (p.415) This contrasts with the vague anonymity given to Duffield by the references to him during the time on the ferry. The contact between Duffield and Mothersole is seemingly trivial. Their moment of companionship is passing. "Almost the only thing he and Mothersole could hope to share was the morning of radiant life and water". (p.401) But their conversation concerns those topics which are to dominate the closing chapters of the work, and provides the moment of communion which is an essential element of Hurtle's resurgence of life:

His heart was beating like a drum; the voluptuousness of his forced confession was intensified by the flow of water around the ferry; he was almost intolerably happy to receive the trust and friendship of this rather boring decent man. (p.416)

⁵⁶ Beatson points out that Hurtle is aware of these moments. Talking of the series of "deaths" followed by "rebirth into a higher plane" which he lives through, he goes on "Hurtle himself becomes aware of this cycle after his conversation with Mothersole". He continues "The indissoluble link between the organic and the spiritual and between death and rebirth are expressed in Hurtle's last painting of Hero, with its hope for a resurrection". Beatson, p.55.

Their discussion presages Hurtle's restored relationship with Rhoda, and through its consideration of childlessness prepares the way for the related themes of the "spiritual child", and art as a form, not only of creativity, but of procreation.⁵⁷ Uniting both these issues is the continuing concern with guilt and responsibility. Speaking of Hero's death, Hurtle says:

'I wonder whether that's really the reason she died. It's difficult to know what people die of. For instance I had a mistress. I took it for granted I'd killed her, because her husband wrote me a letter telling me straight out that I had. . . . Then at the end of the war I had a letter from a woman friend of Hero's telling me what really happened . . . So I didn't kill her as her husband said. She died of cancer . . . Or does one really know what sows the seed? Is cancer entirely a physical disease? Did I help kill by failing her?' (p.418)

The incident ends with an explicit reference to its rejuvenating power. "His teeth grated as he regurgitated the nonsense he had talked while in the throes of rebirth". (p.421)

The resurgence of creative power is short-lived, but it is re-stimulated by Duffield's first meeting with Kathy. His relationship with his "psychopomp" has been the source of some puzzlement and irritation:

White will frequently insert his moral visions into the fabric of the story, to explain what the characters cannot explain. Their visions ultimately lack conviction, because they can only be communicated by assertion - The Vivisector provides the most telling examples.⁵⁸

Baker sees it as a means of establishing the risk implied in Duffield's "self-absorbing idealism". He goes on:

The Romantic roots of Duffield's endeavour to create out of himself a living symbol of his own imaginative energy extend back to Shelley's Alastor, Epipsychidion, and the essay "On Love".

⁵⁷ "His paintings are his children that he carries within himself. They are conceived in sexual terms, he labours to bring them forth, and he sells them as he was sold himself as a child". Kiernan, p.108.

⁵⁸ Adrian Mitchell, "Eventually, White's Language: Words and More Than Words". Adrian Mitchell, A Critical Symposium, p.10.

In Epipsychidion (a coinage of Shelley's meaning roughly "external little soul"), Shelley dramatises a similar process of projecting outwards in tangible form an internal idea or prototype. In "On Love" he describes the origin of this emancipation: "We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man". But in Alastor this subjectively conceived antitype is rejected as a demonic siren who, like Keats' "La Belle Dame", entraps the visionary poet in a stifling world of solipsistic dreaming that constrains and annihilates exteriority.⁵⁹

It is not clear whether Baker sees this as entirely Duffield's dilemma, he seems to imply that it is also White's own. Part of the problem stems from the variety and complexity of the functions the "psychopomp" is required to fulfil. On one level it is used to deepen the characterisation of Duffield himself, and to create a believable portrayal of his young fellow-artist. It also re-creates the young Hurtle in his first struggle to find himself as an artist, and by doing so serves to complete the circle. On another level it expresses the ageing Duffield's fear of the recurrent sense of loss and aridity. It is from this he hopes to escape through the acquisition of an actual child of the spirit, in contrast to the child which is his art. But beyond these aspects there is another, which concerns the resolution in the artist of the long battle between the flesh and the spirit. In this final section of the work the spirit is attempting to draw away from the pull of the flesh. It is not simply that Kathy represents fleshly temptation or even the solace which the young bring to the old, although there is a sense in which this is so, but that she is also symbolic of his spiritual aspiration. She is both the "girl" of Ham Funeral and also an aspect of Alma Lusty. While in the person of the actual Kathy she is finally less than his aspiration, "she was not his equal," (p.600), there remains a

⁵⁹ Baker, pp.122-123.

sense in which she is his creation and his achievement.⁶⁰ During the pressures and the ceremony of his retrospective exhibition he sidles for the familiar safety of "the gloomy latrine where he had often taken refuge from personages and situations". (p.622) As he escapes, he is visited by the vision of his "psychopomp":

His great joy was in recognizing his psychopomp so very opportunely descended with 'love and thoughts' to give him courage. As they advanced towards each other, her golden, boy's figure melted into all the tones of rose. She bowed her head, as though to hide the face which might give her away too soon. So they hurried, she coolly, he feverishly: not that he would have dreamed of touching this embodiment of a spirit. He would speak to her, in few, though significant words; let her know he had received and understood the messages. (p.621)

He has not understood the message. It is not his 'psychopomp', but "an anonymous wrinkled soubrette", (p.621) but the illusion is sufficient to "liberate him". (p.622) He has broken free from the need for the actual Kathy. The illusion is more than the reality.

But in her fleshly role Kathy has still a part to fulfil. She is used throughout as a necessary stimulus to Duffield's artistic achievement, and she also provides further comment upon the role of the artist. For Kathy takes the opposite road to that so painfully followed by Hurtle, "since she had killed by her vulgarity and vice anything he had created in her". (p.559) While aware of the inner truth which is the gift of her art she chooses to follow a socially acceptable path.

I'm a glutton of the senses, I shall end up fat, perhaps bloated, probably destroyed. But I hope that on the way I shall have contributed something of value. . . . I am too pliable, not only physically. I say things they want to hear, because it is easy after what is hellishly difficult". (p.560)⁶¹

Again as with Hero, there is

⁶⁰ "Volkov, the actual one he was at present creating in his mind as opposed to the figment of his original lust", p.497. "I've come across several machines put together by Khrap alone", p.561.

⁶¹ There is an element here which has to do with White's long battle with Australia and her people. Kathy rises above the cult of the ordinary, she manages to combine fame with the role of "little Kathy Volkov from Paddo", p.528. Duffield like White, remains "a tall poppy" and as such is basically unacceptable to large areas of Australian society.

a sense in which the flesh has betrayed the spirit. She has allowed sensual fulfilment, and this includes adulation, to have importance for its own sake, and she does not sufficiently attempt the painful task of reconciling both, in order to use them in the furtherance of her art. Coming as she does at the end of the work Kathy Volkov allows the reader a new perspective on the thematic concerns that have been worked out through Hurtle Duffield. She is in one sense a re-incarnation of the child he has been, like him cutting her way to freedom through the affections of her circle, she is also his child, and, although more doubtfully, his achievement. For Kathy Volkov chooses a path other than that mapped out for Duffield. From the first she is shown as having a weakness in her left hand, her favourite composers are popularist. She chooses fame and acclaim at the cost of the ultimate integrity and truth which Duffield spends his life seeking. As such at least one of her purposes in these last chapters is to remind us of the growth and mastery of self which Duffield has achieved at a time when his physical disintegration might threaten such an awareness. All through this work White appears to be striving to remind us that "Dreck" is not only a part of existence but a part of beauty, compassion and understanding. At the end of his life Duffield is no longer the sensually beautiful child of the earlier pages, "Dreck" touches, surrounds and at times engulfs him. The young Kathy provides a point of contact with the vigorous youthfulness which has played a part in the final achievement of the artist. It is a technique which White will return to and use to the full in the portrayal of Elizabeth Hunter, where he keeps before us the golden days even as he portrays senility and decay.

But the most important function of the child Kathy is as the externalised embodiment of the two sides of Duffield's nature and of his struggles towards resolution. To this end we are confronted not only by the actual Kathy, but by the Kathy who is the symbol of his spiritual

aspiration and his fleshly downfall:

He lay half the morning behind his eyelids, a prey to visions of electric flowers flickering with girls' faces, of such banality he grew ashamed. All the time he told himself he had only to catch sight of Kathy from a window and he would be able to reinvest her with the perfection and purity of his original spiritual child. (p.469)⁶²

It is this division which has led to dissatisfaction with Kathy as a character; while her actual contact with Duffield is relatively slight, her embodiment forms the core of the last section of the work. It is through his relations with his imagined Kathy that Hurtle's progress towards spiritual fulfilment can be charted.

In the last section of the work we are again reminded of the universality of the artist's predicament, for Kathy is the symbol, not only of Duffield's aspiration, but of that of the odd little "circle" which surrounds him in the last days of his life. "There's no one in our little circle who doesn't believe they have the only right to Kathy". (p.580)⁶³ She represents the urge to reach beyond the work-a-day world, which can be as truly a part of the lives of an unsuccessful, homosexual grocer, or an inarticulate sewing woman, as it can of those with "finely-tempered minds". (p.597)⁶⁴ It is this higher level which is reached by the momentary reconciliation of the disparate sides of man's nature. True creative achievement, whether art or epiphany, is

⁶² Baker sees this rather as a means whereby White stresses Kathy Volkov "more as a symbolic projection of what Duffield values most highly, not achieved vision but rather the dynamic process of creativity itself Kathy is not Yeats' mechanical gold bird but the outward embodiment of Duffield's creative nisus, an artist in his own right who, as Duffield's heir, will continue to create and, by that very fact, validate Duffield's involvement neither wholly in nature nor on some ideal plane, but in an ongoing process of dialectical creation in which the creative energy underlying or informing the aesthetic act takes precedence over the achieved work". Baker, p.223.

⁶³ References to the Mandala image increase as the work nears completion.

⁶⁴ "'Cecil's too artistic for a man - for a business - a business man'", p.558.

reached when both aspects are in harmony. It is this further possibility which unites those of Hurtle's circle who are aware of Kathy's potential. But there is, as always, a contrary aspect. It can also be the vulgarity of mass recognition and popularisation at an acquisitive and surface level which creates the attraction held by the artist. It is the unseeing Mrs Cutbush who insists on Kathy's importance to them all. It is outward dazzle which has impressed her, not the integrity and vision of the inner urge for the truth which lies behind "the Volkov's" letter to Duffield:

Of course my approach and reactions were childish, personal, egotistical - let's face it, aren't we appalling egoists? - but I think this was how I began to feel I could reach the truth, if I filtered these sensations through my true self, however limited that area might be. (pp.561-562)

Rhoda, by a rather strained coincidence, is also a part of this small and disparate group. The struggle for affection without loss of integrity which began the work also informs its end. Hurtle's fragile and touching relationship with Rhoda is to dominate the closing pages:

They must have looked and sounded odd, seated side by side on the tram bench, fatally belonging to each other while not owning to it. Most of the passengers were too refined to stare: only the children did fish-mouthed, in one case picking his nose; the children looked right inside.

He uncrossed his legs and squirmed around on the unyielding bench. He hated the prudent faces of the powdered ladies; he hated them for their discretion to his hunchbacked sister, and at least one of them for her stupid admiration of what she saw as elegance of form: when he too, if they had known, was a freak, an artist.

It brought him very close to Rhoda. It made him glance at her, wondering whether she could have been hiding some secret gift inside her deformity all these years; but her expression wouldn't allow him even to guess at its nature. (pp.494-495)

Thus artist and cripple are bound to each other, not only by the claims of affection, but by their mutual affliction, for Hurtle's gift is shown throughout the work as also being his curse. The artist is one apart. Artist and cripple are united not only through their inability, or refusal, to conform, but also through the extra sensitivity and perception which is part of the price of their apartness. Both must

suffer. Hurtle is, after all, "the great Invalid" of the epigraph.⁶⁵ As in all White, suffering is a necessity of redemption. Rhoda, from the first, refuses to accept the possibilities of acceptance and conformity symbolised by the board on which she is stretched as a girl. "But the board, or the floor - it's the same. You torture me!" Rhoda screamed". (p.131) At the end of her life the same image is used. "'I was born vivisected. I couldn't bear to be strapped to the table again'" (p.463) She chooses to emphasise her physical deformity by an eccentricity which borders on the grotesque, and rejects, at least outwardly, the world of which she could have remained a part:

The girls rocked, for here was their monkey, their mascot, standing naked for their entertainment while still dressed in her broderie anglais . . . the monkey mascot, to improve her performance, was pointing her toes and holding out her skirt in a little step-dance.

The girls might have gone on laughing for ever if Boo hadn't raised her head. (p.155)

She refuses the role of the clown in favour of a spiritual and intellectual integrity which rejects conformity and comfort at the price of physical degradation.⁶⁶ To be acceptable in the world of her birthright would have meant playing a part forced on her by the freakishness of her appearance. Such a role, while not avoided, is made bearable by the companionship of others, who are themselves at least partial outcasts. Thus she chooses to bring nourishment to stray cats, and befriend those who, like the Cutbushes and the Volkovs, are themselves apart. But there is another sense, in which Rhoda is shown as more socially integrated

⁶⁵ Morley points to Rimbaud's theory of the artist as "prophet, seer, magician". She goes on, still referring to Rimbaud, "He will then communicate his vision, through art to ordinary mortals, at the cost to himself of tremendous suffering and, quite possibly damnation". Morley, Queen's Quarterly, p.408.

⁶⁶ She is however still "clowning" at the exhibition. "The rose clown was laughing up at her companions . . . Rhoda . . . was doing everything but handsprings to amuse her circle", p.586.

than those who have accepted the conventional morés of society. The use of the cats provides a direct comparison with Pavloussi. Rhoda does not drown her "bagful of cats", she continues to nurture them.

For Rhoda the resolution between the instinct and the intellect must follow a different path from that which is the potential of the physically whole. The limitations imposed by her deformity produce in her a precocious reliance on the intellect. Her sexuality is prevented from becoming the outlet, and the trap, which it forms for Olivia and Hero.⁶⁷ But is is there. Preparing for bed one night during their childhood Hurtle goes to his sister:

He went into Rhoda's room, where she was propped up on the pillows like Maman, but wearing a flannel nightie, and on each cheek a dry round patch of something pink. She must have rubbed on some dentifrice. He decided not to notice it.

'I want to show you something', she said, giving him a thin dark-coral smile.

'What?' he asked, pretty sure it was nothing of interest. She held out her clenched hand at the end of her stiffened arm. At least when she was in bed you didn't notice the hump, but her arm looked horribly thin.

'What is it?' you repeated, like some little kid, while coming closer.

By now he was so close she threw her arms round him: to kiss.

There was a light sigh or whimper in all her movements. She smelt of moist flannel, or rubber: the moisture after a bath. And baby powder. Inside it all the steamy scent of Rhoda herself.

When she released him from the kiss she took a deep breath and lay back on the pillows as though she had eaten a satisfying meal. (p.122)

At the end of the work a hidden sensuality is again apparent. As Duffield lies in a hospital bed, his vivisectioner's eye quelled, Rhoda is compelled by his helplessness to reveal herself as she has never before been able to do:

'I was only ever interested in men. Not their minds - their minds are mostly putrid - but their bodies. Their lovely strong straddling legs. Their backs. Whatever else they know - whatever feeds their vanity - they can't know about their own backs'. . . .

'There's nothing I can - nothing I was ever able to do for you'.
(p.572)

⁶⁷ She has much in common with Theodora Goodman of whom her headmistress predicts, "You will not say the things they want to hear, flattering their vanity and their strength But there is much that you will experience. You will see clearly, beyond the bone", Patrick White, The Aunt's Story (London: Routledge, 1948). p.236.

Denied fruitful existence, Rhoda's instinctive and sensual life cannot become the vital force which informs the artist's power. Nor will it let her escape unscarred. "When, out of pity, he made the formal gesture of kissing, she screeched out: 'No! No! I can't bear being touched! Not even by a cat, Hurtle; 'Though several of the fetid animals were crouched around her on the Indian counterpane". (pp.474-475) But the measure of reconciliation which her independence, both enforced and chosen, has produced enables her to accept and endorse the artist.

But it is primarily through the events of everyday that White has chosen to portray the shared affection of the elderly painter and his crippled sister. Oddities though they are intended to be, we are thus enabled to recognize the universality of their achievement, both in terms of the love and the irritation which inform ordinary families. It is to exemplify this that the squirrel coat is used. When Duffield insists on buying his sister a fur coat, he is expressing natural affection, but beneath this surface generosity there are other less praiseworthy motives. In part the fur is to replace a love which he fails to feel, it is also intended to claim public recognition for his kindness as a brother, at least in the sense that Rhoda herself must acknowledge the debt. But there is a further and more reprehensible motive in which the fur is intended to emphasize Rhoda's incongruity. The first mention of the coat comes after the small meanness with the wireless which occurs when brother and sister first begin to live together:

He switched on the wireless he had been cunning enough to move from the kitchen before Rhoda's arrival. . . .

'When I was here before', she said, 'I thought I noticed a wireless in the kitchen'.

'There was an old wireless I took up to my room. I like to listen to music while I work. I'll buy you a transistor, Rhoda'. He added: 'I'm also thinking of buying you a fur coat', though it hadn't occurred to him till now.

'I don't want a fur coat. . . . I was looking forward to that wireless I saw'. (pp.474-476)

The second allusion follows from the "appeased sensuality" (p.485) of his first sexual encounter with Kathy. "'That fur coat we discussed - I must buy it for you. We'll go in the morning', he said too forcefully. 'You'll have to be specially fitted'. He couldn't help it sounding cold". (p.486) She refuses the "practical, discreet" (p.493) nutria in favour of squirrel, but refuses to appear in public wearing the coat which symbolises a world that is closed to her.⁶⁸ In owning the squirrel she is claiming her right to an essential femininity that the workaday nutria denies. To wear it would re-establish the role of clown which she has rejected. The squirrel coat is the equivalent of the broderie anglais dress of her childhood party. Duffield fails to understand the coat's meaning for her, while recognizing its importance in their relationship. On the night of Kathy's concert he appeases his own sense of rejection with the enjoyment which he gets from studying Rhoda's painful sense of inadequacy. "He would make sure not to miss the announcement of the final, so that he would study Rhoda's, probably secret, preparations for the night: to catch her not wearing the coat, or better still, wearing it". (p.516)

It is not that there is a failing in reciprocal affection, "Rhoda was his remaining prop", (p.503) but that in the interplay of daily living it is only one part of a constant battle for supremacy, and it is this battle which is a universal predicament.

Brother and sister, in common with all those who live together, must learn to accept each other's needs and weaknesses. In the context of the novel it is clear that they do share the values which have informed the work:

⁶⁸ "Once he came across her dozing in the chair, wearing the squirrel coat, and an expression of such sublime repose he was afraid to advance any further", p.487.

But at breakfast, while their habits were of the slackly instinctive, not yet of the obsessive kind, he did feel drawn to his sister Rhoda. He was not certain how she felt about it; but her more relaxed behaviour suggested she was in agreement with the essentials of their relationship, if not its details.
(p.623)

Hurtle and Rhoda have in common not only the period of their childhood but also values which are associated with Maman. "It was delicious to discover that, on this level, they were still brother and sister; it was a triumph of their education by Maman in superficial intercourse, and they were probably both grateful to have it". (p.463) Superficial though this intercourse may be, it yet helps them to continue "living and blundering and working and chopping up the purple horse-flesh in Flint Street". (p.537) Behind the studied politeness, which is a facet of Maman's creed, lies an ability to allow individual freedom in at least one area of everyday living. It is Maman's training in this if not elsewhere that ensures that each will respect the other's need for privacy. Equally it can lead to an heightened sensitivity of response. At the Retrospective Exhibition Duffield's infirmity leads to new embarrassments. "Everybody watching was wondering whether to offer help. Rhoda at least joined him in warding them off in a stiff silence". (p.598) Similarly Rhoda is almost alone in responding to Hurtle the man rather than Duffield the painter. "By daylight he was still outwardly the cold-eyed elderly gentleman, known or anonymous, for whom other people - Rhoda excepted - put on their sickliest of smiles". (p.540) Baker goes further than this and sees Rhoda as rejecting Hurtle's art. "Rhoda Courtney is physically disfigured and rigidly conventional in her values, an adversary of Hurtle's art and a central figure in what Duffield scornfully labels 'the Cutbush clique'".⁶⁹ Such a position can be justified in parts of the text, but it ignores the implication found in scenes such as that at the exhibition, where brother and sister combine

⁶⁹ Baker, p.117.

in their scornful awareness of how little has been understood by an audience loud in fulsome praise. Surely we are meant to infer that Rhoda has arrived, via deformity and suffering, at the same point as her artist brother? It is not that she is an adversary in any real sense to Duffield's art, though it is the source of a mutually enjoyed running battle between them, but that she shares his vision and is a competitor:

Of course the real reason for his irritation, he had to admit, was not her failure to appreciate his home, which he had stopped seeing as an actual house, but her continued unawareness of its *raison d'être* - the paintings: all of which, even the most tentative youthful ones, were shimmering tonight, for Rhoda, in their true colours. (p.458)

Rhoda, from her first response to "the pythoness", has always seen his paintings in their "true colours". It is surely this that Hurtle recognizes when he is jealous of her intuitive response to the conservatory:

'Oh, I like that! It has something. It has a poetry', Rhoda calmly said.

Was she daring to appropriate some idea which hadn't yet suggested itself? He had never seen the conservatory by artificial light. Certainly the blacker shadows and the far more brilliant refractions from broken glass made him share her reaction; but he didn't want to share: the conservatory was too private. (p.459)

Common to both is another inherited value, that combined element of the instinctive and the intellect to which both respond: the sense of beauty and aesthetic appreciation which has been symbolised by the chandelier. In their childhood it has stood for the affirmative values of the Courtney household. It incorporates all the potential for beauty and artistic awareness which is the gift of that particular way of life, but it is also a part of a luxurious and over-protected world which the Courtney children finally reject. The house in which they end their days has none of the affluence and artificiality of their childhood home; nor does it remove from them the ability to participate in the functions of everyday living, but it too has a certain elegance and dignified spaciousness. The broken-down conservatory is able to produce, by

precisely the same process of refraction and blazing light, the momentary frisson, or epiphany, which is achieved by true awareness of the chandelier.

Finally, it is this mutual recognition and respect which makes it possible for this oddly matched pair to live together in an uneasy peace, for as Hurtle nears the end, the need to keep his inner self inviolate becomes of increasing importance. It is to illuminate this need that we are given the brief scene with his sister by blood, a scene which immediately precedes his stroke. The old cry of "Hurt" echoes through the public gallery:

His heart was rent: when he had to keep himself whole for some further, still undisclosed, purpose; painting could be the least of it, though at heart it was all. . .

He had disliked Lena as a kid. How could you be expected to love someone just because you had blood in common? (p.567)

As Lena boasts of her grandchildren Hurtle holds Rhoda's "blue plastic bag against his belly! to protect himself from the knife-thrust". (p.566) The implications of the artificial "plastic" seem clear. Rhoda is not his sister in the sense that he must acknowledge Lena, neither is his art his child with the procreative strength which a child of the flesh might give. Lena too has the power of the vivisector's knife, it is a power which has to do with the clarity of the artist's eye but is also a part of the rape of gentleness and affection associated with intimate relationships. It is this awareness which shocks the Courtney children when with their mother they gaze through a London shop window at a vivisectionist's display:

There was a little, brown, stuffed dog clamped to a kind of operating table. The dog's exposed teeth were gnashing in a permanent and most realistic agony. Its guts, exposed too, and varnished pink to grey-green, were more realistic still.
(p.138)

The dog is used as an image of trust and affection, helpless against the knife-thrust of the ruthless. As he hurries from Lena desperate to make an escape which will end in his first stroke, it is self-doubt that fills

his mind:

There could be something else he was beginning to remember. To want. Really nothing to cry about. Something probably nobody had, if they stopped to think, and that was why most of them took the trouble not to: emptiness of mind is less disturbing than the soul's absence. (p.568)

What seems in question here is an issue which also disturbs in Flaws in the Glass and is unanswerable. Along the way in a search for clarity and truth has Duffield and perhaps White lost a path to fulfilment which had still been open to the child Hurtle? At the end of The Tree of Man the grandchild will continue the lives of the Parkers as much by his inherited blood as by his poet's art. Duffield is in one sense sterile. In his last days Duffield's painting is to be a means of expressing his awareness of the need to be open to the incomprehensible beyond, his first sight of which renders him, literally, speechless. It is revealed to him in terms of colour. Indigo. I in God.⁷⁰ "Hang on to the last and first secret the indigo". (p.571) But while deeply religious, this spiritual experience is specifically not to be contained within any particular ethic or creed". He would have liked to comfort his sister with some kind of faith, but had never gone over to one". (p.635) In Flaws in the Glass White writes "My spiritual self has always shrivelled in contact with organized religion".⁷¹ But Christian values and mythology may be used to increase the richness of allusion. It seems to be to this end that he is given a disciple, Don Lethbridge, to help him in his last days of preparation. Kiernan sees Lethbridge as a part of the re-enactment which is a necessary step on the way to the achieving of the whole self, the completed Mandala:

⁷⁰ Colmer finds the punning on Duffield's last words "typical to the rib-crushing obviousness of White's nudges in the direction of a theology that would reconcile human infirmity and divine providence". John Colmer, Patrick White, Contemporary Writers (London: Methuen & Co., 1948), p.56.

⁷¹ He goes on to say the "ultimate spiritual union is probably as impossible to achieve as the perfect work of art or the unflawed human relationship. In matters of faith, art and love I have had to reconcile myself to starting again where I began", p.74.

The image of the child within suggests the persistence of a sense of self, of some permanence of being, within the flux of experience. Towards the end of his life, Duffield plays nursery games again in the kitchen of Flint Street with Rhoda, who has regained the simplicity of her childhood. Similarly, each character carries within himself memories of a pastoral state of innocence. Later in her life Olivia Davenport is still Boo Hollingrake; Hero Pavloussi is still the young refugee; Volkov, the internationally famous pianist is still Kathy; Nancy and Mrs Volkov remember their childhood and falls from innocence. As Duffield towards the end of his life struggles towards a state of 'pure being', death is identified with youth. Kathy his 'psychopomp' and Don Lethbridge (Lethe-bridge), the 'arch-angel' who suggests that his last painting is 'The Whole Of Life' (p.607), are confused in the composite, androgynous figure of the Summoner Duffield sees in the Gallery on the night his retrospective exhibition opens. In the compressed Joycean passages that follow his stroke, time is regained through the telescoping of memory, and Duffield reflects that if he had developed the habit of prayer, he would have prayed to achieve 'an endlessness of pure being from which memory couldn't look back'. 72

Hurtle's and White's, religious belief is finally to be found in an embracing of life, which, when lived to the full, includes the awareness of a God beyond. It is a consummation of that life to reach a total reconciliation of the flesh with the spirit.

In the last pages of the work Hurtle sits with Rhoda in the intimacy of their kitchen. They discuss an acquaintance of their youth, Mary Challands. Mary, after a life time of invalidism, has finally died:

Mary was pale and thin. Compared with most of us, distinguished-looking. She was said to be anaemic. They expected her to die young. She was forced to do - oh, the most disgusting things! She had to drink blood

'Mary became a Roman Catholic - surely you remember that? Converted while still a young girl'.

'It seems to have done her good. Or else it was all that blood she drank. To be dying only now'

'He was in insurance Mary told me, while we were still in correspondence, he "left her alone", and they were very happy together'.

'Oh God, Rhoda, then it was the blood and the Roman Catholicism which sustained her! It wasn't life!' (pp.634-635)

The titles of the paintings do give fuel to the somewhat vitriolic response occasioned by discussion of them by many critics. Julian Symons sums up the voice of many with "That picture of God as an 'Old Fool Having Bladder Trouble' and the drawing in which all the women he had ever loved were joined by umbilical cords to the navel of the same enormous child. Mustn't they have been rather vulgar? I found myself at times sympathising with the man at the Retrospective who called Duffield 'the biggest con man Australia has produced'". Julian Symons, "An artist worthy of his art" (The Sunday Times, 25 October 1970), p.32.

Hurtle's disgust reflects his belief that life must be participatory.

It is a distortion to live through another's experience. The blood and the Catholicism have taken the place of the flesh and the spirit. Mary has stayed alive at the expense of living.

Hurtle Courtney Duffield has lived life to the full, and dies with a vision of God before him. But it is a vision which may not be reached through another's experience:

Now he was again acknowledging with all the strength of his live hand the otherside unnameable I-N-D-I-G-O.

Only reach higher. Could. And will.

Then lifting the hairs of his scalp to brush the brush-hairs bludge on the blessed blue.

Before the tobbling scrawl deadwood splitting splintering the prickled stars plunge a presumptuous body crashing.
Dumped. (pp.641-642)

Only Don, the disciple, sees the message he leaves. "This is thiss iss hizz miss the paint iss". (p.642) Finally, art may indicate, but it may not take the place of lived experience. "Don't ask a painter, don't ask anybody to explain. All you'll ever know is what you find out for yourself by butting your head through the wall". (p.605)

VI

In The Vivisector, Patrick White has taken the life of an artist as a means of exploring a search which goes beyond the bounds of normal human understanding and love into an area of what might best be called multi-faceted illumination similar to that symbolised by the chandelier. White, writing of himself in Flaws in the Glass, finds love the ultimate redemption and the ultimate truth.⁷³ "You reach a point where you've had everything and everything amounts to nothing. Only love redeems", Flaws in the Glass. (p.251) But love in the sense of a final and fulfilled relationship is not at the centre of Duffield's intention, nor at this point his author's, his art stands in place of a lover, but it is still only a means to an end, an end which does not have to do with the portrayal of the artist. Kathy Volkov at the height of her powers writes to the ageing Duffield "It was you who taught me how to see, to be, to know instinctively," she goes on:

There was an occasion when I even dared touch one or two of the paintings as I left, because I had to know what they felt like, and however close and exciting it had been to embrace with our bodies, it was a more truly consummating love-shock to touch those stony surfaces and suddenly glide with my straying fingers into what seemed like endless still water. (p.561)

The tactile quality of the paint provides for the young Kathy, as for the child Hurtle before her, the way into the intuitive core of the painting. It is this nucleus which Duffield has spent his life exploring and conveying, and it is this which is central to the meaning of a work which must use words rather than paint. Duffield's art is a means to an end, conceived by White, and it is an end which is not finally concerned with the portrayal of the artist, whether painter or writer. It is this which

⁷³ John Colmer sees the middle novels, in which he includes The Vivisector, as celebrating "the powers of the privileged artist to reach truth". Colmer, Patrick White, p.87. Björkstén takes this a stage further "Towards the end of his life he gives this truth a name: God". Ibid., p.99.

protects White from the charge of those who find him guilty of what Baker has called "Romantic Onanism".⁷⁴ The diversity of the central characters in his major works must lead us to suspect that they are all ways of exploring what is basically the same problem; the complexity of the search for a way to express a truth uncontaminated by the many protective skins with which we distort our vision and ourselves. The artist is a useful catalyst for such a search precisely because he has trained himself to look not at what he expects or wants but at what is there, a clarity of vision which his often egotistical drive, will not at best encumber by the falsifications the need to protect or impress may bring.

The artist's eye is separate from the eye of the onlooker, not so much through what he has to say or even through his power in showing it, but in his ability to see precisely and honestly what is before him. That is not to say that White is not taking the opportunity of exploring the particular needs of the artist. Clearly his earlier portrayals of Alf Gage and Ralph Dubbo show his desire to grapple with a situation which has much in common with his own, but the artist differs from those that surround him in the opportunity he has of making a lasting statement, the statement itself then becomes the province of us all. The young Hurtle writes an essay for his teacher in which he states the beliefs that are to be his until his death:

I am Hurtle Duffield age 6 though I often feel older than that. I don't think age has always to do with what you feel because my father and mother who are old never have the same feelings or thoughts as me. They do not understand what I tell them so

⁷⁴ It must also at least help to defend him against other and more generalized charges. Adrian Mitchell sees character as archetype conflicting "with character as individual and real" The Oxford History, p.150. Colmer goes further. "But the most obvious faults in the total conception of the novel are Hurtle Duffield's inadequacy as either Faustian figure or a cursed Romantic artist, the lack of a sustained ironic scrutiny of the hero, who remains throughout a privileged visionary, and the excessively schematic vision of the whole". Colmer, Patrick White, p.56.

I have just about had to give up telling. And I did not tell Mr Olliphant our parson (he has died) though he could read Latin and French, that is nothing to do with it. I get a lot of ideas sitting up the pepper tree in the yard. I like to watch the sky till the circles whirl, these are white, or shut my eyes and squeeze them until there are a lot of coloured spots. Mumma goes crook if I draw on the wall, only the wall in the shed where I sleep with Will at the end of the yard where Pa keeps the harness that wall does not matter, I can draw there, and am drawing a picture which will be a shandeleer with the wind through it when it is finished, I would like to draw everything I know. There is drawing. There is bread. I like if I can get hold of a new loaf and tear the end of a crust off of it and eat it. I love the smell of bread but the bread at home is always stale because you get it cheap. Once I drew a loaf of bread with all those little bubbles. (pp.41-42)⁷⁵

Duffield spends a lifetime trying to render in paint the simplicity and truth to be found in a loaf of bread. It is this he is unable to convey to Hero as she sinks into a conscious bitterness which comes from a frustrated idealism. The many attempts he rejects before arriving at a finalised painting are all strivings to rid himself and his art of the preconceptions and temptations which his skill can create. His painting like White's writing must encompass every aspect of life, a distorted body, human excrement, married love, all are within the scope of a "grandeur too overwhelming to be expressed". (Flaws in the Glass, p.70)

Hurtle Courtney Duffield is engaged in a lifetime's quest which must encompass and incorporate "Dreck" into a wholeness and harmony which can only be found when the instinct and the intellect have both found their place in spiritual completion.⁷⁶ He, like his maker, spends a lifetime searching for what he believes "but can never prove to be the truth".⁷⁷

⁷⁵ White's position here seems to be similar. "Through the open doorway poured the smell of baking bread which will always convey, to me at least, one of the few convincing messages of goodness, hope and possible continuity in a threatened world". Flaws in the Glass, p.207.

⁷⁶ It is to this need that White is indicating with his choice of the first epigraph from the English artist Ben Nicholson "As I see it painting and religious experience are the same thing, and what we are all searching for is the understanding and realisation of infinity", p.6.

⁷⁷ It is a part of the ambiguity which informs so much of these last novels that such a completion seems neither possible nor entirely desirable. To be complete is, as May Brit Akerholt points out, also to be spiritually dead. It is in White's own words "death in two syllables", Ham Funeral, p.32. See also May Brit Akerholt "Structure and themes in Patrick White's Four Plays", Critical Symposium, pp.52-61.

I

The Eye of the Storm concerns the quiet centre of the storm itself. The great bed of the dying Elizabeth Hunter forms the focal point for the re-creation of the climactic moments of the life of Elizabeth and those who are dazzled by her aura. It is this which gives the novel its particular quality and prevents it from being the relatively straightforward progression towards illumination and self-discovery found elsewhere. While instinct and intellect are still to be seen as the opposing forces without whose reconciliation harmony cannot take place, they are frequently observed in fragmented aspects of characters or passing moments of lasting importance.

It is the character of Elizabeth which casts this thrall over the novel. Her influence and her preoccupations distort those with whom she is linked and prevent the development of their full potential, either in the life given to them in the pages of the novel or in the clarity of the reader's vision of them. Not that the grotesque "lilac fairy" (p.124)¹ who so frequently enters her son's dreams is more than a passing aspect of our vision of her, neither writer nor reader is immune to her charm, it is just that in finally examining in depth a woman who has fascinated him since her first evocation in *Catherine Standish*, White's priority is to make clear how extensive and profound has been her influence. Children, husband, nurses, cook, are all at least partially what they are because Mrs Hunter is as she is, and she is, when we meet her, a fulfilled woman shaped by an experience which took place many years before the start of the novel:

¹ All references in this chapter, which give a page number only will be to Patrick White, The Eye of the Storm (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1973).

Just as she was no longer a body, least of all a woman: the myth of her womanhood had been exploded by the storm. She was instead a being, or more likely a flaw at the centre of this jewel of light: the jewel itself, blinding and tremulous at the same time, existed, flaw and all, only by grace; for the storm was still visibly spinning and boiling at a distance, in columns of cloud, its walls hung with vaporous balconies, continually shifted and distorted. (p.424)

But such a moment of fulfilment has not been the result of a life-time's spiritual aspiration; perceptive and aware though Elizabeth has been since her earliest days, her reward is not the just reward of the saint. Rather, White seems to be saying that selfish and worldly preoccupations are not of necessity a bar to ultimate salvation, but a price must be paid. Just as Voss's companions must pay a dreadful penalty for the megalomania of their leader's quest, so the children of Elizabeth are maimed by their mother's brilliance. Her reflected glory dazzles and distorts their own progress towards truth and full self-understanding.

Pervasive though this influence may be, it is still, oddly, true to say that Elizabeth is not herself at the heart of the novel in the way Hurtle Duffield has been and Ellen Roxburgh will be. It is the force her life has been, and continues to be, rather than the recounting of its stages which forms the background to the work. Such a device leaves time for an intensive consideration of the lives of those with whom she has been surrounded and it is through them, as much as through Elizabeth that the processes of self-discovery and the counterpointed pull of instinct and intellect can be seen to be, at least partially, worked out. It is this pervasive and fragmented method which prevents any easy recapitulation of the precise use which White makes of them in this novel. In so far as a generalisation can be made, it is roughly true to say that intellect is equated, as before in The Vivisector, with a middle-class materialism, and an attempt to live through a preconceived concept rather than a

grappling with what is actually offered.² Hence Basil uses the constant role-play of his actor self as an escape from the demands which surround him, just as Dorothy chooses to hide behind her concept of herself as the cool, assured Princess de Lascabanes. Instinct is to be found in a recognition of the "life force". As before, in "Dead Roses" the moment of the acceptance of the instinctive self is to be found on an island.³ It is there that Elizabeth experiences the eye of her storm, and Dorothy allows herself to walk barefoot in the sand. This use of instinct as a vehicle for spiritual awareness is also to be found in Sister de Santis's preoccupation with roses and with the birds she feeds in the tranquility of early morning. It is at such moments that the possibility of communion, whether in the sense of illumination or a momentary bond with another, can take place:

Poured in increasing draughts through the surrounding trees, the light translated the heap of passive roseflesh back into dew, light pure colour. It might have saddened her to think her own dichotomy of earthbound flesh and aspiring spirit could never be resolved so logically if footsteps along the pavement had not begun breaking into her trance of roses.

² Materialism as a concept is, in this work, fraught with ambiguity. Although the Hunter children, and Elizabeth's charmed circle of acquaintance, may frequently be guilty of too great a regard for the material, for Elizabeth herself there is another side. The beautiful objects with which she is surrounded, create in her company a sensuous appeal akin to that she produces herself. The analogy is with the crystal chandelier of Hurtle's childhood. Elizabeth, and the objects which enhance her beauty, together create a frisson in the observer almost an epiphany, at least a moment of heightened awareness.

³ In "Dead Roses" the fulfilment which the island offers is implicitly sexual. Anthea Scudamore in rejecting Barry Flegg and accepting Hubert Mortlake is turning from the living to the dead. Here the island offers a similar escape for Dorothy but for Elizabeth the experience is mystical rather than physical. Linked to the latter is the use of the island in the Donne sense. The work concerns the individual's essential isolation. "Not everyone is an island: they loved 'Bill', while admiring Elizabeth Hunter. It is the children who are the most forbidding, the least hospitable of islands, though you can light a fire if you know how to scrape together the wherewithal", p.15. It is only in a moment of isolation that the spirit can reach the moment of fruition offered by the island. Patrick White "Dead Roses' The Burnt Ones (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964). pp.11-75.

A man of dark, furrowed face and enquiring eyes was asking the way to Enright Street. Though looking at her closely, he did not appear to be soliciting. She knew the street, and directed him with a care which the early hour and its exquisite details seemed to demand, the man listening intently, his eyes concentrated on her directions, half, though in an abstracted way, on her rose embowered figure.

When she had finished he smiled and thanked. They were both smiling for different and the same reasons. From his humble and creaking boots and still apologetic glance, he was not only a stranger to the street, but to the country, she suspected. She was reminded of her own alien birth and childhood; whether the man guessed it or not, he gave the impression that he recognized an ally. (p.209)

II

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

The Elizabeth Hunter whose fabled beauty is forever enshrined in the memories of her acquaintance, is a jewel and, like the jewel with which White equates the eye of the storm, she is flawed. It is this flaw, the novel is to suggest, which is her strength.⁴ She is, like the jewel itself, "blinding and tremulous at the same time" (p.424) and she also exists, "only by grace". (p.424) It is this paradox on which the novel turns, a paradox which enrages her daughter:

And mother: what could mother have told of her experience on Brumby island? She was senile by the time you might have asked. But could anything of a transcendental nature have illuminated a mind so sensual, mendacious, materialistic, superficial as Elizabeth Hunter's? (p.589)⁵

The saving grace of Elizabeth Hunter is her inner integrity, the old woman whose head "is barely fretting against the pillow", (p.9) is sustained by a moral courage which makes her respect the truth however painful.

The novel opens, as it ends, with Sister de Santis. She and her patient have found sanctuary in the quiet house which overlooks the park. The imagery which surrounds them is that of the cloistered silence of the convent:

While working around this almost chrysalis in her charge her veil had grown transparent; on the other hand, the wings of her hair, escaping from beneath the lawn, could not have looked a more solid black. (p.9)

⁴ Beatson makes a similar point "Voss's daemon, Hurtle's gift and Mrs Hunter's élan are all like Norbert Hare's Xanadu, their contribution to the truth - a contribution that is in part made possible by the existence of the flaws that make them morally reprehensible. But they are only contributions, not the whole truth. This is made particularly evident in the case of Elizabeth Hunter, below whose surface quest for power and admiration lies a hidden search for something else, a search that is partly the cause of her betrayals but also, finally, redeems them". Beatson, pp.38-9.

⁵ The quotations which preface this work ~~are~~ the almost accidental, temporary, and seemingly perverse giving of the state of grace.

The white light of early morning spills onto the "steamy pillows" (p.9) of the invalid indicating the release which is soon to be hers. Both Elizabeth and her nurse are already at the door of such a release, one which need not be found only in death. "Thus placed they were exquisitely united. According to the light it was neither night nor day. They inhabited a world of trust, to which their bodies and minds were no more than entrance gates". (p.11)⁶

Sister de Santis is used throughout the novel to represent an aspect of spiritual grace. Her physical clumsiness and occasional lapses into a sensuality which distresses her, are used to cloak a state which is the antithesis of that so long found in Elizabeth Hunter. While the nurse is herself "handsome in looks" (p.11) there is about her an incongruity and dowdiness which equates her with White's "burnt ones". Outward seeming does not reflect her state of "perpetual becoming". (p.11) Elizabeth's physical grace is, on the other hand, for much of her life no reflection of a similar readiness of spirit.

The old woman's recent stroke releases her into a whirlpool of memory in which a lifetime of experience is re-assessed by a mind now opened to spiritual possibility. It is at this point that the recurring theme of the dolls is first introduced. The dolls of her childhood acquaintance, Kate Nutley, are used to symbolize those who have been a part of Elizabeth's circle of influence. The hundred belonging to Kate

⁶ David Kelly rightly points out that such a communion is touched, as so frequently in White, with a teasing ambiguity. "Such an empathy cannot be onesided, and until Mrs Hunter affirms her part in it its validity must remain doubtful. It becomes more so when the novel first turns to Mrs Hunter's narrative point of view. She seeks to dismiss, or to be unaware of, the communion Sister de Santis believes took place. 'Left alone, which after all was how she wanted to be, with due respect to poor broody faithful de Santis. . .'" David Kelly, "The Structure of The Eye of the Storm", A Critical Symposium ed. R.Shepherd and K.Singh with an introduction by John Barnes (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978), p.68. Beatson finds "Mrs Hunter is the heart of an inner maelstrom tossed around in the tumults of time remembered. The present dwindles in importance to her as she undergoes trial by recollection, remembering - or being haunted by - in frightful clarity and every motive, every betrayal every failure in love." Peter Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye: Patrick White's The Eye of the Storm". Southerly 34 (1974).p.229.

are momentarily made the property of her friend, but the honesty which is so integral a part of her character is rapidly re-asserted "'You know it isn't true', the old child complained. 'It was Kate Nutley had the dolls. She was spoilt. I had two - rather battered ones. And still didn't love them equally'". (p.12) The two maltreated dolls represent Elizabeth's children, broken by the murderous instincts so often found at the heart of White's families. The first introduction to Basil, the handsome son who takes much of Elizabeth's affection from her plain daughter, shows him to have a limp.

It is the return of these children that is occupying the conscious mind of Mrs Hunter, a mind still capable of vanity. "But the old woman fully closed her eyes. 'Not now. Why, my lashes are gone - my complexion. I can feel the freckles, even on my eyelids, without having to look for them'". (p.13) The preparations for their visit bring another reference to the destructive potential which can be found on the other side of affection. Dismayed by the decision of brother and sister to find rooms elsewhere, the housekeeper, Mrs Lippmann, wails "'I shall never understand why Anglo-Saxons reject the warmth of the family'". She is answered by Sister de Santis, "'They're afraid of being consumed. Families can eat you'". (p.22)

It is against the present of this impending visit of adult, even elderly, children that the past is chronologically interwoven. Mrs Hunter's dreamlike reconstruction of the past is set against a counterpoint of the daily lives of Basil and Dorothy. In these first pages it is, however, recollections of her own childhood which dominate the memories of Elizabeth. Kate Nutley's dolls give way to the recurring motif of Lilian Nutley, the sister who escaped from the mundane world of middle-class Australia into a mythical and glamorous Romantic past which has much in common with the Glastonbury of The Tree of Man and the Tintagel of A Fringe of Leaves. Lilian Nutley is murdered on the "banks of some great river -

in China, or Siberia". (p.24) The awed whispers of the muddled little girls, set in contrast this mythic river of doubtful location with their own:

shallow and often drought-stricken stream which meandered through everybody's place, through Salkelds', Nutleys' and Hunters' that is, a brown ribbon ruffling over stones, under willows. At its best the river was all joyous motion, though in its less pleasing backwaters scum formed, and sometimes a swollen sheep floated. Elizabeth, never Kate had to prod the bloated sheep. (p.23)

It is this fully observed stream which is to symbolize an attitude to Australia frequently recurring in the novel. Such an attitude will reach its climax in the scene in which Sister de Santis and Basil sit in the sun on the terrace of a beach-side restaurant and are assaulted by the sight and smell of the bloated body of a dog left to float amongst the refuse which litters the boundaries of the land. Natural beauty has been desecrated by an excrement which is the result of man's activities. Lilian, in spite of her brutal death, symbolises for Elizabeth the romantic possibility from which she will turn in her acceptance of the material:

But Elizabeth Salkeld could not cry for Kate's sister Lilian galloping wildly towards her death on the banks of the great Asiatic river. By comparison, their own shallow life, their stagnant days, were becoming unbearable. Elizabeth Salkeld could have slapped her friend for not hearing the thud of hooves, or seeing the magnificence of Lilian's full gallop. (p.24)

Instinctive perception is from the first a part of the complex nature of Elizabeth Hunter, as is the ability to accept the aspects of life which contain "bloated sheep", there will be no struggle for her in recognising that "Dreck" is a part of existence. Her battle is not so much a reconciliation of the opposing forces of instinct and intellect, in the sense in which it has been seen in The Solid Mandala, and will be seen in A Fringe of Leaves, rather it is a need akin to that of Hurtle Duffield. Like Hurtle, Elizabeth must learn to take from the material only that which is needed to feed healthy intellectual development. She too will come to see the stultifying comfort which is the danger to be found in a

love of possessions. Unlike Hurtle, though, to recognise it is enough. She will not be required to give up the setting in which she shines. Her art is herself. She will be allowed to use possession to dazzle, bring joy, and conversely to distort those who surround her.

From her memories of the past Elizabeth opens her near-blind eyes on a present which contains the misty figure of her solicitor, Arnold Wyburd.⁷ Wyburd is used to keep before us the smouldering vision of Mrs Hunter as she has been; a necessary device in a work which never hesitates to show the oppressive, and often repulsive, nature of an old and feeble woman on her death bed. It is Arnold who is most concerned to keep Elizabeth in the jewel-like setting which he sees as her due. The imagery which links Elizabeth with the quality of a precious stone reaches its climax in a final scene, after her death, when we find that it is Arnold who has stolen the missing sapphire. The jewel is seen as a substitute for the lost Elizabeth:⁸

Finally he looked at his sapphire. He invoked the star hidden in it. . .
He could hardly bear to look at it. He closed his eyes, preferring to experience through memory the invitation to drunkenness the nipples tasting unexpectedly of rubber the drops of moisture as flesh was translated into light air nothing all. Perhaps this was what others know as 'poetry' and which, he would have to confess, he was unable to recognize on the page. (p.597)

Their single act of sexual union has had for Arnold a visionary and sensuous force. It is a force akin to that which Lilian Nutley has been for Elizabeth. It is this aspect of Mrs Hunter which is to overshadow

⁷ The figures who surround Mrs Hunter tend to have names which suggest their function. Sister de Santis has spiritual aspirations. Flora Manhood has a spring-like freshness and is torn between the impulses of the male and female principles. Badgery badgers her patient in a parody of the efficient nurse. Arnold Wyburd's name appears to refer to the popular concept of the solicitor as a wily or wise bird.

⁸ The blue sapphire particularly recalls the blue flash of Elizabeth's eyes, "There were the eyes, some at least of their original fire burning through the film with which age and sickness had attempted to secure it", p.14. The pink sapphire, which is later given to Flora is said to have the colour of flesh.

our awareness of her own growth to completion. The momentary sight of a beautiful woman can itself create an epiphany, a mystic moment of heightened awareness in which a growth of the spirit becomes possible, a growth which in White comes about through recognition of the sensual and instinctive. "Her ability to make of herself and her surroundings a work of poetry, to make others intoxicated by the magic of her senses is at least, like Norbert Hare's Xanadu, her 'contribution to truth'".⁹ For the staid solicitor Elizabeth has been a yearning of a similar type to that of Stan Parker's "Gold coast". This feeling is kept locked from the outer world in a foreshadowing of the later hiding of the stolen stone; "he returned the sapphire to the bookcase, ramming Halsbury Vol XV into the void where his jewel would continue smouldering". (p.598)

But the memories which Arnold at first invokes for Elizabeth are those of her marriage:

This was the year Elizabeth and Alfred ('Bill') Hunter had looked at each other and finally admitted. Alfred looked at her longer than she at him because he was the more honest, she granted even then: not that she was dis-honest; she only lacked his purity of heart. (p.25)

As so often in White the marriage has been a failure in communication.

The beautiful, but selfish, Elizabeth craves the worldly. The fashionable Sydney life is again set in polarity with the innocence of the countryside.¹⁰

⁹ Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye", p.223.

¹⁰ Jennifer Strauss reviews this recurrent theme in her article "Patrick White's Versions of the Pastoral". "The rejection of a pastoral home by Elizabeth Hunter . . . maintains and develops themes found in both Voss and The Vivisector. At first we seem to have a replay of the Courtney situation; beautiful wife swanning it in the city, 'decent' husband, who belongs to his land . . . Elizabeth Hunter is, however, a character of considerably more substance than Alfreda Courtney and her relationship with her husband and his property is considerably more subtle. As the novel progresses we perceive that Bill Hunter of 'Kudjeri' has more in common with Sanderson of Rhine Towers than with Harry Courtney. But Elizabeth, like Voss, is not yet ready to dwell in grace, even if her decision to leave, which must be taken without the obvious justification of a major counter-value, visionary quest or artistic vocation, looks arbitrary, irresponsible, selfish". World Literature Written in English Volume 24 No.2. Autumn 1984, University of Toronto Press, Ontario, pp.273-287.

For Elizabeth "Kudjeri" has been, until the last months before her husband's death, a place of deception. "Even when they rode out together he [Alfred] was not aware that she had never been the person he thought her to be". (p.27) The "other lives" (p.27) which Elizabeth lives, bottling fruit, chivvying maids, are akin to those later to be considered more fully in Ellen Roxburgh,¹¹ but in this context they bring to the fore a slightly different theme. Like her actor son and her mannered daughter, Elizabeth is immersed in the playing of roles. It is in this that she differs from the "purity" of Alfred; her core is not so easily exposed. The "many envelopes of flesh she could remember wearing" (p.27) will need to be removed before she is ready for the revelation at the heart of the storm. Further than this she is without the support from a natural balance of instinct and intellect that is Alfred's gift. The books, particularly The Charterhouse of Parma, to which Alfred turns, are not a part of his wife's society-life:

But she continued hemmed in, not only by the visible landscape of hills and scrub, but by the landscape of her mind. I am superficial and frivolous, she blurted hopelessly; there is no evidence, least of all these children, that I am not barren.
(P.29)

Although Alfred is cast in the role so often played by White's fathers, the minor one of an uninfluential and infrequently seen partner in a marriage dominated by the mother, he is, nevertheless, portrayed affirmatively.¹² Alfred has come to terms with the disparate aspects of

¹¹ There are, however, vital differences between the two women's role-play. Ellen's is a part of the demands made upon her and her attempts to fulfil them. It is linked to the consideration of the various "realities" through which she lives, and tends to happen at separate stages of her life. Elizabeth's is rather a part of her vision of herself. A materialistic and dramatic concern with her own image, closer to that seen in Duffield's contemplation of his ill-fated self-portrait.

¹² Veronica Brady sees him as one of a band of White's "ideal men" who spend "most of their lives rebelling against the masculine stereotypes of Australian culture". "Patrick White and the Question of Woman". Who is She? Images of Women in Australian Fiction. ed. Shirley Walker University of Queensland Press, 1983, p.186. The relationship seems close to White's feeling for his own father. "I might have loved Dick had I dared and had we been able to talk to each other". Later he says, "I could not admire Dick enough to love him; innocent goodness, generosity, kindness were not enough". Flaws in the Glass,

an individual nature; in him the intellect, represented by his library of well-worn books, is held in equilibrium with the instinct, seen in the satisfactions of "Kudjeri".¹³ It is only in his relationship with his wife that this essential harmony fails him, and even there final communication is made possible in the last months which they spend together during his terminal cancer.¹⁴ This affirmative aspect of the potential role played by books is not, however, the only use to be traced in this work. Dorothy Hunter's pleasure, in the same text as that best loved by her father, is regarded ambiguously, as is the predominance of play-reading in the characterisation of Basil. In both brother and sister this use tends towards the negative sterility portrayed in Waldo Brown.¹⁵ For Elizabeth, though, the lack of ability to share in her husband's pursuits, both intellectual and instinctive, is to take a toll. It is the relative failure of her marriage, which is to distort the lives of her children and bring the sense of loss which is so prevalent a part of her death-bed musings. The missed opportunity to share in a potentially fulfilling marriage is largely due to the failure of the younger Elizabeth to resist the lure represented by Sydney society. It is only in her last years that she fully understands the lessons

¹³ Alfred Hunter has experienced his own moments of realisation and self-discovery. See p.267.

¹⁴ Veronica Brady extends this: "Alfred is initiating her [Elizabeth] into the mystery of death and into the paradoxical completeness which finds itself submitting to this intimate triumph of physical necessity . . . Alfred's helplessness points to the final shape she must take later on, the fluid state of acceptance which is to float her into the ocean of death". Brady, p.180.

¹⁵ His relationship with his children is unsatisfactory and as such is damaging to them, but this is a concomitant of the married failure. It is Elizabeth who removes his children, both physically and emotionally. pp.15 and 48.

Alfred could have taught her. There is though another possibility, just as Elizabeth fails her husband so he fails her, and perhaps himself. Alfred lacks the vitality and magnetism of his wife and this is only in part due to the off-stage nature of his role. Beatson in considering the sense of failure he feels Alfred engenders in his family has a similar response:

The father is more at home with books or with nature than with flesh and blood relationships and his self-enclosed integrity leaves out of its circle his more carnal wife whose restlessness must express itself through human intercourse. For her, God must always be embodied in a carnal, or at least sensual, form, and when her primary god fails her she must turn elsewhere . . . Her adulteries undermine her husband's belief in goodness, but also engender in her a sense of betrayal, a consciousness of her own evil. They may know periods of mutual affection and kindness, but never achieve the love for which the wife is thirsty.¹⁶

Positive though her marriage might have been it could also have had dangers. The relationship and the life style in which Elizabeth found herself could be seen as a hindrance to a full achievement of personal honesty and integrity.¹⁷ The presence of the solicitor recalls his wife, the "worthy Lal", (p.32) of Elizabeth's ironic memories:

Lal Wyburd would naturally have interpreted as selfishness every floundering attempt anybody made to break out of the straitjacket and recover a sanity which must have been theirs in the beginning and might be theirs again in the end. That left the long stretch of responsible years, when you were lunging in your madness after love, position, possessions, while an inkling persisted, sometimes even a certainty descended: of a calm in which the self had been stripped, if painfully, of its human imperfections. (p.29)

¹⁶ Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye", p.222.

¹⁷ It is possible to take the restrictions imposed by marriage as considerably more damaging than I suggest here, in an article which looks at the struggle of White's female characters to find "true selfhood", Phyllis Fahrie Edelson goes considerably further: "Mrs Hunter does not resist the female role bequeathed to her, does not go through a process of separation from her milieu and re-enter with a fuller sense of self, does not attempt to integrate her sexuality into her total being and does not find compassion for others through her own suffering. She was not wary of marriage and its bonds; rather, she grasped eagerly at the advantages it could afford her. Although she has the courage, vitality, strength of purpose and wit of White's superior women, Elizabeth Hunter never attempts to break the mould. The result of this collision of Mrs Hunter's personal powers with a severely restricted life role is a disastrous disfigurement of personality". Phyllis Fahrie Edelson, "The Hatching Process: The Female's Struggle for Identity in Four Novels by Patrick White", World Literature Written in English, Volume 25, No.2, 1985, pp.372-373.

It is this freedom of self which comes to the fore in Elizabeth's act of adultery with Arnold Wyburd. Brushing aside the remorse which is his post-coital response, Elizabeth tells him, "it is something which had to which you will forget and I shall remember with pleasure". (p.38) The sense of failure which disturbs her in her recollections of her husband does not stem from her rare acts of unfaithfulness. The sexual response she shares with the solicitor is itself an affirmative thing, an escape from the confinement with which she continually struggles. The act does not bind or constrict their future development, nor is it a part of Elizabeth's desire to possess.¹⁸

.....

Our introduction to Sister Badgery alerts us to her role. The mystical night-world of Sister de Santis is displaced by the common-sensical bustling of the morning nurse, "inquisitive, ostentatiously industrious, silly, easily outraged". (p.40) The egg she administers to her helpless charge is followed by the brandy allowed for good behaviour.

It is she who makes Elizabeth ready for the long-awaited visit. "And there was the idol propped against the pillows, the encrusted fingers outspread as though preparing to play a complicated scale on the hem of the sheet". (p.43) It is this aspect of Mrs Hunter that forms the present of the reader's experience. The grotesque, mummified figure is outwardly sustained by the jewels which lend her a momentary and artificial life, and themselves form such a continuing strand in the novel's purpose.¹⁹ They represent Elizabeth, not only in the affirmative sense of their fiery beauty and mandala-like self-containment but also in

¹⁸ There is a marked difference in the treatment of Elizabeth's two acts of infidelity. There is, in her union with Arnold, none of the brutality she is later to experience with Athol Shreve. It is however not seen wholly affirmatively, but is rather another diversion in a life which lacks harmony, and a further sign of the lack of communication between husband and wife. Elizabeth, portrayed as so desirable, is not given moments of sexual communion. The scene with Arnold is the nearest she comes to this.

¹⁹ "Then by an act of special grace, a blind was drawn over the expression the intruder was wearing for this old mummy propped up in bed, a thermometer sticking out of its mouth; if life were present it was the life generated by jewels with which the rigid claws were loaded", p.47.

the envy, richness and greed for which they are an ultimate symbol. While there is a sense in which Elizabeth is no more to be held responsible for her amorality than the jewels are, they, and she, inspire in her followers a devotion which is not simply that offered to a work of art:

Whatever her own feelings Sister Badgery would never be caught in any popish act: no one could guess how she adored, for instance, this pigeon's blood ruby, or that she was capable of worshipping an ancient idol for its treasure. (p.43)

The jewels of Mrs Hunter are a prop and stay when all else has gone, just as they are all that remains to a daughter released from the ruin of a marriage, but they are also a part of the mask which, in shielding her from outsiders, could come between her and her moments of revelation. The wigs, the cosmetics, the jewels distort the living face of the dying woman. They also suggest the materialism which has hindered her development. But it is through her ability to accept her own guilt, ("she looked for a moment conscious of her own fiend, and was resigned to accepting responsibility for it", (p.541)) (p.541) and with it the degradation symbolized by death on the commode, that she is able to summon the will to go forward and meet spiritual release.

III

The first meeting with Dorothy recalls her earlier evocation

Anthea Scudamore in "Dead Roses":

All she could do now was ignore, lower her discreetly smeared eyelids, dust down the coat she was wearing (her rather mature Persian lamb) and stalk behind the barrow on which her bags were being wheeled away. The briefest glance at her own reflection ought to restore her confidence if it were to falter.
(p.48)

"Her faithful old Chanel" (p.47) her "imperiously brilliant jewels" (p.48) suggest a careless confidence which, while a part of her brother's charm, is nonetheless beyond Dorothy's reach. In Dorothy sensuality has been constrained in the service of outward appearance. Her jewels and her clothes are one aspect of materialism, her "precious Chartreuse de Parme" (p.48) is another. Again in the Princess, as before in Duffield, the dichotomy at the heart of her nature is shown by the use of two languages.²⁰ Her childhood and upbringing are rooted in Australia, and it is there her instinctive life is still centred, "I have never managed to escape being this thing Myself", (p.49) but she has chosen to defer to another culture, a decision which has falsified genuine response. Her reading and her possessions are a part of a clinging to the intellect. Her fear of her own instinctive response makes her try to live through the safety of objects, the sophistication of borrowed ideas, and the neatly delineated outlines of fiction. Her marriage fails, not because of her Australian gaucherie, or even because of the money on which it was founded, but through her inability to respond to the extravagances of her husband's sexual demands. "It was her delicacy in sexual matters rather than his perversity which had nipped the ribbons of their marriage".
(p.219)

Faced with the reunion with her mother, Dorothy fears her own response. "She was too écoeurée at the moment to risk being dragged

²⁰ "Dorothy Hunter's misfortune was to feel at her most French in Australia, her most Australian in France", p.49. Also "it was only after the storm took hold of them in earnest and fear united the disparate halves of her entity . . .", p.70.

under by the emotional demands of a domineering old woman". (p.49)

In the event the moment has a humorous physicality. "Till she [Elizabeth] giggled through her flux of tears. 'Too much excitement! I think I've wet myself'", (p.47) a circumstance which Mrs Hunter finds a comfort: "Relief drifted over her face as the water spread inside her bed: for the moment she would not have to think what to talk about to this stranger; better disgraced by the body than by the mind." (p.50) For Dorothy it enforces the recognition of physical needs, a recognition that her first moments in Australia had already brought to the fore:

But felt fulfilled: it was like the sensation of settling yourself inside a cotton frock, between licks at an ice-cream horn, while voices droned on about the weather, the wool clip, and the come and go of relatives. (p.50)

Australia for all its shortcomings allows Dorothy to come closer to accepting a self unadorned by intellectual artificiality. It assumes a role which foreshadows that played in A Fringe of Leaves. The savageness of the land, the insensitivity of the people still allow the instinctive and sensual self a measure of fulfilment that is lacking in a more intellectually free and conversely dangerously stultifying environment. Not that White is, of course, concerned with making a simple distinction between a decadent Europe on the one hand and a sensually satisfying Australia on the other.²¹ Dorothy's experiences in France are complex, and themselves, dualistic. But the transference to foreign soil, aided by the awkwardness and diffidence which are a legacy from her upbringing, have combined to stifle instinctive response. "Should you run to greet? The belle-mère at her patience did not look up, but was watching to see the wrong thing done". (p.55) Life at the chateau contains contrasting experiences puzzling to the young wife. The bored chatter of society "aunts, cousins, and the few friends, equally glacial and exalted who fore-gathered at Lunegard", (p.56) is set against a brutal sexuality

²¹ See "The Prodigal Son" for the need to get away from the intellectual decadence of Europe and return to the roots of childhood.

which excites yet repels. "By contrast, Hubert smelled of thyme, woodsmoke, healthy exertion, and perhaps you imagined-blood". (p.55) The breakdown of the relationship leaves Dorothy installed behind a facade. "The name she had acquired remained her compensation, as well as the recurring reflexion of the marriage in which she failed to please". (p.56) But it is a falsification that leaves her vulnerable. The instinctive side of her nature continually wars with the attempts she makes to find satisfaction in basically intellectual pursuits.

The first conversation between mother and daughter returns to the past and hinges on the myths which lie behind family relationships. Elizabeth tells Dorothy of a remembered visit to friends who live above a river. "Your father was drinking his cocktail, when a bird flew and settled on his shoulder". (p.59) The bird, a love bird, is eccentrically guarded, on the orders of its devoted owner, by a gardener with a gun, a device which, while intended to protect the pet from possible marauding cats, ends by causing its death. Dorothy is stirred, but Elizabeth equates the incident with the Nutleys.²² Answering Dorothy's querying of the gardener's sanity, she replies, "Who knows? Was the Russian lover mad who murdered Lilian Nutley in Manchuria or-wherever?". (p.61) A love which confines can also kill. But the question lies in the allotting of responsibility. Was the doting owner of the pet responsible for its death, or does responsibility lie with the extravagant gesture of the gardener? Did the incident happen at all? Lilian's lover may have brought her life to an end, but he also gave her a reality denied to the little girls playing safe beside the stream.²³ The mythic element is

²² "Mrs Hunter thought she no longer believed in the situation herself, though Dorothy apparently did: she was appropriating the death of Mrs Hewlett's lovebird as something she might have prevented personally; that is the way all good myths are born", p.61.

²³ Ted Hughes "The Thought Fox", casts light upon this theme. The fox of the poem has both more and less reality than a living fox. In the differing realities considered here the myths of memory interchange with the myths of the writer's art, but both have a lasting solidity denied in the swift passing of the "real" world. Ted Hughes, "The Thought Fox", The Hawk in the Rain (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., p.9.

always a part of shared remembrance. The nostalgia evoked by a vanished past is often a distortion, a mythical recreation of a desire rather than an event.

Linked to the danger of falsifying time remembered is the equally recurrent difficulty in family relationships, the frequency with which genuine love fails to reach its full potential through timing. The child Dorothy needed the love of her brilliant society mother and in failing to receive it had attempted to substitute the more obvious homely and comforting virtues of Lal Wyburd. Yet, perhaps because of this early failure, she is unable fully to recognize the nature of her mother's affection when it is finally offered:

This state of unity in perfect stillness which she [Elizabeth] hoped she was beginning to enjoy with Dorothy, she had experienced finally with Alfred when she returned to "Kudjeri" to nurse him in his last illness. There were moments when their minds were folded into each other without any trace of the cross-hatching of wilfulness or desire to possess. (p.63)

Dorothy's response to her mother's mood is one of rejection. She escapes down her usual avenue, that of the external and trivial in place of the spiritual. "Dorothy said, after swallowing, 'I do think, darling, they ought to get you another carpet. This one is threadbare in places, particularly at the door'". (p.63) The equally threadbare nature of their essential relationship leads to an outburst which is followed by a temporary truce. "There was no need to call Dorothy to her their impulses answered each other". (p.64) But beneath the surface of renewed affection a sparring for advantage is soon to take place. Mrs Hunter's seemingly natural desire to have her daughter return to live with her is answered by evasion. Money, as before in The Vivisector, is to be used in an attempt to buy affection. Dorothy will be kept in plenty if she leaves her "pernicious" (p.68) French apartment. A large cheque will later be given to both children in what appears to be a similar attempt. Money is also involved in the return to their mother's

bedside of both brother and sister. Each hopes she will be persuaded to give up her expensive setting and accept the place she is determined to reject, "none of these convalescence homes, and certainly not the Thingummy Village, thank you". (p.31) But Elizabeth Hunter is not just a straightforward re-invocation of Alvira Courtney. Her motivation at least in her old age, has also to do with her recognition of the temporary and ultimately unsatisfying nature of wealth. Her jewels and her money are given away with an abandon which reflects their present lack of meaning. Earlier she had used it differently:

She had faith in her own originality and taste; everybody admitted those were among her virtues. She was not interested in possessions for the sake of possessions, but could not resist beautiful and often expensive objects. To those who accused her of extravagance she used to reply, They'll probably become more valuable; not that she was materialistic, not for a moment. Her argument was: if I can't take your breath away, if I can't awaken you from the stupor of your ugly houses, I've failed. She did honestly want to make her acquaintances as drunk as she with sensuousness. (p.33)

The wryness of White's tone alerts us to the hypocrisy, but does not deny the link in Elizabeth between materialism and sensuality. Her money is made to increase her own jewel-like qualities, and make of her a work of art which deserves at least qualified admiration.

The final moments of that first visit, before a ravaged Dorothy makes her escape from the claims of extravagant emotion, are concerned with the central theme of the eye of the storm. Dorothy's outward journey had introduced her to a Dutchman, who, in attempting to put her at her ease during a rough passage of the flight, recalls his experiences of the calm at the centre of a typhoon. It is a moment akin to those in The Vivisector, in which a brief meeting between strangers can prove to be a potential turning point. But Dorothy turns from the risk of new experience just as she had, fifteen years before on Brumby island.

IV

Col would have been clever at anything he put his mind to, but said what he wanted was peace of mind. As if you didn't, all of you, but what was it? and how to get it. (p.108)

Afternoon brings Flora Manhood. As her name suggests Flora represents a sensual animalism that is combined with an essential innocence, a springtime freshness which is expressed by her physical presence:

The girl was too young, too radiant to be dispossessed: she was smiling besides, out of bland lips, on which was pasted a delicately aggressive pink suggesting ointment rather than lipstick, while her Perspex ear-rings cunningly gyrated, and the patterns of great suns on her pretence of a dress dazzled the beholder with their cerise and purple, particularly just off centre from the breasts. (p.80)

It is this abundant, near aggressive, sexuality, which itself helps to form the trap from which she seeks to escape. Her background of small-town provincialism and uncaring parents has left her the victim of a nature unable to find, or express, a channel for spiritual enlightenment. Her instincts are firmly equated with the sexual fulfilment which comes readily to her essentially generous nature. She is not, unlike Dorothy, or even to a lesser extent Sister de Santis, bedevilled by erotic desires which war with an intellectual self-image. But she does fear that the sensuality and basic tenderness of her nature will lead her into the well-worn trap of disappointed mother and unfulfilled wife. In this she is strongly contrasted with Elizabeth who has used her body and the enticement it has offered; Flora resents the way in which her physical attractiveness shapes her life and her options. Elizabeth uses sexuality, or thinks she uses it, Flora is used by it. Her relationship with Col, her chemist lover, includes an intellectual aura, but it stems from his, rather than her, desires²⁴ and causes a resentment at what she feels to be his attempt to possess her, a resentment which is not assuaged even

²⁴ "But he made her feel empty: the paperbacks, the records, knowing what Noamurra means", p.114.

when she finds herself responding to its pleasures. It is Flora's awareness of this lack of integration in her own personality which leads to her rejection of Colin, and is in turn responsible for her abortive attempt to have a child by Basil. Basically she is rejecting the attempts which she feels society is making to cast her into a mould. It is in this that she is equated with Elizabeth.²⁵ Both women struggle against the concept of themselves as a fixed image, either in their own, or in other, eyes. An acceptance, however momentarily desirable, of any one aspect of their individual natures, as representative of a permanent inward truth, is inevitably stultifying:²⁶

She [Elizabeth] could not have worn indefinitely the veils of tenderness with which he wanted to invest her. Nor was she, except for that one necessary instance, the rutting sow Athol Shreve had coupled with. She would have given anything to open a box containing the total sum of expectancy, but as this did not happen (except in a single comforting dream, in which she discovered in a marquetry casket a splinter of rock crystal lying naked and unexplained on the lead lining) she must expect her answers outside boxes, in the colder contingencies preparing for her. (p.102)²⁷

It is this recognition of the state of flux at the heart of existence which most clearly differentiates Flora from Sister Badgery, Elizabeth from Dorothy. Both women are aware, however momentarily and confusedly,

²⁵ The stages of Elizabeth's life tend to be reflected in her companion of the moment. Hence Sister de Santis recalls childhood and suggests spiritual possibility, Flora Manhood sexual vigour and infidelity.

²⁶ Kiernan sees this differently, he finds her "blundering attempts to solve her [Flora's] dilemma by entertaining the possibilities of lesbianism or having a child by Sir Basil are more easily understood in terms of White's wanting to explore different aspects of sexuality than they are convincing in terms of this character's motivation". Kiernan, p.121.

Veronica Brady expresses no such dissatisfaction "when Sister Manhood in The Eye of the Storm dreams of running away from her boyfriend, Col, imagining him running after her 'waving his thing to bludgeon her into childbirth and endless domestic slavery' she is clearly longing for a similar dissolution into infinity, which she has glimpsed in Elizabeth Hunter moving towards death". Brady, p.185.

²⁷ The jewel like Elizabeth is equated with the splinter of rock crystal, her elegant home with the marquetry box, lead lining is found in a coffin.

of the danger to be found in the safety of "boxes". The security and comfort to be derived from the known is in itself a hindrance to growth:

If you could have said: I am neither compleat wife, sow, nor crystal, and must take many other shapes before I finally set, or before I am, more probably, shattered. But you couldn't they would not have seen you as the eternal aspirant. Solitariness and despair did not go with what they understood as a beautiful face and a life of outward brilliance and material success. (p.102)

It is in Flora's company that Elizabeth's thoughts turn to her other act of sexual infidelity, her momentary coupling with Athol Shreve. Unimportant though Elizabeth apparently feels her infidelities to be, this one, at least, is surrounded by an aura of guilt. The morning after the furtive departure of her aspiring politician of a "certain brutish charm" (p.91) Elizabeth's husband and son arrive fresh from the innocence of "Kudjeri". Basil is hurt, his arm shrouded in a sling. "'Oh darlings!' She was too shattered to cry; and Alfred might have joined her if she had let herself go". (p.100) Interspersed with such recollections are fragmentary thoughts of her father's suicide:

We are never the one they think; we are not one but many. Father was expecting his daughter to read Browning to him as usual, when there she was dawdling beside the river of drowned dolls, plaiting grass, listening for the sound of hooves on the bridge, the evening he put his gun to his mouth. (pp.104-5)

The hurried act with a man for whom she feels no affection, satisfies a momentary physical need, but is not accompanied by any communion of spirit; it is this which seems to equate, in Elizabeth's memory, with her other moments of failures of affection. The hint of degradation here, also divides Elizabeth's encounter with Athol, from Flora's with Colin. Although her need is basically sexual, it also has an element of the materialistic. The bitchy society-setting of the telephone call and dinner party which precede, and include, the meeting, emphasise the sense in which the politician is a collector's item to be equated with the Radfords' marble stairs. Sexuality in this instance, as before in Hurtle's encounter with Hero, is coupled as much with the intellect as with the

instinct. It is in this that it differs from the instinctive sensuality of Flora's moments with Colin:

as they pulled up facing each other the silence was serious around them. A network of midges hung in the glow of sunlight; on the one hand scraggy, slanting gums, on the other the fuzz of orange trees, sooty branches and wax-clogged twigs struggling to escape from their own crowd. She realized from the stillness that she was caught again, if she had ever really broken free. Col, who had at first stood back, was coming at her, like a sleepwalker returning by instinct to the room he had left earlier in the same dream; the exhausted, but intent trees were collaborating with him. (pp.111-2)

The imagery is not entirely affirmative. Flora is caught, like the branches, but though she may struggle to escape it is from these roots that new growth is made possible.

v

. . . the real proof would be the son arriving tonight, whether he had survived the mother to become the great actor, or whether he would start acting her tame zombie (p.107)

The stage is set for Basil's arrival. Elizabeth is equipped in her full grotesquerie; a desecration which still contains a reminder of the past. "Momentarily at least this fright of an idol became the goddess hidden inside". (p.121) Basil's performance at the reunion is marred only by his "distinctive limp" (p.122) and his slight recoil on realizing "he had found an understudy waiting on the spot where his leading lady should have been". (p.122) The irony of White's tone is reinforced by the imagery which surrounds Basil's constant role play. He is rarely able to escape his inner vision of his outward self. His art has become his life.²⁸ There is a sense in which White is re-engaging with a problem which confronted him with Hurtle, the essential separateness of the artist and the need to protect an inner core of awareness, but whereas in Hurtle this sensitivity is allied to perception, in Basil it seems often a pretence. The validity of Basil's art is to be held in question, in a sense that is never so in Duffield; a questioning shared by the actor himself. "Perhaps you were after all the man of inspired mistakes". (p.127)

Basil is, throughout our experience of him, to remain assailed by a fundamental dichotomy. As he walks in the garden with Arnold Wyburd on the evening of his return, this dilemma is clearly stated:

²⁸ "It was becoming too easy to please: just as acting can become too easy, and you have to start again, imposing physical penance, and more painful still, by dragging up from the wells of the unconscious the sludge in which the truth is found", p.127. All experience is seen as an extension of his actor's world. "He experienced as usual a faint excitement at the thought of playing opposite a woman whose work he didn't know, who had been chosen for him perhaps ill-advisedly, or even out of malice", p.144.

If you could remain long enough in this garden of ungoverned fronds, twisting paths, and statues disguising their real attitudes and intentions behind broken extremities and mossy smiles; if you could return upstairs and wrinkle experience out of the blind eyes and half-gelled responses of the Lilac Oracle, you might eventually present the Lear who had so far evaded almost everybody. But you had come here for a different purpose; short sharp, and material. (p.127)

This dualistic response is to be continually at the forefront of his mind. His instinctive self is drawn to the freedom offered to the artist, he can escape from his own limitations through the transformation made possible through a fulfilled moment of great art. Lear is his means of escape. But against this wars a further and primarily intellectual possibility. The new "half-written non-play" (p.140) approach to theatre set before him by Mitty Jacka might still be the road which his talent should take.²⁹ The fear with which the idea is associated might in itself mean that it is a desirable path. It is this area of his thinking which is, however, continually associated with materialism. It is also a no play it offers him, a man of too many masks, yet another. It is in search of money for the project that he has returned to Australia, and it is with financing it in mind that he is to attempt to uproot his mother from her chosen setting, "his survival depended on the death a materialistic old woman had delayed too long". (p.152)

The dual aspects of this dichotomy are further enforced by the two meetings with actors which take place soon after our first encounter with Basil. On the one hand there are the travelling players, well met in "Bang-kok!", (p.133) and the artificiality of their seeming insouciance; on the other, there is Lotte Lippmann the housekeeper who has survived the Nazis and is to be cast in the role of tragic clown. The claims of the first are extravagant, the need to "experience everything" (p.143) in the service of a prostituted art, those of the second are, in her own eyes, mere "Tingeltangel-Tingeltangel", (p.145) but small though Lotte's

²⁹ See Kelly, pp.62-70, for a consideration of the no-play/non-play element.

pretensions may be they are yoked to the "aspiring spirit". (p.209)

It is the ritual form of her dancing which, as before with Arthur Brown, is used as a release for those for whom initiation within its charmed circle is possible.

.....

The end of Basil's first day in Sydney brings the return of Sister de Santis. Glimpses of her have already troubled the actor. "As in the garden earlier the radiance of the woman's eyes and the opulence of her breasts surprised him". (p.151) He senses the occasional uneasiness which underlies the apparent tranquility of her nature, an uneasiness that is related to the contrastive influences of the flesh and the spirit. As so frequently before dualism is heralded by the use of two voices, the nurse's recollections of childhood begin with the cries of her parents. "'Már-o!' in her mother's despairing reed of a voice; 'Mar-i-a?' in her father's basso; till both parents were agreed she could only become an Australian 'Mary'". (p.155)

Sister de Santis' role is that of a votary.³⁰ During the fifteen years of her periodic nursing of Elizabeth Hunter she helps her to a fuller understanding of the message received during the heart of the storm:

'Oh, I know I am not selfless enough!' When she [Elizabeth] turned she was burning with a blue, inward rage; but quickly quenched it, and drew a stool up to the girl's feet. 'There is this other love, I know. Haven't I been shown? And I still can't reach it. But I shall! I shall!' She laid down her head on her nurse's hands. (p.162)

It is to this nurse that she confesses her desire to possess. "'I used to long for possessions: dolls principally . . . then jewels such as I had never seen . . . later, and last of all, I longed to possess people who would obey me - and love me of course. . .'". (p.162) It is Mary de Santis' concept of love which Elizabeth needs to reach, "' . . . Sometimes

³⁰ See Ibid, p.63, for a rather different approach to her function.

I've thought it's like this: love is a kind of supernatural state to which I must give myself entirely, and be used up, particularly my imperfections - till I am nothing". (p.162) Yet although Mary has early learned the lesson now stated by Elizabeth that "love is not a matter of lovers", (p.170) she is not immune to the need for sexual fulfilment, stumbling through the shadowy rooms in the night hours of the silent house she fails to find her familiar comfort in the stability of the known and yearns instead for physical contact with Basil:

As he bent her backwards with the smoothest, most practiced motion, her mind rooted through, her mouth lapped at, every detail in the catalogue: she drank through the pores of his just faintly bristling skin; dragged at the creases in tight clothes; inhaled the scents of brilliantine and stale tobacco.
(p.174)

The desire in this imaginary union is in conflict with her loyalty to the creed taught her by her parents, an analogy which is made, somewhat irritatingly, through the play on Basil's name. "You mustn't touch the basil Maro Papa has planted" (p.174) "Around her on the carpet the wasted basil seed was scattered". (p.175) This use of the connotations of the herb is pre-figured at the beginning of the passage by the use of rosemary. "She was left picking the needles from the rosemary bush beside the porch. The perfume increased her isolation". (p.173)

Later in the novel Sister de Santis will go to Basil's hotel and in an encounter which parallels an episode with Flora will attempt to expurgate her conflicting emotions of tenderness and lust.

In spite of buttoning her habit she might arrive at the sanctuary stripped. In whatever state, she burst in. To fall on her knees at the foot of the bed. If not to recover what had passed for sanctity. She found herself pressing the palms of her hands together . . . as she begged . . . for grace. (p.175)

VI

The nurse recognized the silence which comes when night has almost exhausted itself; light still barely disentangled from the skeins of mist strung across the park; at the foot of the tiered hill on which the house aspired, a cloud of roses floated in its own right, none of the frost-locked buds from Elizabeth Hunter's dream, but great actual clusters at the climax of their beauty. (p.208)

Night brings dreams to Elizabeth and roses to Mary de Santis.

Tossing uneasily on the great bed, silvered by moon-light, Elizabeth lives again the last months before her husband's death.

The death takes place at 'Kudjeri', "Her husband's property never hers". (p.195) She is, nonetheless, bound to the land, that of her Salkeld childhood. "So she did belong: as inevitably as the brown river flowing beneath willows, as her own blood running through her veins". (p.195) The context is important. It is here that Elizabeth is to experience an awakening of the spirit akin to that found in the eye of the storm. It is no coincidence that linked to these memories are others of Brumby Island; "but those at sea level, including St Mary de Santis, could never understand that this was only a physical aspect of the storm: you alone had experienced transcendence by virtue of that visit to the Warmings' island". (p.205) Just as she later accepts, and is strengthened by, the terrors at the heart of the storm, so she now meets head-on the suffering implicit in the death of her husband; not suffering in a conventional sense, though that is there, but the suffering which is an integral part of growth. "For a moment or two she dipped her toes in hell, and made herself remember the bodies of men she had dragged to her bed, to wrestle with: her 'lovers'". (p.205) During the last months husband and wife achieve a fusion of spirit which had previously escaped them:

Then she began to realize that the brief exquisite phrase when she had been able to speak to her husband in words which conveyed their meanings was practically past; from now on, they must communicate through their skins and with their eyes. It was a climax of trustfulness; but of course they had nothing left to lose. (p.203)

It is this communion which gives her the strength to make the final effort that death will demand. Death she comes to see is a summit, a consummation, a final achievement. "Extraordinary the number of people who insist that death must be painless and easy when it ought to be the highest, the most difficult peak of all: that is its whole point". (p.190) Summoned by "her instinct to involve in a miraculous transformation", (p.204) she kneels by her husband's side as death approaches:

She was not afraid, either in contemplating what must happen, or when it did. They accused her of being cold. She was not: she was involved in a mystery so immense and so rarely experienced, she functioned, it could truthfully be said, by reverence, in particular for this only in a sense, feebly fluttering soul, her initiator. (p.204)

The point that is being made is not, as it may seem when taken out of context, over-idealized, the pain and the degradation are also there, but it is to be found in the opportunity it offers for Elizabeth to participate to the full. Like Barry Flegg, like Hurtle Duffield, Elizabeth's strength lies in her determination to confront, and accept, the tests to which she is subjected. Unlike her daughter, she does not run from Brumby Island. It is at this time that Elizabeth is first likened to the skiapod:³¹

she became spellbound by the artist's image of what he called a skiapod: not her own actual face, but the spiritual resemblance which will sometimes float out of the looking-glass of the unconscious. Unlike most of the other monsters in the book, this half-fish half-woman appeared neither allied to, nor threatened by, death: too elusive in weaving through deep waters, her expression a practically effaced mystery; or was it one of dishonesty, of cunning? (p.200)

The fish and water symbolism and its elusive quality links the skiapod to the mythical romanticism with which Elizabeth has earlier surrounded

³¹ "Elizabeth Hunter sees herself as a skiapod, a fabulous sea-creature, half-fish, half-woman, 'elusive in weaving through deep water' towards death, the moment of physical dissolution." Brady, p.188.

Lilian Nutley.³² Its fascination for her is another expression of her groping towards the uncharted areas of the spirit. Further, in its ambivalence, it is closely allied to Elizabeth herself. Yet however ambiguous her nature it is one that is free from hypocrisy, a freedom which is heightened by the contrast with Dorothy and Basil. Faced with their father's imminent death, the Hunter children hide behind masks of convention. They do not allow themselves to experience the pain of which they are aware. "Oh, if we had our lives to live again, I [Basil] believe I'd choose to live! Not to renounce life for the grubby business of creating an appearance of it". (p.203) Theatrical though the tone may be, Basil's claim has validity, it is just this that is at the heart of the novel. Neither he nor Dorothy, is unaware of the emptiness of his or her choice, both recognize the falsity of the lives that they lead, and both recognize in their mother's abundant vitality a life force which they have denied.³³

It is on awakening from such recollections that Elizabeth is able to accept Mary's gift of the roses. "The roses sparkled drowsed brooded leaped flaunting their earthbound flesh in an honourably failed attempt to convey the ultimate". (p.211) For Sister de Santis they have represented an experience which has translated her barren sensuality into

32 Beatson sees it differently: "During her lifetime Mrs Hunter has always been at home in the destructive element, the storm on the ocean. The Vivisector established the sea as the symbol of the fallen world, the world of matter which contains not only sensuous beauty, but also concupiscence and filth, cannibalism and dishonesty . . . Unlike Cosma's cats and Kate's dolls, Elizabeth Hunter is an adept swimmer in the carnal element of water. Elizabeth Hunter is appalled to find her spiritual resemblance in a book of lithographs she reads during Alfred's illness". "Later, on Brumby" he goes on ". . . we have Mrs Hunter, at home in the cat-drowning sea, appreciative of its sensuous beauty, and herself a source of radiance that attracts others to her, where her revenous appetite makes short work of them - as it does of Edvard Pehl". Beatson "The Skiapod and the Eye", pp.223-224.

33 "She [Dorothy] was saddened, also, to think that it might never be given to her to enter the eye of the storm as described by the Dutch sea captain, though she was not unconscious of the folded wings, the forms of the sea-birds afloat around them", p.71.

a spiritual experience.³⁴ Coming upon them after a night in which she has been tormented by the lusts of the body she falls on them with a greed which is in itself sexual:

As soon as arrived she began to snatch like a hungry goat. Dew sprinkled around her in showers. Thorns gashing. Her heels tottered obliquely when not planted in a compost of leaves and sodden earth. Nothing could be done about the worms, lashing themselves into a frenzy of pink exposure: she was too obsessed by her vice of roses. When she stooped to cut into the stems, more than the perfume, the pointed buds themselves could have been shooting up her greedy nostrils, while blown heads, colliding with her flanks, crumbled away, to lie on the neutral earth in clots of cream, splashes of crimson, gentle heart-shaped rose rose. (p.209)

Yet it is after her orgy of roses that she also has her moment of communion, one no less powerful for its brevity. "Tíximaíroma kánomay", (p.210) the stranger says to her, a voice from the past, the meaning of which she has forgotten. It is the blind Elizabeth who rekindles the memory. "'Yes, I can see, Mary - our roses'. And at once Mary de Santis heard in her mother's voice the words she had not understood when the peasant-migrant spoke them, "'What a sunrise we are making'". (p.211) The roses represent a shared moment which is, in itself, an essential part of the process towards self-discovery, a foretaste of final spiritual experience.

³⁴ "Where two separate plants had been rubbing together so sweetly in bursts of glossy foliage and pointed spearheads of near seed, here was her knotty solitary self, trapped in the leather chair, in a . . . distorting mirror. Not even Mrs Hunter's 'big lilly'. Her anger broke around her. She began unbuttoning her uniform, tearing at the strait-jacket beneath to free her smoothest offerings. Which he, or anyone, would have rejected, and rightly. Though dimpled under pressure, and arum white, their snouts pointed upward to accuse the parent sow", pp.174-5.

VII

. . . this is what I must keep in mind, at all times: the light the movement of birds. Climbing the path, the princess knew she was giving herself a piece of hopeless advice: as if you can possess the moment of perfection; as if conception and death don't take place simultaneously. (p.221)³⁵

Brother and sister are each occupied in their separate parts of Sydney with the daily trivia with which they keep at bay the pain which would be the concomitant of recognition of their own motivation. Both have refused, however politely, to sleep under their mother's roof. Both are determined to break the hold which she still asserts. It is with this in mind that they keep to the fore memories of Elizabeth's acts of aggression and violation, but they are memories which are left in doubt for the reader.³⁶ Although Elizabeth's selfish destructiveness is frequently asserted, we are shown few examples, all, except perhaps her early behaviour to her husband, could stem from the viewpoint of the other protagonist and from the discomfort which is the result of her penetrating vision. It is this which makes it hard to judge how responsible Elizabeth has been for her children's limitations. In earlier life she seems to have failed them by dazzling them into a love which she is not prepared to reciprocate fully. Their need for truth is rewarded by the offering of outward appearance. But at this stage in their lives it is the reverse which holds. It is Elizabeth who refuses to accept sham and her children who hide behind conventional response.

Wracked on her solitary bed the Princess de Lascabanes revolves sleeplessly, and in her brief moments of fever-tossed sleep dreams of Arnold Wyburd, her mother's lover. Waking, she is "scarcely less

³⁵ Again Dorothy's response is acquisitive, she is not incapable of seeing, or appreciating, she must possess.

³⁶ Elizabeth's inadequacy at the time of Basil's broken arm is perhaps an exception to this, as is the affair of Athol Shreve's cufflinks and the lie told to Dorothy.

disgusted by reality than by the dreams which had been foisted on her".

(p.216) It is this she fears her mother's sharpness of inner vision will uncover. "Mummy would somehow worm out that shameful dream". (p.216)

Dorothy's need is to cut through the layers of pretension and to reach back to her Australian beginnings. It is this that is exemplified in the scene at the club in which she suffers tortures over the ordering of an uneatable mutton chop:

It didn't help to catch sight of herself in memory holding the chop over the embers on a sharpened stick, and to hear the even less articulate, but naturally sincere, voice of little girlhood, no Daddy it isn't burnt only charred that's when it's scrummiest. (p.213)

She has allowed herself to be confined within a strait-jacket of convention not yet felt in the freedom of the child. It is this freedom which she confuses with her feeling for her father.³⁷ It is his image which is to the fore in her dealings with her mother and Arnold Wyburd, but Elizabeth will not allow references to her husband to be cloaked in the piety which her daughter seems to demand. Dorothy's request to share in her mother's memories is met with an outspokenness that horrifies the princess. "'For many years I couldn't love, only respect him. Then I - well, I never loved enough. In all our life together, I didn't touch his penis. To touch would have shown, wouldn't it?'" (p.224) Elizabeth is aware of how much her own conventional responses have cost her, but it is a lesson that Dorothy is not to learn. Elizabeth's perception is translated in Dorothy into an intellectual need to experience and possess the externals of other lives. It is this that leads her to ransack the servants' rooms and find, amongst the garbage, the wasted steak. She has limited herself to the refuse of others' existence and fails to recognise the values which they might have offered.

³⁷ Dorothy frequently allows herself to wallow in memories of her father, which seem to suggest a failure to bring to fruition a potentially satisfying relationship. Such a regret is certainly there, but it is largely negated by the hypocrisy which is so large a part of her adult nature. The letter she sends to the dying Alfred Hunter perfectly expresses the criteria which she has chosen. Occasional moments of nostalgia are rather an indulgence than a real attempt to escape from the blind alley in which she finds herself.

Basil too, finds that his Australian childhood remains the source from which it is possible to draw an instinctive vitality lacking in his more cerebral, and sophisticated, relationship with Europe. In the actor however, such an instinct has already been translated into creativity:

When it wasn't his achievement he wanted to recall, but his childhood, from which Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, together with other paler apparitions, had sprung, out of the least likely looking drought-stricken gullies, brown, brooding pools, and austere forms of wind-tattered trees. (p.240)³⁸

In spite of the acclaim that the playing of such parts has brought him, Basil's tragedy remains his awareness that he is an Edmund and not a Lear. He lacks the courage "to look behind the screen", (p.244) a protection which has been provided through the false security offered by acting:

'This screen - how it's continued cropping up. So solid and real - as real as childhood.' He laughed uneasily for his discovery. 'I've built speeches round it, rehearsing parts which have worried me. It's always protected me from the draught'. (p.245)

The play which Mitty Jacka offers is one way of penetrating the screen. It provides a searchlight on the life of the actor himself, "The unplayed I" (p.261) and not the other selves behind which he has been allowed to hide. It is not, however, a solution which appears to have the full affirmation of the author, one falsity, we suspect will be supplanted by another.³⁹ Flashes of uncomfortable insight are not enough to strip from the core the layers of vanity and insincerity which have, since childhood,

³⁸ "There had been a time when he saw clearly, right down to the root of the matter, before his perception had retired behind a leger-demain of technique and the dishonesties of living", p.273. He is what Walsh calls a character "in whom technique and the dishonesties of living [have] not worn away perception. Walsh, p.116.

³⁹ "Basil's mask is a travesty of what Mitty Jacka has ordained for the non-play: it is a false set expression, whereas the non-play was going to be an escape from the 'cast-iron, proven self' (p.248) and allow him to give himself the flow to live out all his potential lives. By refusing this he condemns himself to the unreality of a role, to mock flesh". Kelly, p.68.

been allowed to accumulate. On the contrary they merely replace one form of insincerity with another. The actor's nakedness is in itself a posturing surface which forbids the painful process of penetrating towards individual truth, a truth which, momentarily revealed, might be shared with the audience. If Basil is to aspire to his mother's integrity it must be through a renewal from the roots. Such a renewal, however, calls for a recognition of self-motivation which he frequently lacks:

His footsteps resounding down the hill, the sky awash with early morning colours above the telly grids and wet slates, restored his faith in himself as future. If he did fly home on a brief visit, it would be from his own choice, not a mentor's, his object not to bully an old woman into handing over a fortune even if it killed her, but to renew himself through bursts of light, whiffs of burning, the sound of trees stamped by a wind when they weren't standing as still as silence. And mud: in spite of the pavement and his shoes, he could feel it almost, oozing upward, increasing, between the splayed toes of his bare feet. (p.249)

The meeting between brother and sister provides the first hint of the incest which is to reach its culmination in the family bed at "Kudjeri",⁴⁰ "till here she was faced with the lustrous truth: Hubert de Lascabanes himself had not appealed more disturbingly on the occasion of their first meeting in the Crillon Lounge". (p.259) It is primarily in Dorothy, at this stage, that a latent sexuality has been awakened; an awakening that seems to be a part of the air of Sydney and which has already been suggested in her dreams. Later, as she sits in the Botanic Gardens, this instinct is further stimulated:

The young people were conducting themselves disgracefully, with the result that they impinged on the thoughts of the princess, till she too was writhing, upright and alone on her bench, in almost perfect time with their united prostrate bodies. (p.271)

⁴⁰ There is also a hint of incest in Dorothy's dreams of Arnold Wyburd. In Dorothy's memory her father and the solicitor frequently interweave and interchange. There are also occasional slight hints of a similar feeling in Basil's relationship with his mother, a relationship which at times recalls the feeling that Alvira Courtney had for Hurtle.

On the far side of the same "wall of evergreens" (p.271) Basil is enjoying a different form of sensuality, one which, nevertheless, shares a note of decadence:

Around him the fortified soil, the pampered plants, the whiffs of manure, the moist-warm air of Sydney, all were encouraging the vegetable existence: to loll, and expand, fleshwise only, and rot, and be carted away, and shovelled back into the accommodating earth. (p.272)

For the Hunter children such an indulgence in the desires of the flesh may not be entirely an affirmation, but there is a sense in which it is the beginning of the familiar descent into the depths of the individual nature. It is such a descent which White so frequently sees as a prerequisite for eventual growth.⁴¹

⁴¹ Basil's eating of the shellfish recalls Hurtle's experience in the same setting, for Hurtle it is set at the beginning of his descent into a degradation which is eventually followed by spiritual consumation.

VIII

No, he must look further back for somebody to blame, farther even than Mitty Jacka expecting him to find the money for the spectacular suicide she was devising for him. Look right back to the original grudge. I was never a natural mother - I couldn't feed. But that-you see, darling - hasn't deprived you of - of nourishment.⁴² She had told him, by God, without his asking. And doled out a cheque for five thousand - dollars, not pounds. Again only a wretched nibble. (p.320)

It is at this point that the emphasis of the work shifts from Elizabeth and lights on the events and motivations in the lives of those who surround her. The decision taken by brother and sister to remove their mother from her accustomed setting in Moreton Drive, precipitates a ripple of unease in the circle of her associates. First to be affected are the Wyburds. Lal Wyburd's conflicting emotions of antagonism and admiration have caused her to leak the secret of the children's intentions. The effects of this produce in turn, the first signs of the depression which will end in Lotte Lippmann's suicide, and the surface motivation for the visits of the two nurses to the hotel of Basil Hunter.

In the mind of Dorothy, intention is already beginning to fester. "No, there was nothing wrong, Dorothy assured: actually it was the murder she was contemplating, and was pretty certain to commit since her visit to the house of one who had brought it off successfully". (p.295) Again the actions of the family, one against another, are being conceived in terms of murder, not first-hand killing as is finally the case with the Brown twins, but death brought about by the imposition of will. It is in the house of Cherry Cheeseman (née Bullivant), the one-time friend whose mother has already been disposed of via the Thorogood Village, that Dorothy fully begins to grasp the implications of the actions in which she

⁴² There are times when she holds herself more fully to blame. "Perhaps it is you [Elizabeth] who are responsible for the worst in people. Like poor Basil sucking first at one unresponsive teat then the other the breasts which will not fill in spite of the nauseating raw beef and celery sandwiches prescribed by Dr Whatever - to 'make milk to feed your baby'. Instead of milk, 'my baby' (surely the most tragic expression?) must have drawn of the pus from everything begrudged withheld to fester inside the breast he was cruelly offered". p.423.

has begun to be involved. It is now, however, an involvement which bears more than a surface similarity to the well-worn dilemma of grasping child and ageing parent. Crass though Dorothy's motivations may be, they pay no more than lip service to conventional responses. It is not that Dorothy is not enamoured with the money her mother's death will bring her, her miserly instincts are frequently made clear (in the present instance through her inability to "reduce such a lovely round sum" (p.286)), but that by far her most basic desire is to escape from the emotional demands she finds in the presence of her mother and which she feels reinforced by the strength of her own response to the land of her birth. She needs to retreat to the thin bread and butter and the cloistered security of her life in France. Her searching in mirrors for the stability she finds in outward appearance indicates her recognition of the chaos within. Neither Dorothy nor Basil is without an awareness, however deeply buried, of his or her own failures. In portraying them White makes clear how narrow is the path between the living and the dead.⁴³ Neither brother nor sister is without the potential to achieve a harmony of the instinct and the intellect. Both fail to do so through their refusal to face head-on the depths of their own motivation. Both in their different ways erect a "screen" between themselves and the instinctive life with which they need to come to terms; for both Elizabeth Hunter is at the same time a cause and an escape.

It is here that an ambiguity in White's portrayal is most clearly seen, for in The Eye of the Storm cracks appear in the façade of his traditional family. In "The Skiapod and the Eye" Beatson expands upon this theme:

⁴³ A division current at the time which he has used since The Living and the Dead (New York: Viking, 1941).

The "White family" is a unit of four . . . One or both of the children is often emotionally incapacitated by the imprint left in their formative years by the mother . . . The children are often mentally or emotionally crippled through their relationship with their mother, and the result is usually incapacitation rather than illumination . . . But while she has always been admired for her positive qualities, she has till the present novel, been regarded from the rather baleful point of view of the children whose lives she has warped or suffocated. Her obsessions are understood, even sympathized with, as is her sense that she has never received from her children the love that is theirs to withhold . . . In writing The Eye of the Storm, it is as though White has at last been able to penetrate to the innermost core of this fictional personage and find there the grace which even until now he has not been able to acknowledge.⁴⁴

While recognizing and acknowledging this, it is still hard to decide how far Elizabeth is to be seen as responsible for the failings of her children. In earlier portrayals the development of the children has been closely observed, and the mother's areas of culpability correspondingly demarked.⁴⁵ In reading The Eye of the Storm it is hard to avoid lending to Elizabeth some of the behaviour-patterns culled from her predecessors and there does also seem to be a sense in which White too is at times more concerned with a re-incarnation than with the woman he is currently delineating. Certainly her children use Elizabeth as a scapegoat. They fear her power to probe below the appearance they offer to the world; and they fear the strength with which she still makes emotional demands able to stir a strong response. But in this novel, in a way which has not happened previously, such a response can be seen as affirmative. For Basil and Dorothy their mother is their eye of the storm and to attain her clarity of inner vision they must first find the calm at the heart of the turmoil she creates in them. Instead both use

⁴⁴ Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye", pp.221-223.

⁴⁵ Clearly, Elizabeth is, from the first, intended to be seen more sympathetically than her predecessors. In part this is due to an extension of a softening process which has been a gradual development over the years. But it is also partly due to the structure of the work. The use of the present axiomatically produces greater involvement, and therefore, greater sympathy in the reader. The motivations of the dying Elizabeth are frequently generous, and her words if sharp, are designed to expose the truth.

Elizabeth's imagined or real transgressions as an excuse and an escape from their own responsibility. In spite of the grudging admiration she evokes, each fetters response in the service of material gain.

Locked uncomfortably in the narrow bed in which he grapples with Flora Manhood, Basil snatches uneasy moments of sleep, sleep lit by nightmares:⁴⁶

In the cold awfulness of this fur-trimmed robe feelings unshutter only for brilliant glimpses watching the old painted skin give its last gasps through every frightened pore as well as the purple cupid's bow no need to use the dagger in your sleeve words are fatal if pointed enough money is life while there is life left otherwise it is time to die die then . . . (p.320)⁴⁷

It is from Flora that he attempts to take the nourishment denied him by his mother. "He did in fact nuzzle at those breasts overflowing with kindness and - and 'nourishment', unlike the reluctant official tit recoiling from his importunity". (p.322)

It is motherhood that Flora hopes to gain from her brief coupling, motherhood unshackled by the constraints imposed by an acknowledged father, "now it was she who had become the guiding force. It was this desire to create something tangible, her only means of self-justification: as she must make others understand". (p.316)⁴⁸ Flora recognizes the power of her sensual urges and wants to give them form, but, like Elizabeth before her, she seeks to escape the imprisonment which she

⁴⁶ The central awareness of the novel, the dying Elizabeth's only half conscious memories, is reinforced by the frequency with which the other characters are shown locked in the world of dream.

⁴⁷ "Basil is a great actor, and knows how to choose words for their marrow; he's learnt the business thoroughly", p.280.

⁴⁸ As in The Vivisector creativity is linked to the over-riding theme of wholeness. Creativity is not the sole prerogative of the artist, it can be found in the birth of a child or even in the production of a meal. Here it is of course paramount in the motif of acting, in the performances of Basil, Lotte Lippmann and Elizabeth and Dorothy, but closely linked are the various portrayals of parenthood, the Macrorys the de Santis's and the Manhoods, but above all the motherhood of Elizabeth and Flora.

fears is the price of affection. As she gives herself in her union with the "ugly substitute" (p.322) for her chemist lover, her thoughts are filled with doubts which concern her own conception:

She herself would not have wished to be born; sometimes she wondered whether her parents had wished it; or whether it was something that had happened because it was too long a drive to the pictures, so that they stayed at home. Of course they would never have admitted it if you had been brave enough to ask them; they were honest religious-minded people. (p.321)

Flora's dilemma is the dilemma at the heart of the book and indeed is to be discovered behind everything White has written. How can affection, love, emotional response be offered and accepted without damage to individuality and freedom? Even in the portrayal of an earth-mother of the type of Mrs Godbold, the risk of distortion through possessiveness can still be found.⁴⁹ Flora's abortive and muddled attempt to achieve motherhood in a vacuum, illuminates and comments on the struggle of Elizabeth and its effects on her children. Elizabeth too has, in her escape to Sydney from Kudjeri, attempted to render her children fatherless. In earlier works such behaviour might seem a comment on the selfish possessiveness which can lie at the heart of mother-love, here it is rather an attempt to escape from the constriction of the conventional and acceptable family. Flora craves children and the whole-hearted sensual fulfilment which is an allowable part of a mother's protective love for a young and helpless child, but she fears that by accepting the rigid structure which society erects around its families she, and the child, will be contained and lessened. The neatly prescribed world of the kindly, and barren, Vidlers illustrates that aspect of her fear. It is a world in which the straight and narrow garden path forbids the growth of the natural vegetation constrained beneath it. Such a path is implicitly contrasted with the dangerous, overgrown and erratic curve by which the visitor arrives at the house in Moreton Drive; for the Vidlers

⁴⁹ See the brothel scene in White's Riders in the Chariot (New York: Viking, 1961), pp.305-21.

change and growth are curtailed by the daily imposition of a timetable, "front path, doorstep, and hall were the first details of her [Viddie's] schedule". (p.301) It is in an attempt to escape from this that Flora tries and rejects the lesbian, and equally barren, life offered by Snowie Tunks, a world in which the stimulus of artificial affection is sought beneath a coating of dirt, drugs and drink. Flora's final encounter with Snowie, the object of her childhood affection, finds, and leaves, her in the gutter. Between these extremes stands Col, offering her a greasy mutton chop, the beginnings of intellectual awareness and sexual fulfilment. It is an alternative that appears to have White's affirmation, and has appeared before in the portrayal of the Fleggs in "Dead Roses".⁵⁰ It is also the choice which Flora finally makes, but it is an alternative that is not without risks, alleviated but not negated by the awareness of the participants of its dangers. It is, however, at least the way which includes participation.

It is not, though, the choice which Elizabeth has made. The final reconciliation with her husband takes place after the children have left home. If there is blame for Mrs Hunter it lies here. She has excluded her husband, and her children, from a mutually fulfilling relationship, a relationship for which she has offered no substitute. But White has deliberately chosen to lessen the impact of her behaviour not only by the care with which he delineates the constraints which the more conventional course of behaviour would have imposed on her spiritual development, but also by the distancing effect which his use of time inevitably places on

⁵⁰ Writing of his relatives the Withycombes White clearly shows his affection for the expansively untidy as against the rigidly controlled. The one allows for growth the other leads to death in life: "Ellen the mother was one of my loves, expansive, slovenly if the truth is to be told, her hair always coming down, her seams bursting. At the same time she had her aesthetic principles, whether getting a room into shape for an arriving guest, in the books she read, in her approach to life. Never in the money, she had an instinctive taste which can conjure beauty out of the junk shop into the cottage. The meals she served were in the same tradition of conjuring and rightness. I loved everything about Ellen", Flaws in the Glass, p.66.

the construction. It is not Elizabeth's failings as a young mother, but Dorothy's and Basil's shortcomings as elderly children which occupy the present of the novel.

Sister Manhood's descent upon Basil is closely followed, and paralleled, by that of Sister de Santis. The sensual aspect of Mary's attraction to Elizabeth's actor son is prepared for by the impact of the new self with which she greets Flora:

'I decided to take your advice', she explained, 'and buy myself something gay. How do you like it?'

It was more than awful; there was something sort of sacriligious about Mary de Santis in this orange hat, not worse if she had bent down, switched her skirt over her back, and shown she was wearing a naked bum underneath. (p.330)

It is not, however, this unlikely and alien regalia that she finally chooses for her mission, rather she reverts to the safety of her "unofficial uniform". (p.336) Both in the choice of her "usual navy", (p.336) and in the ostensible reason for her visit, the proposed injustice to her patient, the basically honest Mary is allowing herself the same escape through outward seeming that has been chosen by the Hunter children. Like them she remains, however, fitfully aware of her own self-deceptions. The orange hat, a colour frequently associated with the young and blatantly sensual Flora, itself reflects the older woman's inner need to escape from the constraints which her will is continually imposing upon a voluptuous body.⁵¹

Basil greets her with the full complement of his actor's charm, and "breathless jollity", (p.337) and sweeps her away on a trip which foreshadows the journey back to "Kudjeri" which he is so soon to take with Dorothy. It is here, in an artificial setting beside a tainted sea, that the insecurity of Mary's spiritual aspirations is gently mocked and Basil's encroaching and gathering doubts given shape:

⁵¹ Sister de Santis appears at Elizabeth's funeral in the same hat, the point appears to be that Elizabeth has stood, as does to some extent Flora Manhood, for life and vitality.

The sun had gone in besides, behind a drift of dirty cloud. And once your vision is withdrawn from you, there remain the lapping shadows, the littered sand, one competing with the other for the sludge to which the human spirit can sense itself rendered: an aimless bobbing of corks which have served their purpose, and scum, and condoms, and rotting fruit, and rusted tins, and excrement. (p.352)

Just as she had earlier enjoyed a pathetic flirtation with the elderly Colonel Askew, now the sharing of a restaurant table, with a famous name, turns a head which is normally bowed in the search for sanctity. Leaving Basil, she is intoxicated in every sense, she stumbles, as he has done before her: ⁵²

As for Sister de Santis, she made the extra effort to drag herself out through the car door, and had practically reached her full and normally impressive height, when she stumbled, and fell forward on her knees. For a moment she stayed kneeling on the pavement, her shuddering back turned towards him . . . She was trembling horror struck by more than her fall, when he was to blame, for the second time he was made to see: he could not have felt guiltier if he had come to his senses and found that, not even of his own will, but by malicious inspiration, under some cloud of unreason, he had defiled this pale nun. (p.356)

Through these paralleled incidents a common theme is apparent; the impact of the individual for good or ill on the lives of those with whom an intimacy is shared. Neither the nurses nor Basil is made, however, more than momentarily to suffer for the revelations which their contact has caused. Flora's attempt to deflect the course of her life through the use of Basil's body ends in a tumult of relief as she gazes at the "lovely blessed BLOOD", (p.548) which releases her from her self-imposed motherhood. Mary's indiscretions, puncturing as they do an image of herself which could grow pretentious and turn dangerously inward, help to leave her in the state in which the novel ends, able to offer "to this entombed girl, her future patient, the beauty she herself had witnessed, and love as she had come to understand it". (p.607) And Basil, through each of the contacts which Australia forces on him, comes nearer to the

52

"At a turn in the path, where an abrupt flight of steps spoiled its serpentine flow, he put his foot in a pool of darkness and began to topple", p.153.

core which his ego struggles to resist, a core which his likeness to his mother reminds us, will not necessarily be beyond revelation.

IX

Arriving at the Warmings' island, wrenched by helicopter from the sophisticated mainland, it is Dorothy, not her mother, who is ripe for spiritual experience:

The Princess de Lascabanes failed to animate the stick she was changed into. More than anything, she feared that the secret joy she had experienced while carried onward and upward through the forest, might overflow through her eyes and give her away. So she screwed it up as tight as she could, together with the equally terrifying sobs which were rising in her. Ten minutes later, as they sprang into the open and down a grass-stitched slope, she might have prayed, if her prayers had been more successful in the past, that their car should continue charging into the immensity of light and water, as far as the ocean could support its wheels. Better blinded by green grass, ear drums burst by a black roar, infinity pouring into the choked funnel of your throat, than the paroxysms and alternating apathy of a lopsided existence. (p.375)

But it is at this point that a further aspect is introduced into the familiar idea of the individual's striving towards completion. Elizabeth Hunter is capable of transcending personal limitation and herself becoming a source for another's epiphany. The Warmings greet the coming of their socialite guest with what we are intended to see is genuine tenderness:

But personal honours were irrelevant beside the family triumph in coming by a living breathing object of worship and source of oracular wisdom. With a twinge Dorothy de Lascabanes realized she had been invited, not because the Warmings wanted to be kind but because they adored her mother. (p.376)

Elizabeth's projection into the eye of the storm is to be prepared for by a consideration of social context. Not only are we to be given another glimpse of her effect upon her admirers, but also to be examined are the levels of sincerity and insincerity in personal relationships. Thus Elizabeth, in spite of the affirmative role in which the Warmings have cast her is not, of necessity, to be assumed to have passed beyond social guile. The readiness of mother and daughter for illumination is to be reviewed and counterpointed. Hence the scene, in which Elizabeth,

ostentatiously apron-clad, insists on peeling potatoes, ends when, bored she leaves them for Dorothy to complete. Similarly, when she finds the flowers the children have gathered for her, "her effusive praise", (p.380) is treated ironically. "Elizabeth Hunter ignored him [John] 'in whatever ways we fall short, we have our native flowers: there's nothing subtler - nobler;' and getting up, she advanced upon the erect bunch to rearrange it". (p.377) By contrast Dorothy is shown as making a real attempt to communicate with the young members of the family. "Mutual understanding did exist at another level if the children would admit to it". (p.378) Her effort is rewarded by a momentary sharing of their hidden world; a world which presages the one to be explored in A Fringe of Leaves,⁵³ and also recalls "Dead Roses".

But as always White is not concerned to show us a simple equation. We are not being given a contrasting portrayal of mother and daughter, with a dazzling Elizabeth whose brilliance produces a temporary dulling of her audience's faculties on the one hand, and a gauche, unattractive, but basically sincere Dorothy on the other. The Princess de Lascabanes, as even on Brumby Island she most frequently remains, is not above social expediency. Foraging for early morning coffee in the kitchen of her hosts,⁵⁴ she finds herself alone with Edvard Pehl, the "unwanted Norwegian" (p.379) whose momentary nakedness has already attracted her:

She saw her hand as it would have lain, like a narrow, snoozing, white fish, in the pale hair, its thicket still sticky from salt and the shortage of rain-water; she avoided the phosphorescent pubics, recurring anyway only in one of the briefest flickers. (p.386)

⁵³ "There was somebody murdered here in the beginning. They were wrecked on the island. The blacks killed the man and made the woman their slave", p.378. This forms the nucleus of the Eliza Fraser plot. Patrick White, A Fringe of Leaves (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1976).

⁵⁴ The episode of the omelette throws light on the dichotomy at the heart of Dorothy's nature. "It is - only for my Edvard taste - too much slime' 'Baveuse! That is how we like it'. . . . No, it was slime. How could she have been so depraved as to collaborate in depravity?", pp.386-387.

In such a situation she uses a guile she recognizes as inherited from her mother. "Mother may have known, after all". (p.385) Later, on the beach, she reverts to the same tactics. "At the same time she was amazed at herself: at her instinctive insincerity". (p.387)

This portrayal of varying levels of sincerity is not confined to the treatment of outsiders, more significantly it casts a searchlight on the reciprocated feelings of mother and daughter, and later, as Elizabeth approaches the eye of her storm it is used as a measure of the extent of her recognition of self-hypocrisy.

These connected, but not interchangeable, themes come most fully to the fore once the Warmings, called by "antiquated telephone" (p.391) to the Sydney bedside of their son, leave their ill-assorted guests to the fate to which Brumby Island is to bring them.

It is soon after the departure of their hosts that the attack on the susceptibilities of the remaining few begins. Walking "blissfully alone", (p.394) along the deserted beach, Dorothy and Edvard are assailed by the "brumbies of Brumby". (p.395)⁵⁵ The horses are an early presentiment of the storm to come, and the princess and the professor respond to them with a fear which nonetheless draws them together:

Edvard Pehl and Dorothy de Lascabanes stood supporting each other. She could feel his thick body breathing against her negligible breasts and palpitating ribs, whilst outside their physical envelopes their minds flapped round in bewilderment and fright. (p.395)

Later, alone in the deserted house, Elizabeth also sees the Brumbies, this time though, they leave their breathless scramble along the echoing beach and turn inland through the sheltering scrub and away from the approaching cyclone. Dorothy and Edvard are also to run in the face of

⁵⁵ The use of the brumbies is not altogether clear. They seem to bear some relation to the horses in Lawrence's The Rainbow as theirs is a similar mixture of beauty and threat. But there is also a sense in which they exemplify the behaviour of the mass. Illumination is a solitary process and one for which Dorothy and Edvard in their clinging together are not yet ripe. The brumbies are, however, in their natural element. The princess and the professor are incongruous, clinging together on a beach to which they do not belong.

the storm, a flight which, while perhaps as instinctive as that of the horses, is based on a fear of participation, a fear which has much in common with that felt by Anthea Scudamore on her own island of possibility. 56

On the night of the departure of the Warmings, the Hunters and Professor Pehl dine together on fish caught by the Norwegian and transformed, by Elizabeth, into "a work of art". (p.398). The fish re-introduces the theme of the skiapod:

'a kind of shadowy fish, but with a woman's face. The face was not shadowy. Or some of it at least was painfully distinct. I [Elizabeth] saw it years ago in a drawing, and it stayed with me. You couldn't say the expression looked deceitful, or if it was, you had to forgive, because it was in search of something it would probably never find'. (p.404)

For Dorothy eavesdropping on the conversation from a precariously perched barrel, the description is a further betrayal:

How could Elizabeth Hunter have got possession of anything so secret? Only Mother was capable of slicing in half what amounted to a psyche, then expecting the rightful owner to share. (p.404)

In a manner reminiscent of "the riders", mother and daughter appear to have in common the same mystic image. The "forgiveable deceit" on the face of the skiapod is at the heart of the paradox which is Elizabeth herself, a paradox which she must soon face and accept. But it is to one facet alone, that Dorothy determinedly and resentfully clings, in spite of the self-awareness which warns her of possible delusion. "Dorothy knew that one of her worst faults was to suspect ulterior motives in others; and kindness always roused her suspicions". (p.370) At this moment it is the greed of the skiapod and its means of hunting that is all Dorothy will permit herself to see. Elizabeth, in telling her dreams to Edvard, allies herself, not only to the skiapod but to all the life which lives in the depths of the ocean. Edvard makes a further equation with the dazzling Mrs Hunter. "'Many deep-sea animals are provided with luminescent organs, you know, to enable them to produce the light they

56 David Kelly comments "As in her reunion with her mother, Dorothy's spiritual life is defined negatively with reference to an experience she does not have". Kelly. p.65.

need. Some fish use this light to attract their prey". (p.403)

Dorothy is convinced that Professor Pehl, blinded by the light of Elizabeth's still "formidably sensual body" (p.405) is to provide her "next meal". (p.405) It is her determination to use this, largely imaginary, sexual jealousy as a means of staving off any suspicion of genuine affection on the part of her mother, that causes Dorothy to leave the island, and with it the participation and illumination she has already perceived as amongst its possibilities. Hence she returns still trapped in her "stick" (p.375) of a body to the safety of the mainland and the continuing irritant of missed possibility. "Only those who can endure the storm at its height can experience the Eye".⁵⁷

But egotistical though some at least of Elizabeth's responses may be, they are only one side of a complex nature. Left to herself after the desertion of her daughter and Edvard she is forced into an introspection which prepares her for the storm to come:

To confess her faults (to herself) and to accept blame when nobody was there to insist on it, produced in Elizabeth Hunter a rare sense of freedom. As she wandered up past the bunker, past the abandoned Chevrolet, into the bush, she even went so far as to admit: in some ways I am a hypocrite, but knowing does not help matters:⁵⁸ to be utterly honest, spontaneously sincere, one should have been born with an innocence I was not given. (p.416)

Walking on the forest floor, her hair unpinned, "that most recalcitrant, though habitually controlled part of her", (p.416) she comes, for the first time to question the mystery of her strength, "of her elect life". (p.416) Why should it be the fabled and indulged Elizabeth, the black swan, and not the common noddy, who has been given more than "most women would dare envisage"? (p.416) But preparation though the silence of the island may afford, it is not in itself enough. "By allowing her

⁵⁷ Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye", p.225.

⁵⁸ The book itself contradicts this, knowing does help matters. It is through her self knowledge that Elizabeth is able to accept the storm.

inescapably frivolous and, alas, corrupt nature the freedom of its silence, the forest had begun to oppress her: she could not believe, finally, in grace, only luck". (p.417)

She has still two lessons to learn. The first lies in the ripping away "of the myth of her womanhood . . . She was instead a being, or more likely a flaw at the centre of this jewel of light". (p.424) The silence at the heart of the storm finally convinces her, as the forest has failed to do, that she exists "flaw and all, only by grace". (p.424) Encircled by the towering walls of the still-raging cyclone, she is secure in the still, and womb-like centre "of this dream of glistening peace", (p.424) a centre from which she will emerge reborn. Kneeling in the shallows of the calm sea she offers bread to the other elect, the wild swans which, "expressing neither contempt nor fear", (p.425) share her haven:

All else was dissolved by this lustrous moment made visible in the eye of the storm, and would have remained so, if she had been allowed to choose. She did not feel she could endure further trial by what is referred to as Nature, still less by that unnaturally swollen, not to say diseased conscience which had taken over during the night from her defector will. She would lie down rather, and accept to become part of the shambles she saw on looking behind her: no worse than any she had caused in life in her relationships with human beings. (p.425)

But she is not allowed to remain within her moment of sanctuary; "some force not her absent will" (p.425) confronts her with the sight of an "insignificant sooty gull", (p.425) impaled upon a branch. It is enough to teach her the second lesson, one similar to that which Ellen Roxburgh will also have to learn:

It got her creaking to her feet. She began scuttling, clawing her way up the beach by handfuls of air, an old woman and foolish, who in spite of her age had not experienced enough of living. (p.425)

To stand upon the threshold of understanding is a gift, but one that may not be misused, it must be followed by a return to the life which is also a gift, enriched, and enriching, by its recognition of the possibilities

of the infinite.⁵⁹ Above all, the lesson the island has to teach is that already quoted. "Whatever is given you to live you alone can live". (p.414) Like Hurtle before her, Elizabeth has been taken, at least momentarily through "the wall".⁶⁰ Dorothy and Edvard fail, through lack of recognition or cowardice, to take the opportunity which has been offered them. They allow the sterility of intellectually conceived ideas to outweigh the instinctive understanding that the island calls to the surface. Edvard tries to take what is offered and measure and contain its limitless possibility within the tidy conformity of a plastic bag. Dorothy taints the physical promptings of her body by an imposed, and only partially genuine belief in her mother's betrayal. Both leave Elizabeth to face, stripped of her physical beauty, in a fore-shadowing of her later meeting with death, the lesson the storm has to teach her, a lesson which, above all, emphasises the need to face the core of inner truth which lurks behind the most impregnable and polished façade, together with the need fully to participate and to live what it has been given to live "and re-live, and re-live, till it is gasped out of you". (p.414)

⁵⁹ Veronica Brady seems to suggest another reason for the years Elizabeth has yet to live out after her moment of vision. She says the "destruction she sees before her manifests the power of the natural world. But accepting this power, being passive before it leads her to the truth, in contrast with the 'myth' of her womanhood". Veronica Brady may well be implying that Elizabeth has not yet done with her "womanhood" and needs to reach the point when stripped of all her body's last reminders of femininity she has passed into a state beyond sexuality where she is able fully to receive the spirit. Brady, p.189.

⁶⁰ The Vivisector, p.582.

X

The recounting of the experience on the island has been enclosed within a present that brings to the fore the decision of brother and sister to divest their mother of the last of those trappings which have so bedazzled their past. Neither White nor his protagonists doubts that to do so is to commit an act of murder. It is not the waste of their mother's money, nor even greed to have it within their control, which prompts their mutual decision to plunge the metaphorical knife into the "trussed figure on the great bed"; (p.431) rather it is that it is from her blood-connexions that Elizabeth draws the greater part of the strength to maintain, not only her feeble body, but her remorseless spirit:

'Kiss me, won't you? Before you go?' One of the organisms Elizabeth Hunter's skiapod depended on for nourishment, you let yourself be sucked in. 'Come back tonight - both of you,' the mouth withdrew enough to bubble. 'I'll get hold of an ambassador, or foreign professor. That's the sort of thing people seem to like. However perfectly foreigners use words, one can blame them for what one doesn't want to understand' (p.433)

White is giving us two diametrically-opposed possibilities one, that his mother as his mothers have in the past, is denying full life to her bemused young;⁶¹ the other that the Hunter children are hiding from full self-awareness through a usefully maintained illusion. While allowing a measure of truth to both possibilities, White's intentions seem, this time, to be largely with the latter. In the probing into the minds of the protagonists in which the reader has shared, it is Elizabeth's which has best escaped from the taint of hypocrisy and lack of self-knowledge. Both Basil and Dorothy hide behind momentary convenience, and a façade, which while far from impregnable, is continuously fortified. It is from Dorothy's viewpoint that the helpless

⁶¹ Further, that in Beatson's words, she has reached a "lingering old age when the spiritual and emotional bankruptcy that has been concealed by her magnificence are exposed". "The Skiapod and the Eye", p.222.

old woman lying on the ornate bed, is transformed into a skiapod, using her daughter as an "organism" from which to suck life. But White immediately follows an analogy learnt force to by the use of a word found throughout as an image of Elizabeth, by a reminder of her present weakness. Her children will not return, at her command, to a dinner party shared, as in the past, with visiting dignitaries. Yet, babble though Mrs Hunter's words may seem to be, they again suggest the crux of the issue. The escape into misunderstanding allowed by the use of a foreign tongue reminds us that mother and children, in their different ways and for different reasons, are using words not as a means of communication but as a shield.

Elizabeth Hunter recognizes and accepts the final withdrawal of her children, and gathers round her the remnants of her splendour. Jewels, nurses, solicitor, housekeeper, they have all been the tentacles through which she has kept contact with the physical world, and it is through them that her blind eyes are to take their last look at the sensual life which she has lived to the full.

The grotesque Lotte, "swollen flesh and contorted bones" (p.440) forced into "once sprightly, skintight pumps", (p.440) dances for her a macabre dance of death,⁶² a dance which is witnessed only by the bemused Flora and the wheezing Mrs Cush. But it is not the gyrating steps of the elderly Jewess, herself a witness to and participator in the depths of suffering, that Elizabeth sees, but the glittering splendour of her own past and the dances which were a celebration of the full fruition of her beauty.⁶³ Further the roses recall the moment in the garden experienced

⁶² See the use of dance elsewhere in White, e.g. The Solid Mandala and The Twyborn Affair.

⁶³ Elizabeth and Lotte's dances are linked. Both are entertainers, both artists. Their audiences respond partly to their recognition of art, whether it be expressed through suffering or beauty, and partly because of the artist's ability to manipulate, through understanding, the audience. There is also a link with Hurtle and his final visions, e.g. "deepest cobalt" etc. The offering which is being made is not so much to a present and, frequently caricatured audience, as to the unknowable beyond.

by Sister de Santis and suggest a bond between the spiritual and the earthly.

Nursing at her breast an ammunition of roses (hers were white) she hesitated a minute to allow her patrons to recover from the dazzle, then took aim. Thanks to her height and her supple body she could throw farther than anyone. She threw the handfuls of white petals, torn off so extravagantly that they might have been paper, or flesh, sometimes an eye fringed with stamens, and stems which made her hands run. She flung her offerings over the men's smarmed heads and those of their jealous tight-permed women, to lob amongst the pyramidal waves of deepest cobalt, the muslin balconies dissolving round them to be thrown up afresh and contorted by the storm of applause.⁶⁴ (p.446)

But if her entourage has been her means of support, she has also been theirs, and it is with the final ordering of her responsibilities that she is primarily concerned. Flora must be brought to marry the man whom she has failed, like Elizabeth herself, "to value enough". (p.454) Lal Wyburd, the plain, homely figure, who has been counterpointed against the glittering Elizabeth, is to be given the "chain of my mother's I was wearing when the storm struck". (p.456) It is only after such a conclusion that Elizabeth will, once again, be allowed grace. Denied in her half-hearted attempt at conventional suicide, she will be given the power to gather about her the remnants of her will and accept the death which is offered.

⁶⁴ "As in most White novels the double nature of man caught between his fleshly compulsions and his spiritual intuitions, is suggested in The Eye of the Storm by reticent but evocative images of the sacred flower. . . . All those flowers have a double reference - like the Eye itself - suggesting both allegiance to the flesh, the earthly rose, and ultimate unity with God, the Celestial Rose". Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye", p.231.

XI

From the stifling atmosphere of the sickroom, Basil and Dorothy escape into the air of a country which has nourished their roots. The journey to "Kudjeri" is, for Basil at least, a quest; an attempt to reach into a past when instinct and intellect were at one in a self not yet fatally divided.⁶⁵ "At "Kudjeri" perhaps he would rediscover the real thing - if there was enough of him left to fill so large a stage". (p.466) Both brother and sister try through physical means to rediscover a lost emotion - Dorothy, by rejecting the mask which normally protects her. "There was no getting away from her face, for today she had abstained from make-up, in celebration of nature"; (p.469) Basil, by the buying of meat pies. "Basil was already stuffing his mouth. She doubted whether his boyhood could be recaptured so easily". (p.468) The ironic tone is to be maintained throughout. White, in describing the attempts of the Hunters to immerse themselves in a past which may be more legendary than real, seems to be watching their antics in a mood which combines humour with a measure of detached affection. It is as if, in forcing them to follow a route to which most of his major protagonists have been subjected, a route with which he has by no means done, he is aware that he is asking too much.⁶⁶ It is, however, from Basil alone that the major task is to be exacted, that of playing the fool, a part in which his helplessness and awkwardness is symbolized by the damaging of a foot already supposedly

⁶⁵ Beatson sees this as a search for the "ineffable centre within the centre of the Mandala", in which both Hunters are involved: "Basil is in the process of a self-conscious quest for a reality that was lost, if ever possessed in early childhood. Dorothy lacks his desire for self-knowledge and possible rebirth but even she is aware that all the usual outworks of identity are barren without the ineffable centre she senses in her mother". Beatson "The Skiapod and the Eye", p.228.

⁶⁶ "'I thought of taking a job, as a labourer more or less - hard physical labour on the land - and in that way perhaps, getting to know a country I've never belonged to'", p.161. The Twyborn Affair.

maimed. "When Sir Basil made his entrance with a real limp instead of that mannerism which passed for one". (p.477) Released into the wide lands of his remembered past, Basil cavorts amongst the splendours of a scene which has already been the setting for drama. "The roan bay was coming at a canter. For God's sake boy what have you done?". (p.491) In so doing he gashes the foot already damaged in the mishap of his first night at "Kudjeri". This time there is no thunder of approaching hooves. "Abandoned by everybody. Stranded in his own egoism and ineptitude. Though he listened for it, the reliable roan was not coming at a canter". (p.494)

The quest on which brother and sister are engaged is an attempt, not only to recapture the past, but to see it in a truer light.⁶⁷ The children, no less than the mother as she dreams on her death bed, must try to learn the truths which the past has still to tell. Thus the relationship of child to parent and parent to child becomes a part of the search for the lost sense of integration and belonging:

And Alfred Hunter offering downright love disguised as tentative sweaty affection. When Mother was the one you were supposed to love: you are my darling my love don't you love your mummy Basil? Bribing with kisses, peppermint creams, and more substantially, half crowns. I don't believe you love me at all perhaps you are your father's monopoly or is it yourself you love? So the game of ping pong was played between Moreton Drive and 'Kudjeri', between Elizabeth and Alfred Hunter (Dad at a handicap). (p.491)

Mutual relationships, particularly between parent and child, so much a part of the fibre of this work, come to the fore in the "Kudjeri" section, a section in which the incestuous love of brother and sister slowly ripens. From the fear of his lonely accident Basil is at last rescued by his

⁶⁷ Jennifer Strauss judges their motivation more harshly but notes, as have other commentators, the gentler tone of the portrayals: "Their motives, partly the indulgence of conventional sentiment, partly flight from the reality of their mother's approaching death, are hardly promising. Nonetheless, in their barely comprehended hankering for an unrealized garden of innocence, there is a capacity for that life which they are strenuously trying to avoid. The Princess Dorothy is particularly convincing evidence that loss of satirical bite is not necessarily entailed by increased sympathy and subtlety. If we compare her with Thelma of The Tree of Man we see a shade too much glib censoriousness in the depiction of the latter as a dead soul". pp.273-287.

pseudo-father. "Basil recognized the tone of voice in which the man addressed his children: for the moment you were accepted as Macrory's additional if idiot, child". (p.495) Just as Flora's attempts to come to terms with parenthood have been counter-pointed by those of Elizabeth, so now the need for Basil and Dorothy to re-examine their past life at "Kudjeri" is set against the Macrory's struggles in the same setting.⁶⁸

Later, in a scene in the deserted barn, in which comedy plays an unusually large part, a maimed foot is again involved with Basil cast, once more, as the "fool".⁶⁹ The boot which brother and sister struggle to release themselves is a direct link with the past. Basil's momentary acceptance of the limitations and deformities which the boot thrusts upon him, symbolizes an acceptance of that which it might have offered. "He was trembling to such an extent he was glad to bend down and pick up a boot he could not remember noticing on other visits. A bloom of fungus on leather cast in iron wrinkles discouraged any normal foot from prising its way into the boot". (p.505) But it is a guise for which he is not ready, and again, as when he first left "Kudjeri", he seeks release, a desire he shares with Dorothy, "the Hunter children fought for their self-justification and freedom from awfulness". (p.509)

It is in the form of his actor-self that Basil must find liberation for the instinct trapped beneath a façade which has denied the roots of childhood. Hence it is as an actor, and not a participant, that he stands declaiming to the empty countryside on the first morning of his visit:

68 "The implicit contrasting of Elizabeth and Alfred Hunter's marriage with those of the devoted Wyburds and the passionate Macrorys shows how well White can dramatically present variations on a theme". Kiernan, p.115.

69 Although Elizabeth is cast in the role of predator here, a measure of ambiguity is maintained through its recounting via Basil's memory.

Legs apart, pants hitched their highest and tightest, he listened for his own voice (his worst vice) and some of it returned out of that extrovert blue. He listened again: as the circles widened around him on the muddy water, magpies wings were clattering skywards; but the silence burning his skin was the applause he valued. That his art should have come to terms with his surroundings gratified Sir Basil Hunter. (p.492)

The scene contains both the approval and the disapproval of its maker. Basil's instinctive recognition that it is the silence of this place to which he still belongs that matters, is approved, as is the desire to create a oneness between his art and his surroundings. But he remains Sir Basil Hunter. His elegant feet have "become useless, except to stride imagined miles around a stage; incapable of trudging the actual miles to Dover. Perhaps this was why he had failed as Lear". (p.492)⁷⁰ Nevertheless, his own awareness of his failings keeps him from crossing the threshold which finally divides the living from the dead.

Both Hunters are able to accept that dishevelment which we have come to recognize as a part of the preparation for enlightenment. Each is able to escape, at least temporarily, from the assured and conventional outer shell which, meant as a protection, has proved a trap. Their life at "Kudjeri" is timeless.⁷¹ "'After all these weeks. How long do you suppose it is?'" (p.508) Both sink into a background in which they mingle with, and belong to, their surroundings. This relaxation of the rigidity of a timetabled life recalls the experiences on the islands, both in The Eye of the Storm and "Dead Roses"; for Dorothy such a relaxation is achieved through an acceptance of demands, those of the place, of the Macrorrys, and of her brother. Her town clothes, and the

⁷⁰ Kiernan takes the Lear motif further "in attempting to dispose of his dying mother as quickly and as economically as possible, he sees himself as engaged in a version of Lear, the betrayal of this old queen by her children". Kiernan, p.116.

⁷¹ Timelessness is a frequent prelude to a time of re-assessment in White, e.g. period in the boat in A Fringe of Leaves. See also the spells on the island in "Dead Roses". "Days slipped easily away for Mrs Nortlock. Her island balanced in its bubble, floated between seasons in an air which was neither hot nor cold. . . It was so gently perfect in the healing water that she closed her eyes and almost understood which direction was the right one". "Dead Roses", p.64.

self they disguise, are disregarded. Her normal elegance is replaced by the smell of mutton fat and the disfigurement of grass stains. In Basil a similar metamorphosis takes place, but for him it is essentially an individual and lonely experience, despite his growing relationship with his sister. "So the Hunter children held hands for the return. They leaned on each other in the climb up the river bank, before wading, almost luxuriously, through the sea of dry, winter tussock, to reach the house". (p.518) The gift that "Kudjeri" has to offer lies, if he has the strength to take it, in the opportunity it gives to begin to see with clarity. "As the water hurried over the stones beneath, he could see his face, when he dared to look, at the other end of this tunnel of light". (p.517) Basil must walk the same road as that already taken by Hurtle, the difficult one which reconciles the needs of the individual with that of the artist. Dorothy's way is the opposite:

If she could have remained enclosed by this circle of love and trust, she might have accepted herself by living up to their opinion of her. But her heart sickened on her thinking that her commitments made this impossible. As the surrounding hills shrank under the pressure of cold, and the warmth from the rusty governess stove decreased, so the love her friends appeared to feel for her became more poignant and undeserved. (p.511)

The environment at "Kudjeri" offers the Hunters the opportunity to re-enter a charmed circle which has not been open to them since childhood. Its discomforts and inconveniences, its crumbs, chilblains and reeking chops, could be used to replace the grittier affectations of minds which have rejected instinctive response.⁷² It is not an enviable environment.

⁷² It is an environment which precisely recalls its earlier evocation in "Dead Roses". In the house of the Tullochs, prototypes of the Warmings, Anthea Scudamore learns, however briefly, to escape from the rigid propriety of her upbringing; an upbringing which has prized above all else an immaculate surface appearance. The imagery which surrounds the Tullochs and their island is, like that of "Kudjeri", concerned with naturalness and vitality "a certain salt stickiness, a roughness of crumbs" ("Dead Roses" p.23). In such an atmosphere Anthea's "raw silk" ("Dead Roses" p.20) is soon stained with dishwater, her white arms become "red and ugly. Pickled in brine" ("Dead Roses" p.24). Such a physical transformation from the elegant and, by implication the restricted, seems necessary before spiritual growth can take place. Both Anthea and Dorothy are, however, both attracted and repelled by the raw sexuality which seems to be the last stage of this acceptance of the flesh. Both flee before their final transformation can take place.

The Macrorrys feud endlessly, caught in a relationship which itself turns on the divisiveness plaguing the Hunters. Anne Macrory remains at heart a Robertson of "Kirkaldy", herself the victim of a sustained and largely imagined ideal, Rory, by contrast, is at ease only in sensuality.

"Physical exertion is Rory's speciality". (p.474) Yet they are still open to possibility. They are able to accept "the French princess and the actor knight", (p.520) just as they accepted the mother before them. "I loved your mother, 'Anne said". (p.521) In neither case has the shortcomings of their objects of devotion failed to be observed, "the superb Hunters were reduced to a crocodile handbag and a pair of cornelian and filigree cufflinks". (p.520) Elizabeth is similarly clearly seen. "Yes, she liked to flirt. With either sex. And although you knew what she was up to, it didn't matter". (p.521) It is just this clear-sightedness that allows room for growth. In such a setting it is no longer necessary to hide behind the screen of illusion.⁷³

It is the need for appraisal and re-appraisal that seems to lie behind the events of this chapter. From the first it is a bared and vulnerable self that each Hunter has brought on the journey into the past. As they drive through Gogong on the night of their arrival, they pass the statue of their father, a statue seen for the first time; the doubts and uncertainties of experience set forever in bronze:

He thought he would not mention the statue his mind was busy resurrecting; when Dorothy murmured, 'He wasn't like that'.
 'Can you honestly remember?'
 'Oh - yes - no - not distinctly'.
 It was his own recurring predicament. (p.472)

73 Jennifer Strauss sees this rather differently: "At "Kudjeri" Basil and Dorothy discover what another pair of pilgrims, Hurtle and Hero of The Vivisector, had found on Hero's Greek island: that it is not so much re-entry to the place of innocence that is barred by an angel with a flaming sword as that the spirits have departed and the place is inhabited by the all too palpably mortal. Here, the incumbent tenants are the Macrory family, scruffy, impoverished and burdened by the resentments of the misalliance between the ex-stockman Rory and Anne, daughter of a local squatter. Jennifer Strauss, Patrick White's version of the Pastoral. World Literature Written in English (Vol.24. No.2. Autumn 1984, University of Ontario Press). pp.273-287.

In this place which had been their father's domain, his image is, for once, able to compete with that of Elizabeth. It is his love which the boy Basil seeks as he lies cradled during the pain-filled ride which follows his fall, and it is his father who fills his later thoughts as he stands on the same spot. Similarly, it is with memories of Alfred that Dorothy is engrossed as she sits in the room which had been his, fingering the book which still forms a frail bridge between them.⁷⁴ The Hunter children's lack of integration, the failure of confidence both feel in their own reality, has its roots in an origin which was itself divisive. On the one hand, they were offered the life of the instinct, as exemplified by "Kudjeri", on the other, the intellectual attainments symbolized by the city.⁷⁵ Each has chosen the path of the intellect, yet each still feels the pull of the unique landscape which is Australia itself. It is Elizabeth who has placed them on the way which leads from "Kudjeri", and it is her influence which they now attempt to resist. "Whatever happened to Elizabeth Hunter, her children were determined to resist encroachment". (p.466) But, ironically, if they could now accept the "awfulness" (p.509) which she represents, they would be firmly placed on the path which leads, in White, downward into the depths which precede integration and eventual illumination.

74 Jennifer Strauss sees this as an artificial attempt to construct a link with the past: "The same object will not have the same effect on all persons. The Charterhouse of Palma has fed Bill Hunter's awareness of the richness of life; it feeds his daughter's religious evasions of life. For White, grace, or indeed horror, its opposite, is a matter of a momentary intersection of time, place, and person. That it was present may be recalled in memory, or in dreams; it may thrust itself back there although unbidden; but it is not easily summoned back into time and space by the exercise of will". Jennifer Strauss. pp.273-287.

75 City and bush are frequently opposed in this way in White as in much Australian literature, although some would see their opposition rather differently. "White's Australia is either a landscape which encourages mystical possibilities or the endless banality of suburbia". Mark Williams "Countries of the mind: Patrick White's Australia, Malcolm Lowry's Canada, World Literature Written in English (Vol.28. No.1. 1985). p.130. This may be so but it is noticeable that the process of self-discovery involves most of his visionaries in time spent in the city.

The instinct stimulated by the return, finds its first form in their growing affection:

Then she laid her cheek against his. Her skin felt slightly greasy, which made the affection she was offering more intimate and spontaneous. Their relationship had grown dove-tailed, they were taking it so much for granted. (p.518)

It leads, in time, to a culmination in the great bed of what had been their parent's room.⁷⁶ Such a union has had its predecessors - the Brown twins and the Courtneys skirt the same dangerous ground, and has the same risks:

Somewhere in the night he rejected their drowsy nakedness. 'Do you realize, Dorothy, they probably got us in this bed?' Such thoughtless candour poured them back into their separate skins; to turn to ice. (p.526)

But we are left to feel it might have been the path their author ordained. "What have we got unless each other? Aren't we, otherwise - bankrupt?". (p.526) It is a moment that recalls Hurtle's response after Alvira's near-incestuous approach to him; as in the earlier novel we are left with more than a hint of White's approbation towards it.

The incest that is the outcome of the set of circumstances Basil and Dorothy have set up in revisiting their childhood home, while hardly admirable, is not a fiasco. For a character in a White novel, the monstrous usually offers a chance. The Hunter "children" refuse theirs in collaborating to deny the reality of the whole episode, and are set thereby on an apparently irrevocable path of diminishing vitality.⁷⁷

It is, though, to be a sterile and fleeting moment which will not bear the light of morning.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Björkstén sees the act as the completion of the curse which has been upon them, which he finds "undeserved". Another mother and their fate would be otherwise. Björkstén, p.111.

⁷⁷ Jennifer Strauss World Literature Written in English. pp.273-287.

⁷⁸ Kiernan sees this scene as a part of a "tendency towards allegorising in the novel". He goes on "this is very much a symbolic rather than a physical embrace but what it signifies remains hazy, an elusive Platonic conjunction of birth copulation and death". Kiernan, p.114.

XII

You, on the other hand, would never know for sure how much of the evil was of your own making, and how much had been forced on you by others. (p.541)

It is Dorothy who wields the knife which divides the growing bond:

'Don't bring it up! Ever! I want - ohhh, to forget about it!' If only she could lock the door, lose the key, and never again open.

He had in fact heard her locking him out.

So they continued their separate preparations, the dividing wall safely between them. (p.558)

Their incestuous relationship has entered their mother's dreams. Shifting uneasily in the bed which already encompasses the chill of death, her thoughts turn on her children. "In the dream they wanted to be twins. I could hear them calling from inside me - blaming me because I prevented them loving each other". (p.528) Faced with the truth her memories have brought, she acknowledges her guilt. "Oh, I got them from him. But I made them into mine. That is what the children resent - already - why they are protesting inside me". (p.529)

In this final reckoning other ghosts must be laid. Rousing from her dreams, she returns to the present. "'It was a charming idea', she said, 'Lal - to pay me a visit'". (p.532) Arnold and Alfred mingle and interchange. "'Does my husband love you?' Mrs Hunter pursued". (p.534) It is love that is at the forefront of her dying thoughts. "'Oh Lal! Does he love you?'". (p.535) Her failures in love for her children, her husband and her lover flicker irremediably across the screen of memory. Lal is subjected to alternating lash, "'Why should this creature be allowed to explore your nakedness, first with her claws and now with her vindictive mind?", (p.535) and gentleness. "Mrs Hunter was making a gentle noise of eiderdowns; she was stroking the back of one of Mrs Wyburd's by now gloveless hands. 'The freckles, Lal - you still have them. Are they all right? One used to hear that, with age, freckles can become dangerous'". (p.532) It is to this "honest woman", (p.529) that she has

bequeathed the chain which survived the eye of the storm, but even such a gift is subject to the contrary pulls of affection and irritation. Greeting her husband on his return from Elizabeth's funeral, Mrs Wyburd wears the chain that she had failed to put on for her last visit to Moreton Drive. The more malignant effects of Elizabeth's influence still linger. "Her neck looked red and shrivelled, its freckles fretted by the turquoise clusters dividing the ceremonial chain". (p.577) It is this influence that Lal has always fought.⁷⁹ Bending over her dying friend, and avoiding kissing her, she is reminded of a similarly distasteful occasion many years before, on a visit to Lourdes:

What, oh, what to do? Then Lal Wyburd ducked and in no way disrespectfully, kissed the air several inches above the surface of the slimy rock. She walked on dazed but thankful she had managed to avoid hygienic and spiritual contamination without vulgarly demonstrating. (p.536)

The incident restores perspective. Mrs Wyburd may have deserved sympathy when subjected to her friend's sniping, but she is a non-participant (in each case she has rejected the mystery she is offered) and as such she lacks Elizabeth's rich vigour.

It is with the last of her vigour that Elizabeth approaches the ultimate climax of death. Lotte Lippmann, no longer grotesque but "excessively calm and in some way resplendent", (p.538) is called on to officiate. Elizabeth herself is once more to be masked in her full splendour, a splendour which Flora attempts to deny:

Certainly the custodian of the sacred image had never felt less religiously inclined. What if she did a real hatchet job for once? So she dusted, and pasted on, the shimmering greens of all fiends; the idol's brutal mouth would scarcely overflow after she had contained its crimson with a thick wall of black; if steely lids sharpened the swords those eyes could flash in their most vindictive moments, at least their victims would go down laughing. (pp.539-40)

⁷⁹ David Kelly sees Mrs Hunter here as both a "torturer and a healer". He goes on "Mrs Wyburd is Mrs Hunter's opposite. With her admirable love for her husband she remains empty. It is Mrs Hunter, unable to love in this way, who is 'the one'; not only the one who is successful and has power over Alfred and Arnold, but also the one who realises the alternative to emptiness: pure being. She in fact becomes co-existent with 'the One' which is the answer to all sums. Kelly, p.66.

Such a denial is, however, useless. Elizabeth must die as she has lived. Her only preparation for death can be that she has found sufficient for life. Through the frailty and degradation which age has imposed, her will survives.

From the doorway Flora Manhood looked back, afraid of what she might have created. Old Betty's green and silver mask glittered and glimmered in the depths of the room. Nobody could assuage you of malice when you had only emphasised the truth. As for Mrs Hunter, she looked for the moment conscious of her own fiend and resigned to accepting responsibility for it. (p.541)⁸⁰

It is this strength she gathers about her as, clamped precariously on the commode, she makes the final effort to advance on death. "Now the real business in hand was not to withdraw her will, as she had once foreseen, but to will enough strength into her body to put her feet on the ground and walk steadily towards the water". (p.550) In death she re-enacts the culminating moments of the eye of the storm. As life leaves her body, she is again walking barefoot through the sand, reaching toward the "swans waiting by appointment each a suppressed black explosion the crimson beaks savaging only those born to a different legend". (p.550)⁸¹

As the legend of Elizabeth ends, it ends also for the child of Flora's imagination, an imagination inspired and sustained by the strength of Elizabeth's influence. "A misconceived ideal of pure love and independance".⁸² In The Eye of the Storm the death of the central protagonist does not bring to an end the book itself. It is Elizabeth's aura, not the woman herself, which has been all-pervasive and as such its

⁸⁰ The motif of the masks reaches its climax here, Elizabeth's dying mask is contrasted to the NØ mask which Basil is to take up on his return to London, his is the final acceptance of the loss of self which his role playing has imposed upon him behind it lies nothing, the mask is all. His mother's symbolises the last remnants of the magnetic beauty which she has worn so long and which she is finally to discard as she moves from the flesh to the spirit.

⁸¹ Referring to the storm Walsh concludes "This model or shape of perfection was what she struggled to make the act of dying conform to, in spite of the intervention of human greed, guilt or simple fussiness. It is the inwardness and conviction with which this effort is communicated which raise White's account of her death from pathology to poetry." Walsh, p.113.

⁸² Kelly, p.68.

influence continues beyond the limits of her life. For Flora, her first "real death" (p.585) forms a climax which releases her from the impasse in which she has been caught by the dualism of her nature. Tossing sleeplessly on Col Pardoe's "narrow marriage bed", (p.573) the last of the many beds from which the action of the novel has been reviewed, she re-enacts the night of the death and accepts the part Elizabeth has played. "'She understood me more than anybody ever. I only - always didn't like what she dug up out of me'". (p.573) The attraction she has had for Flora illuminates the puzzling elements of her seemingly contradictory nature. She is complete. It is this completion which is the sum of the paradox. She is not of the stuff of which saints are made, as Sister de Santis perhaps is, but she has the power, for good or for evil, of the life force itself. It is this that Flora now understands:

Hadn't she loved, not Mrs Hunter herself, but something she stood for? Life perhaps. She whipped you on. Like when the menstrual blood had begun to flow again, and you felt it warm and sticky on your legs, something of love and life was restored. (p.564)

It is to be a legacy which lasts. Our final glimpse of Flora leaves her accepting. She drifts into sleep recognizing her ability to give life without taking freedom, "but your own flesh is different my children are human we hope Mrs Hunter if the blessed sapphire works". (p.573)

The Hunter children have, however, denied their mother and the gift which in death she might have finally been able to give them. It is with returned equanimity that Dorothy takes the place which money now makes possible. Only in her relationship with Basil does she remain vulnerable. "She looked away on making her thrust; she could not see whether she had drawn blood, but was conscious of a wound opening in herself". (p.585) The final shutting-away of the self which might have been revitalized is exemplified by the first moments of her flight back to France:

The Air France hostess had enquired so impersonally that some (Australians, for example, with their manic insistence on 'warmth') might have judged her contemptuous. Exchanging the ritual sliver of a smile, the princess and the air hostess knew better. (p.587)

Mocking though White's tone may be, it is clear that in rejecting the artificiality and forced camaraderie of Australian "warmth", she is also rejecting something more important, the link that binds her to her roots. Such an action demands a penalty; for Dorothy the price is the fruition of her instinctive self. Like Anthea Scudamore, she turns from participation to the comfort of things:

How she could occupy herself in her state of spiritual (and economic) emancipation was more to the point. For a start, she thought, she would go through her cupboards and drawers, but ruthlessly. She would make inventories. She would restock only with the very best quality. . . . (p.587)

The outlines of Basil's mould are less rigidly set. "Sir Basil Hunter refused his plastic dinner; if they had offered him a real one he might not have had the appetite for it". (p.590) His flight passes in a brandy-induced lethargy, in which nightmares of Mitty Jacka interchange with memories of his mother:

till about the fourth stair the light breaks from inside around her, it is the moment you never catch in a flower however determined you are to witness the miracle of exploding flower petals, that is exactly what happens as this being descends, in a burst of sensuous joy she needs to share with those standing in comparative darkness below, controlling their breath, their blood, their amateurish attitudes, while her sun beats down on them, the rustle of her skirt, her fall of jewels promises relief from their drought of waiting, from their, yes Mrs Hunter no Mrs Hunter how well you're looking at their last gasp they are not relieved they are made drunk. (pp.590-91)

His art, and the possibility implicit in it, remains.

The novel ends, as it began, in the house on Moreton Drive. It is a house from which the life has gone, and with its dying comes the death of its guardian, Lotte Lippmann:

Closing her eyes she floated with the dead maids, the entwined lovers. Or if she cared to look, she was faced with a flush of roses, of increasing crimson. Opening and closing her eyelids growing drier brittle. Her eyes afloat, so it seemed. If she smiled, or sank, she would drink the roses she was offering to those pressed always more suffocatingly close around her. (p.607)

But for Sister de Santis the last moments in the house are those of illumination. After a sleepless night she goes out into an early morning heavy with dew, the scent of roses and the calls of birds:⁸³

She ducked, to escape from this prism of dew and light, this tumult of wings and her own unmanageable joy. Once she raised an arm to brush aside a blue wedge of pigeon's feathers. The light she could not ward off: it was by now too solid, too possessive; herself possessed. (p.608)

⁸³ The rose motif pervasive throughout, returns in the last lines of the novel: "A solitary rose, tight crimson, emerged in the lower garden; it would probably open later in the day. . . . At the topmost step it occurred to her that she must take this first and last rose to her patient Irene Fletcher. She would return and cut it before leaving: perfect as it should become by then". (p.608) Beatson comments: "A single rose appears on the last page of the novel, hinting at the two modes of transcendence of the individual found in White's vision - the transcendence of continuity, through which the experience of one generation is passed on, at the end of the cycle, to the next, and the transcendence of life after death. Beatson "The Skiapod and the Eye". p.232.

XIII

Writing of The Eye of the Storm William Walsh says:

The book's strongest and most vibrant value against which I suppose we are to measure the distortions of life, is not virtue in the conventional sense in which it exists in the husband and the nurse but rather the intensity of life represented by Mrs Hunter herself, and perhaps supremely in her dying.⁸⁴

It is the effect of this "intensity" on the characters who surround Mrs Hunter which shapes the processes of self-discovery in this novel. The focus of the work conflates character-vision and narrative-vision into the single person of Elizabeth Hunter and in so doing risks distortion.⁸⁵ The eye of her storm must be not only her means of seeing but also that of her entourage and of her reader. Writing of her as she appears when the work opened Beatson encapsulates the part she plays:

So White portrays Mrs Hunter at a point of extreme physical decay, mitigating none of the ravages and indignities that age has inflicted on her. Yet in spite - or perhaps because - of her physical ruin, she is now the centre of a mandala-spiritual, as in life she had been the centre of a mandala-social.⁸⁶

Mrs Hunter's gradual realisation of her own spiritual potential and defiance of the boundaries of her social roles, is echoed and amplified by the use of other characters. It is however a limited use, their own growth towards self-discovery is, if it takes place at all, only hinted

⁸⁴ Walsh, p.112.

⁸⁵ Riemer feels that the timing is of particular importance: "Most important of the alterations in the novel is a departure from the movement towards a state of illumination by the central character. Elizabeth Hunter's visionary achievement occurs in the past, and this changes both the significance of the experience and its effect upon the individual". He goes on, "What she finds in the eye of the storm - that most mandala-like of images - is not a specific result of discrimination and choices, of discardings and attachments, of the recognition of essentials and the objects of quests, but total inclusiveness - everything and everyone". A.P.Riemer, "The Eye of the Needle: Patrick White's most recent novels". Southerly, 1974. pp.256-257.

⁸⁶ Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye", p.227.

at.⁸⁷ In Alfred Hunter such a process is clear but it is largely off-stage, for neither writer nor reader is it of central importance.

Sister de Santis is clearly involved in a similar experience but we are shown only a glimpse of her struggle. In Basil and Dorothy, both, in Dorothy Green's words, "fairly routine textbook jobs", it is a matter of considerable doubt whether spiritual growth is more than a possibility. In exploring their motivations White is concerned to show the death in life which threatens when the instinct is denied.⁸⁸

In none of the characters who surround Elizabeth Hunter is a growth towards self-understanding allowed to divert attention from her. It is not that the processes of realisation are not important in the other characters but that their struggles are used primarily to comment upon the progress of the central protagonist. The main concern of the work is with how a spoiled, beautiful, rich, socialite can be brought to the point when her death will not be into lasting oblivion but rather into a splendour of blinding, and conversely, clarifying light.

In finally confronting the mother-figure which has haunted his fiction and perhaps his life Patrick White seeks to explore an enigma which on at least one level defies explanation.⁸⁹ Elizabeth is a

⁸⁷ Riemer endorses this: "For none of the personalities that surround her is given the same visionary possibility, even though some seem to be cast from a finer metal than hers". Riemer. p.259.

⁸⁸ She goes on "Dorothy is the kind of woman who crops up again and again in White's fiction; clutching her handbag for protection, she is afraid of the life she dimly perceives outside her structure of rituals". She goes on "Basil Hunter's life is no less ritualized than his sister's except that the rituals are on a grand scale, intellectually acceptable, and that he has been knighted for them". Dorothy Green, "Queen Lear or Cleopatra Rediviva? Patrick White's 'The Eye of the Storm'". Meanjin Quarterly (No.32, 1973). pp.397-398.

⁸⁹ "The Eye of the Storm" came to me crossing Kensington High Street, London, after a visit to my mother at her flat in Marloes Road where she was lying bedridden, senile, almost blind, tended by a swarm of nurses and servants. I knew I would write this novel about such an old woman at the end of her life, but in a house in Sydney, because Sydney is what I have in my blood". Flaws in the Glass. p.149.

supreme egoist, she has distorted the lives of her children and left until almost too late a recognition of the worth of her husband. Yet, even on her death bed and despite "the sick-room smells, nausea, excrement, pus, phlegm [and] farting", of her decaying body,⁹⁰ she remains a force which extorts from those around her a frequently unwilling admiration.⁹¹ It is not, clearly, an admiration which remains centred on her beauty or on her undying vigour and sensitive responsiveness charismatic though such qualities may be; it is rather that she is open not just to the vitality of life but to the stillcentre that lies within it. Writing to Björkstén in 1973, White speaks of the mandala-image which his title suggests. Unconscious though he says the symbol has been "it is in one sense the still centre of the actual cyclone and in another the state of peace and spiritual awareness which Mrs Hunter reaches on the island and at her death."⁹²

It is this which is Mrs Hunter's supreme gift but it is a benediction which she can only pass on to those who are ready to receive it. She combines, and has always combined, since childhood the ability to recognize and accept both life and death, the flesh and the spirit. The little girl romancing over the death of an idol and, at the time of the suicide of her father, recognizing how close is the affinity between joy

⁹⁰ Dorothy Green, p.401.

⁹¹ Annegret Maack feels it is her contradictions which are her strength: "She, whose supreme experience her own children envy, stands above them precisely in her contradictions: she is both 'selfish, greedy . . . cruel', and 'beautiful, brilliant . . . inspired'. (pp.275,116). Good and evil, 'earth-bound flesh' and 'aspiring soul' (p.203) belong together like the storm". (The references are to the Penguin edition of The Eye of the Storm.) Annegret Maack, "Shakespearean Reference as Structural Principle in Patrick White's The Tree of Man and The Eye of the Storm." Southerly (1978), p.136.

⁹² Björkstén, p.104.

and tragedy, is already preparing for her time on the island. She is intrinsically the same Elizabeth that can transform "'Edvard's magnificent catch' into a work of art" (p.398) but can also, at one moment revel in the feeding of the black swans at the storm's centre, and at the next scuttle back across the beach to the indignities and warmth of contingency.⁹³

Instinct in Elizabeth Hunter is from the first fine-tuned but it is vulnerable, in this, as in so much, she is separated from her husband. Alfred is, like Belle Bonner in Voss, one of those White is contented to let be, to find the path to salvation without struggle.⁹⁴ Elizabeth has more in common with the Eddie Twyborn to come particularly the Eddie of the central and Australian section. Not for Mrs Hunter an inarticulate

⁹³ In an article which traces the Shakesperian reference in The Eye of the Storm Annegret Maack comments upon and expands those central moments on the island: "The parallels between Elizabeth Hunter and Lear do not consist solely in the fact that both her children, impatient of their inheritance, bring about the death of their mother by refusing to fulfil their parent's most deep-felt needs. They can also be discerned in the fact that Elizabeth Hunter, when she is seventy years old, experiences and survives a whirlwind on a deserted island. She learns the destructive forces of nature and the harmony in the eye of the storm, and through these events begins to see her life in a new light.

The description of the storm scene contains verbal reminiscences of the 'scene on the heath' in Lear. Mrs Hunter, 'an old woman and foolish' (p.410: III ii 20; IV vii 60) tested and judged on the island by the powers of nature and by her own conscience, experiences a reduction to her quintessential self". Annegret Maack. p.134.

⁹⁴ Some commentators would argue that White is not standing aside from these characters but, rather, finding them wanting. "For example the bride, Belle, whom White later endorses as a good person . . . is also described as one who 'might have been less happy if she had time to consider'. (p.426) White tells us that in her marriage 'she had been forced to curb herself in many . . . ways'". (p.426) Phyllis Fahrie Edelson. p.231.

Kiernan, however, using the same character to exemplify this theme argues that she has "grown through love into harmony with the cabbage tree". Kiernan. p.62.

harmony with the earth and the completion that it offers; she must wrestle with the attractions of a socialite world which is both her temptation and her rightful setting. Just as Hurtle is primarily a painter and Voss an explorer, so she is a jewel and as such she must shine with a light which can illuminate, but can also dazzle and distort the lives of those around her. Her daughter is held by the hard light of the jewel and the mercenary qualities it encourages. She uses it as a mirror which reflects only that she wishes to see. Basil is attracted by the art as well as the artifice, but for Flora and Sister de Santis, Elizabeth is a means to an understanding of their own spiritual potential.

All the characters as Colmer has said struggle towards the "unplayable '1'".⁹⁵ It is, however, Elizabeth in her final and redemptive role who succeeds in playing it; hidden behind the last of the masks which have been both her strength and her weakness.

⁹⁵ Colmer. p.74. See also Leonie Kramer, 'Patrick White: "The Unplayed 1"', Quadrant 18 (1979), pp.65-8.

I

Personally I tend to dislike historical novels and have avoided writing them because of the strictures they impose on the imagination. Instead on a couple of occasions I have taken a historic character or moment, as starting point. I feel this is permissible if you preserve psychological credibility and aesthetic principles - the fiction need not decline into romance.¹

Ellen Roxburgh does not stand alone as have Elizabeth Hunter and Hurtle Duffield before her, always in the background is the shadowy but substantial figure of Eliza Fraser.² Ellen's process of self-discovery as it takes place against the primitive landscape of the outback has been travelled before by her real-life counterpart. In charting her progress the earlier journey must be taken into account; but Ellen is no literal re-enactment of Eliza rather she is a further stage in the development of the earlier protagonists of White's fiction. At first sight Mrs Roxburgh may seem to have little in common with her immediate predecessors yet she is to experience her own eye of the storm and she like Hurtle will pass through stages in which both poverty and luxury play a part. "So from living isolated on a poor Cornish farm, Ellen Gluyas entered into temporary purdah in a Gloucestershire mansion". (p.71) For both Ellen and Hurtle luxury is followed by a time of deprivation and squalor, but here the likeness falters. For Hurtle the period of degradation is of his own choosing, for Ellen it is an enforced concomitant of a time of tragedy and loss. And yet there are similarities, for it is while living without that cushioning of experience which wealth brings, that both begin to resolve the pull of the dual aspect of their natures.

¹ "Patrick White speaks on Factual Writing and Fiction", A.L.S. (1981-82) p.99.

² In the next section of this Chapter I have dealt at some length with the precise development from historical to literary figure. Sufficient here to stress that in tracing Ellen Roxburgh's spiritual growth it is helpful to see how far her needs have been determined by those of the real-life woman.

In this novel, as in The Vivisector, but not in The Eye of the Storm, instinct is to be equated with those who live uncluttered by possession: but whereas in The Vivisector, a direct parallel could be found with a working-class vitalism, in this novel it is rather an earth-rootedness, an instinct which is fed by living close to the pull of the earth itself.³ Such an equation is not, of course, sentimentalised; on the contrary, Ellen's life in both her Cornish days and her time in the outback, is frequently seen as encompassing both physical and mental anguish. But it is a time basically free from that illusion which feeds on possession, and is therefore close to the reality with which the novel is to be concerned, for, coupled with a continued probing of dualism, is to be found a closely linked concern with shifting states of reality.⁴

Intellect, here as in The Vivisector, is joined with a middle-class leisurely pursuit of culture. It is frequently symbolised in this novel by the copy of Virgil which Austin Roxburgh clutches through all the terrors and indignities to which he is subjected.⁵ While the pull between

³ This instinctive unity with the earth is suggested in the early Cornish scenes, but is evoked more fully in the lesson which the aborigines will exemplify for Ellen. Through them she comes to recognise the essential transience which is a part of a life which responds to the earth itself. The use of the aborigines has much in common with the earlier treatment in Voss. "They do, strictly, live in another world, one which is the negation of active will, a projection of the appalling land, turning this way and that by some inarticulate sympathy with it. They survive by becoming part of the earth". William Walsh, Patrick White: Voss (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), p.30.

⁴ This concern is most clearly observed in the series of transformations to which Ellen is to be subjected. Her widely differing roles are all aspects of the entity which is Ellen, and the question to be asked concerns which, if any, has the greatest reality.

⁵ In a lecture at Hull University in 1975, Keneally suggested that Patrick White in his middle-period novels, was reworking the European myths in Australia. Manfred Mackenzie extends this argument when he sees Virgil as "accommodated to the Australian environment. Like Virgil himself, evidently, White means to create an etiological myth for his postcolonial civilisation . . . what better way then, to translate the most powerful of European classics than to interpolate once again the 'classic' story of the exposure of Mrs Fraser, and to tell it as if there were no continuity whatever between European Virgil and the Australian situation, indeed as if the legend of Mrs Fraser had cultural priority?" Manfred Mackenzie, "Tradition and Patrick White's Individual Talent", Texas Studies in Literature and Language 21. p.160.

instinct and intellect is most profoundly observed in the character of Ellen, it is endorsed and clarified by a fundamental dichotomy between her husband and his brother Garnet. Austin is used to epitomise a regard for the intellect which is life-denying. His habit of subjecting experience to analytical scrutiny comes to prevent immediacy of response:

Fascinated by so much of what he observed in life, whether beautiful or incongruous, he might have made use of it creatively had his perceptive apparatus not been clogged with waste knowledge and moral inhibitions. (pp.145-6)

Garnet represents a sensuality which is closely linked to the instinct, but which is not necessarily to be regarded affirmatively. Such an alliance is also observed in Ellen's childhood visit of exorcism to St Hya's well,⁶ but for Garnet it has brought offence against the mores of the society in which he was born: "but he, alas, had defected earlier, to sensuality and worse, and been packed off as quickly and quietly as possible". (p.148)⁷

Garnet and Ellen's moment of sexual consummation acts as a catalyst for a burgeoning of that side of her nature which allows her to accommodate not only sexuality, but also compassionate understanding.⁸ Later in the novel we are to be shown a complex link between the convict-system, and what it meant in terms of man's treatment of man, and Ellen's growth towards awareness and completion, a link which is made through

⁶ Michael Cotter sees the visit to St Hya's well as showing that neither her role as "'Mrs Roxburgh' nor even that as 'Ellen Gluyas' truly represents her. Beneath these two layers of identity is a character possessed of a highly developed mythic consciousness and of a form of negative capability." Michael Cotter, "Fragmentation, Reconstitution and the Colonial Experience: the Aborigine in Patrick White's Fiction", South Pacific Images ed. Chris Tiffin (Queensland: South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 1978) p.175.

⁷ There is a suggestion in the portrayal of Garnet that he may have had a hand in the death of his wife. In the context of this novel the possibility is used to link Garnet with the guilt of the convicts particularly Jack Chance, who has himself been prefigured in Jack Frost in The Aunt's Story, but in the larger canvas of White's work as a whole, such an implication can be seen as a further thread indicating the murderous instincts of "the family".

⁸ A rather different interpretation sees it as setting her "irrevocably on the path both to indulgence of the flesh, culminating in an act of cannibalism after the shipwreck, and torturing 'moral confusion'". Jaqueline Banerjee, Journal of Commonwealth Literature No.12, (1977), pp.74-5.

just such a form of instinctive sensuality.⁹

As occurs so frequently in White, the period of growth is shown in the form of a journey, a journey which functions at both a literal and a metaphorical level. It differs, however, from other works not only through the use of a narrative which emphasises and clarifies such a device, but also through the concentration on a relatively short period in the protagonist's life, for, while we are to be shown, through a complex series of time shifts, Ellen's life from birth to the present, we are not to follow her into old age. The burden of the novel is concerned with a period of a few months during which the extremity of her experience enables Ellen to come to terms with the divisive areas of her inner self.¹⁰ Throughout the novel this dichotomy is symbolised by the two stages of her earlier life, that which she spent on a Cornish farm and that as the wife of Austin Roxburgh. Such an equation is not, of course, over-simplified; elements of the contrary sides of Ellen's nature occur in both; but we are left in no doubt that such a division is fundamental. As before in The Vivisector, White uses recurrent motifs to emphasise the disparity; of these the most important is the use of names, and the particular character and voice which they call into being. In Ellen's childhood years her name is Gluyas and it is as Ellen Gluyas that she endures, and almost enjoys the hardships and deprivations which her ordeal is to bring, but it is Ellen Roxburgh who is capable of the ironic self-appraisal and compassionate understanding which is to ensure a triumph of the spirit.

⁹ "The social betrayal for which she accepts responsibility is the punishment and retribution inherent in the convict system. Through her varied experience of failure and betrayal she comes to understand the process of guilt and punishment as a kind of festering sore in humanity which can only be resolved by replacing the victorious Lord of Hosts of All Saints', Van Diemen's Land, with the God of Love in the unconsecrated chapel built by the repentant Pilcher at Moreton Bay." Elizabeth Perkins, "Escape with a convict: Patrick White's 'A Fringe of Leaves'", Meanjin, 36 (1977). pp.265-69.

¹⁰ Paul Theroux refers to this as a time when the mind becomes "keen and responsive to suffering" when "the soul" informs "the body". Paul Theroux, Times (London) 16 September 1976.

II

It is a rare event for a White novel to have what may be termed a source, that is, a basis in some fact or external stimulus separable from the writer's own consciousness. By far the most common structural device to be found is that of the life-span of the central protagonist or protagonists. A Fringe of Leaves, like Voss, breaks with this tradition. Ellen Roxburgh's historical counterpart Eliza Fraser is an unfortunate Scotswoman whose shipwreck amongst the aborigines of New South Wales, and ultimate rescue by a convict, has been the subject of much biographical reconstruction.¹¹ Further than this, the book is remarkable for the fidelity with which it clings to the minutiae of Ellen's daily existence. The fascination lies in the way in which such fidelity is transmuted into material which bears the unmistakable hallmark of its author's primary concerns. Where there is a variation from the Fraser tradition it can be seen as clarifying this underlying symbolism.

It is, of course, impossible to pinpoint with any precision the source of White's inspiration from amongst the plethora of material which surrounds an incident now settled deep into Australian mythology, but there are significant parallels with a work which appeared in 1971, Michael Alexander's Mrs Fraser on the Fatal Shore. The date fits comfortably into the incubation period of A Fringe of Leaves. Such parallels are, however, applicable to only a part of the story. It is

¹¹ The most accessible of these sources are Robert Giddings, John Graham Convict 1824 (London: Dent, 1937), Henry Stuart Russell, Genesis of Queensland (Sydney: Turner and Henderson, 1888), Michael Alexander, Mrs Fraser on the Fatal Shore (London: Michael Joseph, 1971). The majority of my comparisons are with the last work. Since publication of A Fringe of Leaves there has been a further book, Kenneth Cook's Eliza Frazer (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1976) and a film, Eliza Fraser (Hexagon Productions, 1976). All quotations from Mrs Fraser on the Fatal Shore will be followed by the page number and the shortened reference Mrs Fraser. In my article, from which I have taken some of the material used here there is a fuller discussion of my reasons for supposing Mrs Fraser to be the source for this work. "Patrick White's A Fringe of Leaves: History and Fiction". A.L.S. 1978-9. pp.402-18.

apparent from the novel that one of the more discernible reasons for White's interest in Mrs Fraser can be found in the ambiguity which surrounds her attitude to her rescuer, commonly supposed to be the convict John Graham. Such an ambiguity had already resulted in Sidney Nolan's paintings of Mrs Fraser. Randolph Stow in a review article of A Fringe of Leaves, refers to the alternative version of the rescue; an alternative which White adapts for the purpose of his novel:

Queensland, in its folk wisdom has preferred to accept the account of a runaway convict called David Bracefell, made public half a century after the event in the memoirs of Henry Stuart Russell. According to Bracefell, it was he, living as a wild white man, who rescued Mrs Fraser and guided her overland to Moreton Bay. His reward was to have her turn on him as soon as rescue was in sight. "She said she would complain of me. I turned round and ran back for my life!"¹²

In the novel the confrontation is markedly different, but White uses the possibility as a means of probing Ellen's conflicting emotions of tenderness and guilt.

A Fringe of Leaves opens in Sydney in the 1830's. The setting recalls the social context of the fashionable life as portrayed in Voss, and owes nothing to the Fraser material. The cushioned existence portrayed in these early pages is used as a framework with which to surround the central thesis. During the final scenes Ellen is restored to a setting appropriate to the wife of a member of such a society, but for the majority of the work all such comforts and illusions have been destroyed. Ellen Roxburgh, born Gluyas, the daughter of a poor Cornish family and to become the wife of a member of the land-owning gentry, is to

¹² The Russell version is condemnatory in its attitude to Mrs Fraser and it appears to have been influential. "The only details of this story which are not doubtful are the proven lies; but it is widely believed, and the legend of heartless Mrs Fraser (who later, according to Russell exhibited herself in a London booth, admission sixpence) is dear to Queensland. It was the inspiration of Sidney Nolan's Mrs Fraser paintings which Bracefell haunts as an eidolon of stripes suspended in the air". Randolph Stow, "In the boundless garden", T.L.S. (London) 10 September 1976, p.1097. Michael Alexander confirms some aspects of the Russell tradition particularly the rather dishonest way of life taken up after the rescue.

live through a series of transformations. It is only in her grim struggles along the coast of Queensland that her history parallels that of Eliza Fraser, but it is through the growth in understanding that these events force on her that her final transformation is able to take place. Thus, while the events to be found in the Fraser biographies form the backbone of the work, they are set within a framework of complex time-shifts which involve the memories, not only of Ellen herself, but also of her husband and his brother, memories very different from those of Eliza Fraser.

The similarities which can be found between the lives of the fictional and the real woman are therefore confined to the shipwreck and the subsequent terrors. Yet, while Mrs Fraser's early life may bear little resemblance to the fictional character, there is that about the woman herself which may well have provided an initial stimulus to the novel. At the beginning of Mrs Fraser on the Fatal Shore, Michael Alexander describes a contemporary drawing of the heroine: "A handsome dark-haired lady whose strong features and mobile mouth suggest contradictions between duty and indulgence." (p.18) It is a similar contradiction between sense and sensuality, instinct and intellect, which is to form the main theme of the novel, a contradiction which can be resolved only after the depths of suffering, indignity and frightfulness have been reached.

III

"It was too late when I started to learn. I shall only ever know what my instinct tells me". (p.35)

A Fringe of Leaves opens quietly. Its first impact is of a new simplicity, a lucidity of style, which is combined with an emphasis on narrative line unusual in White.¹³ Also unusual is the use of an opening chapter concerned, only indirectly, with the main protagonists. Our introduction to the Roxburghs is made through the eyes of a trio, only one of whom we are to meet again. The distancing effect of this device is to remain a part of our relationship with Ellen. This is not to suggest a lessening of empathy; on the contrary, she is an almost wholly sympathetic character, but it is to indicate a standing-back from the inward workings of the mind. While much of the novel is to be seen through her eyes, the picture to be evoked is without much of the capacity for tortuous self-analysis that marks the protagonists of the earlier works.¹⁴ Here, for the first time since The Tree of Man, White is to be concerned with the mind and motivation of an "ordinary woman".¹⁵ Ellen Roxburgh is remarkable only for her powers of endurance.

A Fringe of Leaves is from the first concerned not only with the characters' need to establish an equilibrium between the body and the spirit, but also with "the possibility of a relationship with a landscape". (p.11) Australia herself is to be a principal character in the subject-matter of this work.

¹³ Walsh sees the opening as "low key in tone; it is more severe in diction, more disposed to social, as it is more objective in moral, analysis". Walsh. p.118.

¹⁴ There is a sense in which the journal can be seen as offering a means of probing Ellen's mind, but it is a probe of dubious authenticity. Later in the novel White makes it clear that it concerns a truth which conceals more than it reveals.

¹⁵ Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son", p.39.

The opening pages bring this theme to the fore. Directly, through the Merivales' differing attitudes to the land, and indirectly by the use of imagery:

An atmosphere of unconfessed presentiment was intensified by the slight creaking of woodwork and friction of leather in the comfortably upholstered carriage. Rocked together and apart by the uneven surface of the street the occupants were at the mercy of the land as seaborne passengers are threatened by the waves. (p.9)

This opposition between the illusion of safety produced by reassuring comfort and another and harsher reality is to be used throughout the work. Ellen's dualism is thus illuminated by a pervasive sense of background which concerns not only individual characters but also a universal condition.

Brief though the appearance of the Merivales is to be, their function is complex. Firstly, and most obviously, they help to set the scene - that of a complacent and comfortable, middle-class existence, clamped precariously onto the uncompromising landscape of 19th-century Australia. Secondly, they bring to the fore themes which are to be of continuing concern. Of these the most important is a consideration of "duty", particularly in the context of a class-conscious society, and that of cannibalism. The latter is to be part of a probing of the depths of human possibility:

'Oh no, people can be frightful!' Miss Scrimshaw asserted, rather flat, but surprisingly loud. 'I do not believe one will ever arrive at the end of people's frightfulness'. (p.10)

It is White's purpose to show such "frightfulness" as not of necessity precluding affirmative values. Thirdly, the participants are used to suggest those qualities about Mrs Roxburgh herself which are to be our continuing concern. The hints we are given are slight, but they are sufficient to suggest a woman subtly different from the society of which she seems to be a part. She is prepared, to the horror of Mrs Merivale, to risk a journey in a "wretched little tub". (p.12) Her looks hint at a

sensuality which antagonizes the women while attracting the man:

'A pretty woman, yes. But Mrs Roxburgh is not what I would call beautiful'

Mrs Roxburgh is a woman, not a marble statue'.

Mrs Merivale was pretty certain that her husband's vision was undraped.

Miss Scrimshaw must have realized too, for she blushed and quickly added, 'What I meant to suggest was that true beauty is spiritual. There was nothing spiritual in Mrs Roxburgh'.

(pp.16-17)

Further, there is a suggestion of mystery about both the speed of the Roxburghs' departure and Ellen's origins. She is from the first apart from the society in which we find her, a separation which stems not only from what she is but from what she is to become. Her potential for spiritual growth already marks her out from those with whom she is surrounded.

Our first meeting with Austin Roxburgh includes a moment in which he considers death, a death which is soon to be upon him and for which his words show him unprepared:

'For that matter - although I've been threatened several times - and am prepared to be gathered in by - our Maker - death has always appeared to me something of a literary conceit'.

(p.35)¹⁶

Austin has come to Australia for a last meeting with his brother, a brother who has remained an image of sensuality always present in his mind - "Garnet had in him something of the quality of fire. Austin himself was not without it, if damped down, concealed by ash". (p.149) This need to re-establish a relationship with a brother who epitomizes a nature so apparently contrary to his own, suggests Austin's awareness of his own intellectual imprisonment.¹⁷ The experiment is a failure. At the

¹⁶ David Tacey uses this quotation to support his belief that "Austin is in an extremely perilous situation because the conflict between the two sides increases the more one tries to separate them - as Nietzsche says 'when a tree grows up to heaven its roots reach down to hell'. Austin Roxburgh . . . persists in his one-sidedly rational attitude to his own peril, for eventually he falls victim to his own dark side and is consumed by it". David Tacey, "A Search for a New Ethic: Patrick White's 'A Fringe of Leaves'", South Pacific Images ed. Chris Tiffin (Queensland: South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 1978), p.187.

¹⁷ "Yet Austin Roxburgh, whatever appearances suggested, was not all bookish; in him there stirred with vague though persistent uneasiness an impulse which might have been creative". p.60.

time of our first meeting Austin is urgent for home. He has parted from his brother with few regrets, and the Australia, with which Garnet is to be symbolically linked, has proved too barren and inhospitable to support the frailty of Austin's desire to develop instinctive response. His thoughts return with longing to his established place beside the library fire at Cheltenham, but he is not to go so unprepared to his death. The wreck of the "Bristol Maid" will help to release him from the coils of the intellectual cocoon in which he has been imprisoned. It is not that White is condemning Austin's dependance on a cultural heritage, on the contrary, much of his portrayal is sympathetic and allows us to admire a sensitivity of response, but he is used to indicate a danger, that of the substitution of art for life. Throughout the novel we are to be shown moments in which Austin curbs immediacy and sensuality beneath an adherence to a facsimile of life, a facsimile which must, inevitably, disappoint:

Once as he watched his wife descending the stairs in a topaz collar which had been his mother's, he was to such an extent illuminated that he resolved to commission Sir John to paint her portrait and had written away the following morning, but remained disappointed with the result, knowing that it was not the ultimate in revelation, which he himself had experienced as his wife shimmered on the stairs. (p.146)

Austin Roxburgh has chosen to distance a potentially fulfilling relationship by making his wife into his creation. He sees Ellen as "not only his wife but his work of art". (p.61)¹⁸ The early pages are full of moments where Ellen endeavours to include her husband within her own instinctive enjoyment, but is stifled by an aridity of response. Such a moment occurs as they struggle together up the rocky headland which dominates Sydney Cove and the land around. Ellen's elation is instantly curbed by her husband's mood of rejection. Later as they talk together in their cabin she meets a similar response:

¹⁸ "This could be the project which might ease the frustration gnawing at him: to create a beautiful, charming, not necessarily intellectual, but socially acceptable companion out of what was only superficially unpromising material. There were remedies for chapped hands and indifferent grammar; nothing can be effected without the cornerstone of moral worth". p.61.

She had halted close behind his chair, and leant, and put her arms around him, as though attempting to cleave to him as she had sworn

Mr Roxburgh must have felt incommoded by her leaning on him; he started fretting, and shrugging her off. (p.35)¹⁹

This inadequacy is, however, to be overcome. The wreck brings with it a measure of release from the stifling quality of a life in which experience has been filtered through possession, whether in a material or an intellectual sense:

Plastered together in their drenched condition, they were truly 'one flesh', an expression he had been inclined to reject as in bad taste, until the senseless caprices of nature invested it with a reality which had become his mainstay. (p.198)

The contrary elements in husband and wife are set against a counterpoint in which Australia herself, in her changing moods, also expresses the conflict between "the live and the dead". (p.31) Throughout this section of the work it is "the blunt club" (p.33) of the golden teasel which is used to evoke the upthrust of sensuality and vigour which lies beneath the uncompromising face of a harsh landscape. The juxtaposition of the symbol with the thematic concerns of the novel is frequently explicit:

Disappointment made her withdraw her hand, to pick at the twigs of a bush which drought and wind had not prevented from putting out flowers: golden harsh-coated teasels alongside grey hairy effigies of their former splendour.

In her distraction, Mrs Roxburgh's fingers dwelt indiscriminately on the live and the dead. 'You can't deny that the visit to your brother made you happy'. (pp.30-31)

Here as always the live and the dead are used to evoke the conflict between the possibility of spiritual growth and the recognition of an aridity which is life-denying. But it is also allied to a further concern which prevents our making a straightforward equation with nature as archetypal image. White is concerned to show the landscape as encompassing further connotations peculiar to Australia herself. Commenting on the teasel, Austin Roxburgh illustrates this. "Like all the flowers of this

¹⁹ There are echoes of Causabon and Dorothea discernible in the Austins' relationship.

country - or the few we've seen on our walks - it is more strange than beautiful". (p.33) Later Ellen asks Spurgeon if the flower is still alive. "'I wouldn't know that', he replied without deigning to look. 'There's a lot in this part of the world that looks alive when it's dead and vicey versey'". (p.39) It is therefore a precisely particularised landscape which is equated with the themes of the novel. Whereas in Voss the desert in which the ordeal takes place is, however potently realised, of secondary importance to the journey of the mind, in A Fringe of Leaves location is an intrinsic and precise part of Ellen's endurance.²⁰ It is this "refreshed landscape"²¹ which provides much of the sensuous sparkle of this work and divides it from the more cerebral, and conversely scatological approach of its immediate forerunners.

This use of setting is closely bound to the portrayal of Ellen, herself. She also refuses too ready a transference from individuality to symbol. Her growth of compassionate understanding and self-discovery, a growth which is at the heart of White's aims for his characters and his readers, is more possible in the context of the unexpected than in a settled, and therefore known, landscape.²²

Interspersed between preparations for departure and the early days at sea are recollections of Ellen's childhood and her first meetings with Austin Roxburgh.

The portrayal of Ellen's girlhood is used to show the roots from

²⁰ It is not simply that the desert in Voss has a further and symbolic level of more importance than its physical portrayal, but that its conception had been at least partly due to experience in other lands. The idea of it had been "nourished by months trapesing backwards and forwards across the Egyptian and Cyrenancian deserts", "The Prodigal Son", p.39.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

which her instinctual life has sprung.²³ It is this portrayal which most clearly delineates White's use of instinct in this work:

On reaching the age of discontent it seemed to her as though her whole life would be led on the stony hillside, amongst the ramshackledom of buildings which gather at the rear of farmhouses along with midden and cow-byre. Poor as it was, moorland to the north where sheep could find a meagre picking, and a southerly patchwork of cultivable fields as compensation, she admitted to herself on days of minimum discouragement that she loved the place which had only ever, to her knowledge, been referred to as Gluyas's. She would not have exchanged the furze thickets where a body might curl up on summer days and sheep take shelter in a squall, or the rocks with their rosettes of faded lichen, or cliffs dropping sheer towards the mouth of booming caverns, for any of the fat lands to the south, where her Tregaskis cousins lived, and which made Aunt Triphena proud.
(p.50)

It is, significantly, furze and rocks and cliffs which are Ellen's delight and refuge. The harsh side of natural beauty foreshadows her later ordeals and also prepares her for survival. "The fat lands to the south" symbolize too easy an acceptance of natural riches, an ease which precludes struggle, and through it spiritual growth, providing for cossetting rather than questioning. Conversely, Ellen's intimacy with the land by giving stability through a sense of belonging, will also in time bring the ability to live to the full in the present without the damaging need for possession.

The Gluyas side of Ellen's nature then, is founded in a harsh and uncompromising world of rock and solitude, a world where little is gained except through struggle and where moments of sunshine and tranquillity become the more rewarding for their rarity. Such a beginning teaches Ellen endurance, but it is not in itself enough. Two further elements

²³ David Tacey goes further when he refers to what I have termed the instinctive as "the shadow side" and sees the argument of the novel as showing "that there is no ethical or spiritual health until we become acquainted with our own darkness". He goes on "Like modern man, Ellen Roxburgh is torn between the two sides of her nature, which seem at first to be mutually antagonistic. On the one hand she is the wife of Austin Roxburgh, a sickly intellectual who forces her to be rational in all that she does. Underlying her sophisticated Roxburgh personality, on the other hand she has a primitive, crude and sensual side which is personified as Ellen Gluyas . . . White has created a useful metaphoric structure through which he can express his dualistic vision. Tacey, pp.186-187.

are necessary before spiritual rebirth can take place. One will struggle into life through the medium of the Roxburghs and the cultural heritage to which her marriage is the introduction.²⁴ The other is less easily circumscribed. All White's central characters must reach beyond the knowable into the mystical. For Ellen the first glimmerings of this further need are shown in the fascination of superstition:

Some professed to have heard mermaids singing on the coast above Gluyas's. Pa told tales of tokens and witches, which he half believed, and of the accommodating white witch at Plymouth. If Ellen Gluyas wholly believed it was because she lived such a solitary life. (p.50)

The passage goes on, "she was drawn to nature as she would not have been in different circumstances; she depended on it for sustenance, and legend for hope". Out of this yearning for some possibility beyond the cramped horizons of actuality comes the hope that she might "eventually be sent a god". (p.50) Such a yearning is symbolized throughout the novel by the use of Tintagel.²⁵ Ellen's god is, however, to take at first a less glamorous shape. Her "fanciful" (p.51) thoughts are interrupted by the introduction of Austin Roxburgh. As before in The Vivisector, parentage is used to illustrate dualism. Ellen's first meeting with her future husband takes place through the efforts of her mother. Clara Gluyas had been a lady's maid. Her frail delicacies are not sufficient to meet the demands of an arid land or "the pair of 'roughskins' she was saddled

²⁴ Not that "culture" in its narrowest sense is necessarily a part of the protagonists' progress towards illumination, but for Ellen it is to be a means of developing the spirit. Further light can be cast on this by a consideration of Amy Parker, a character who has much in common with Ellen. Amy is without cultural awareness, witness her bemusement in the Hamlet scene, and fails to achieve her full potential. Although Ellen finally rejects the cultural inheritance offered to her by the Roxburghs, she has taken from it, as has Hurtle Duffield before her.

²⁵ The symbolism behind Ellen's yearning for Tintagel seems never to be made entirely clear. It remains, like Glastonbury, a mystical and elusive image. Manly Johnson sees Tintagel as the "paradise garden" which forms part of the "Vergilian landscape". He goes on "one of telling images of Ellen's wilderness journey is the inversion of the Tintagel fantasy with its power in the forest of blossoms and leaves in which Tristan and Iseult sleep in perfect happiness . . . In the wilderness with Jack Chance, the escaped convict, the bower becomes a rough shelter of bark and their lovers dream nightmares". Manly Johnson, "Patrick White: A Fringe of Leaves", A Critical Symposium ed R. Shepherd and K. Singh with an introduction by John Barnes (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978), pp.88-89.

with". (p.48) But her false gentility does contain sensitivity. Though "ailing and disappointed", she is aware, however incoherently, of an unsatisfied need in Ellen. During the sufferings of what is to be her final illness she makes what provision she can:

'The money will help us out', Mamma dared suggest.
 'And it will give the girl an interest to have someone else about the place. A gentleman of scholarly tastes, so her ladyship writes.' (p.51)

Little time is given to the portrayal of Ellen's father. Sober he is an "idle muddler"; drunk, "passionately abusive and unjust". (p.49) After the death of his wife he gives way to the "despondency which had always been eating him". (p.63) Yet this dour and unimaginative countryman shares with the wife with whom he is contrasted, areas of sensitivity. "While she [Ellen] was still a little girl, he used to stroke her cheeks as if to learn the secrets of her skin". (p.63)²⁶

Ellen's childhood has, therefore, from the first contained strong contrary elements. Her parents' characters are sharply contrasted. The landscape surrounding her own farm is markedly different from that of her Aunt Triphena. Both have played their part in arousing the conflict in Ellen which it is the purpose of the novel to resolve.

These beginnings in dualism are crystallized by the arrival of Austin Roxburgh. In Ellen's eyes he is a "scholar an' a gentleman". (p.55) He is set against her cousin Will, with whom she has shared her first brief experience of sexual arousal. "Until, on an unofficial occasion, he gave her a cuddle which flooded her with a delight that surprised her". (p.55) The sensual, forthright side of Ellen's nature is drawn to the cousin with whom she shares both childhood experience and the healthy vigour of the young, but her need for spiritual fulfilment, the same need which leads to her visit to St Hya's well (p.273) draws her towards the side of her nature left unsatisfied by the sensual rootedness offered by

²⁶ The passage goes on to hint at an incestuous tendency akin to that found in Mr Lightfoot.

Will. This spiritual need is confused by Ellen with the intellectual attainments of Austin Roxburgh. He takes the life she has been living and encloses it safely within the confines of his cultural heritage:

It seemed that poetry was all, and the 'natural beauty of a country life'.

'And labour', he remembered to add. 'over and above practical necessity, labour, you might say, has its sacramental function'. Yet he retired gladly to nurse his blisters after a morning with the rake, and sniffed and frowned to find pig-dung stuck to the heel of his boot. (p.54)

Nature, and those who labour close to the soil, are all part of a Romantic vision. Such a vision has no part in the reality with which Ellen is confronted. False though the trail along which Austin leads her may seem to be, it leads in time to the fulfilment of both sides of her nature.

IV

Ellen's early married years are recalled through her memories as the ship tosses uneasily through the first stages of the voyage home. Contrasted with these recollections are present scenes in which husband and wife are shown to share a settled, tender relationship which yet contains areas of constraint. For both, marriage has brought satisfactions which have themselves been limiting factors in further development. Austin Roxburgh has failed to satisfy the persistent uneasiness "which might have been creative". (p.60) Ellen's intellectual attainments have been made through the sacrifice of her sensual needs.²⁷ Her sensuality is, at this stage, symbolized by the child growing within her.²⁸ Gradually the girl-bride has been transformed into the society-wife:

She remembered she was the farmer's daughter who had married an honourable gentleman, and corrected her speech, and learned to obey certain accepted moral precepts and social rules, most of them as incongruous to her nature as her counterfeit of the Italian hand and her comments on the books with which her husband wished her to persevere. (p.80)

²⁷ "Just as she was to learn that death was for Mr Roxburgh a 'literary conceit', so she found that his approach to passion had its formal limits. For her part, she longed to, but had never dared, storm those limits and carry him off instead of submitting to his hesitant though loving rectitude. 'Tup' was a word she remembered out of a past she had all but forgotten, in which her own passive ewes submitted, while bees flitted wilfully from thyme to furze, the curlew whistled at dusk, and night was filled with the badger's chattered messages. She herself had only once responded with a natural ardour, but discovered on her husband's face an expression of having tasted something bitter, or of looking too deep. So she replaced the mask which evidently she was expected to wear, and because he was an honourable as well as a pitiable man, she would refrain in future from tearing it off". p.76.

²⁸ At this stage only hints have been offered to the reader - "she preferred to ignore the salt pork (more fat than lean, more conducive to nausea)". p.60. "Mrs Roxburgh lay, not uncomfortably, except for a slight nausea". p.70.

Ellen's rough assurance in her Cornish setting is contrasted with the humiliation of much of her life at Cheltenham. The storm scene, in which she and Austin battle against the wind, presages the shipwreck and also allows her strength to be compared with Austin's weakness. In Cheltenham it is Austin who is, in metaphorical as well as literal terms, on his own ground.

Ellen's pregnancy, in the shifting time-scales of the novel, is at this stage only hinted at. We have yet to meet the probable father, Austin's brother, Garnet.²⁹ Austin's childhood memories of his brother are encapsulated in a firelit scene in which the naked child is bathed by the nurse.³⁰ Fire and water are used to emphasize the elemental, sensual qualities, which, in their grossest form, Garnet is to epitomize. A similar method is used for Ellen's recollections. Throughout the novel she is to recall the photograph which old Mrs Roxburgh so proudly displayed:

But I [Ellen] continue seeing the little boy with glossy lips and shallow eyes determined to dazzle as he stares out of the likeness his mother loved to show to visitors.
(p.80)

Ellen determinedly clings to her memory of the portrayal as a talisman against the attraction which she feels for the man himself. As in her earlier relationship with her cousin, Ellen fears that the sensual side of her nature will limit her spiritual growth. It is only in her relationship

²⁹ "Garnet is a personification of the Roxburgh shadow, and their ostracism of him is a projected expression of their own fright reaction to the shadow side of life . . . Austin's desire to visit Garnet is in some sense a desire to contact his other darker self in the form of his reprobate brother." Tacey, p.188.

³⁰ "He could remember an occasion when, seated beside the curiously woven brass fender, he had watched Garnet leap the rail, and stand crowing from amongst the coals, clothed in a suit of fiery feathers. He had awoken sweating from his dream; but Garnet had in him something of the quality of fire. Austin himself was not without it, if damped down, concealed by ash. He would not have had it otherwise - oh dear, no! but admired the free play of flames". p.149.

with Jack Chance that she can come to accept, and even to revel, in her own desires. Ellen is shown throughout the early stages of the novel as seeing the life of the body as a threat to the growth of the spirit. In common with all White's major protagonists she must learn to reconcile the needs of both; and, as a part of the process towards realisation she will first be forced to face the depths of her own nature.

The drive to "Dulcet" creates in Ellen a surge of homesickness. "Had it not been for the uncommunicative stares of respectable burgesses and the open scowls of those who must be their slaves, she might have been driving Gluyas's cart to market". (p.83) The arrival on Australia's shores returns us immediately to the theme of convictism and man's degradation of man.

The scene in which the convicts struggle to control the handcart makes not only the obvious comparison with the freedom allowed to the "ambling cow", (p.82) but is also a foretaste of the degradation which is so soon to be Ellen's. "Every face was raised to the sun, teeth bared in sobbing mouths when the lips were not tightly clenched, skins streaming with light and sweat". (p.84) It is against such a reminder of the behaviour of civilised man that we are to be shown the cannibalism of the aborigines. As Veronica Brady states:

A Fringe of Leaves is a novel which shows most clearly what the Aborigines mean for White's imagination, showing on the one hand the impotence of white culture, and on the other the liberating effect of contact with the "savage" domain which they represent and inhabit.³¹

The Roxburghs' stay at "Dulcet" is, in a scarcely definable way, set apart from the rest of the novel. The complex method of construction which White has chosen, juxtaposing scenes from the past against a continuing saga of the present, contrives to give each recollection a poignancy which derives in part from its enclosure within the narrative present, but the "Dulcet" section has a further dimension which stems

³¹ Veronica Brady, "A Properly Appointed Humanism: Australian Culture and the Aborigines in Patrick White's 'A Fringe of Leaves'", Westerly 2, (1983). p.61.

partly from its position, so close to the time when the central events occur, and partly from the certainty of its sense of place.

There is, however, a further ambiguity. Although the events which occur there are of importance to the main strand of the novel, they are not to form so continuous a place in Ellen's recollections. "Dulcet" is not a part of the Gluyas side of Ellen's nature, nor even that of the Roxburgh; it is, rather, the place where the dichotomy begins, however painfully, to be healed.

The theme of convictism is linked, from the first, with this dichotomy. Leaving the brothers to linger over the remains of "the fat goose they had killed by way of celebration", (p.89) Ellen goes in search of the housekeeper, who is prompt to make clear the difference between her own status, that of a free settler, and that of the girl Holly, who has been "assigned". The talk of "miscreants" (p.89) leads Ellen towards the subject which is to be at the forefront of her thoughts throughout the rest of the work:

How much of the miscreant, I wonder is in Garnet R.? Or in myself for that matter? I know that I have lied when necessary and am at times what the truly virtuous call 'hypocritical'. If I am not all good (only my dearest husband is that) I am not excessively bad. How far is it to the point where one oversteps the bounds? I would like to talk to these miscreants, to satisfy myself, but do not expect I ever will. (p.89)³²

Ellen's struggle towards spiritual awareness must, in this context, be made through a consideration of social morality. Again and again she is confronted with situations in which she must begin to doubt society's allocation of blame.

The issue which she comes to face is primarily whether the individual has the right to abdicate from judgement and true self-awareness along the convenient avenue offered by social values. Society has judged

³² The theme is kept before us by a continuous reference which extends to other characters. "'Only dirty blacks', he [Pilcher] added, 'and a few poor beggars in stripes who've bolted from one hell to another. The criminals they found out about! That's th'injustice of it. How many of us was never found out?'" p.151.

Garnet and found him sufficiently wanting to justify transportation to Australia. The difference between the sentence passed on him, and that on the other "miscreants" is primarily one of severity, and its leniency is due not to the nature of his crime, but to his social position. Later, when she has reached a state of sufficient awareness, Ellen will be asked to consider whether man has the right to condemn even the ultimate barbarity to be found in murder and cannibalism. In all these confrontations Ellen is unable, from the first, to feel herself guiltless.

Her time living in, and near, "Dulcet" is to include at least two occasions during which she will be asked to subject her own behaviour to particular scrutiny. The first of these includes her act of sexual infidelity. The second occurs when on a solitary walk she is threatened with assault by a man so reduced by society's displeasure that he resembles a bundle of "cast-off clothes lying amongst the crabbed bushes: old greenish garments the sight of which suggested a smell of must and the body to which they had belonged". (pp.134-135) The issues raised by this serve to bind more closely the strands of Ellen's dilemma. Firstly, Ellen herself has invited danger, and with it further punishment for the convict, as her brother-in-law points out. "You court disaster, Ellen. Remember this is Van Dieman's Land. An infernal situation won't be improved by you blowing on the coals". (p.136) Secondly, her own behaviour shows her subject to the same temptations:

'Most of us on this island are infected'. (She has heard it before, alas, and from her husband.) 'You, Ellen, though you are here only by chance, have symptoms of the same disease. I should hate my virtuous brother to know. But would love to educate you further in what you showed yourself so adept in learning - on one occasion at least'. (p.137)

All this is still a judgement within society's own terms, but White goes further. Asking after the serving maid, Holly, Ellen finds she has been returned to the factory. In a complex triple link between Ellen, Holly and the mare Merle, White illuminates their shared danger:

Again she thought she heard the cry of that other victim of her brother-in-law's displeasure, the little mare who, conveniently, had staked herself. Anger and fear conflicted in Ellen Roxburgh, together with relief that herself, the least deserving of the three, was assured of a refuge. (p.138)

Each of the three has been subjugated to another's will, but each has also been obeying her own instincts. Merle, in bolting from the physical and emotional tensions which she sensed in her rider, Holly, in succumbing to her master's desires, Ellen in sharing, and enjoying, a sexual union outside her marriage. White in examining their behaviour is not only avoiding the too hasty condemnation with which the twentieth century already concurs, but is going beyond that into a refusal to see even Ellen's betrayal of trust as misguided.³³ The miscreant from whom she runs resembles, in all his filth, the convict Jack Chance with whom she is so soon to share sexual love. Ellen must come to accept the demands of the body as a valid means of reaching spiritual fulfilment. Her feeling for her convict-lover is no more, and no less, innocent and spiritually rewarding than her love for the children of her captors. Momentary communion with another is seen as having the power to allay fears of the unknown. It serves to prepare the spirit for illumination. Fighting together against the terror of a further heart-attack, husband and wife are similarly united:

Now the world had shrunk to its core, or the small circle of light in the middle of the ocean, in which two human souls were momentarily united, their joint fears fusing them into a force against evil. (p.158)

Linked to the attraction which Ellen feels for her brother-in-law are her growing religious doubts. During the Christmas service at All Saints, in which Ellen struggles against the emotional and physical pressures which Garnet's presence excites, this theme is brought to the

³³ White throws light on this by the way in which he juxtaposes the brothers' sexual response to Ellen, and thereby exposes the failings of each. Garnet's brutal sensuality attracts yet repels her, Austin's is a primarily intellectual response; neither considers Ellen.

fore. The austere building is itself uncompromising, offering little to "inspire those of shy sensibility who need signposts before they can venture upon the paths of private mysticism". (p.107) Tied around the central arch is a riband on which is inscribed the text, "HOLY HOLY HOLY LORD GOD OF HOSTS". (p.107) The words are to recur in Ellen's thoughts, again and again. The distaste and disbelief which the text produces in her seems to stem from the implication that God should be seen as divisive. In the context of the church Mrs Roxburgh sits amongst the elect while the rear of the building is kept for the "assigned population". (p.106)

As the hosts swept onward against the foe, Mrs Roxburgh was again disturbed by her reluctance to accept the text on the riband garlanding the archway ahead. Yet there was no reason to complain when she belonged on the winning side.
(p.108)

Again she is forced to ponder on the right of herself, or others, to such a position of security. This theme is to be brought to the fore during her moment of illumination in the white-washed chapel built by her fellow survivor. Its importance is emphasised by its reworking at such a time, for it is a moment of self-realisation which is akin, in however underplayed a way, to Stan Parker's celebrated confrontation with the gob of spittle.

The sensual side of Ellen's nature is at this stage of the work, explicitly linked by her with the "presentiment of evil", (p.111) which she has already attempted to overcome in her immersion in St Hya's well. The religion which her mother-in-law has instilled in her had seemed protection enough until "on Christmas Day doubts came faltering into her mind". (p.111)³⁴

Through her union with Garnet she is forced into a recognition of those areas of her nature which she has curbed in the service of her

³⁴ Further than this, there is again in this novel, as so often before, an element of "Dreck". Ellen must come to accept filth and degradation as a part of a complete whole. She is to succeed where Hero failed and will come to see beauty in the offal and refuse of existence.

husband and his mother. The sexual act occurs in the same clearing in which she had earlier dreamed of such an event. It is on that occasion as she sits in "the dappled shade" (p.92) of a small clearing in the forest, that the years of servitude to another's ideal begin to lose their hold:

Removing the superfluous bonnet and loosening her matted hair, she felt only remotely related to Ellen Roxburgh, or even Ellen Gluyas: she was probably closer to the being her glass could not reveal, nor her powers of perception grasp, but whom she suspected must exist none the less. (p.92)

The act itself is a further step along the same road; Garnet is "less her seducer than the instrument she had chosen for measuring depths she was tempted to explore". (p.117) The "Dulcet" section of the book is used as a means of preparing Ellen for the final exorcism which the shipwreck is to provide, and also to contrast the behaviour of husband and wife when faced with the challenge which both Australia herself, and her surrogate Garnet, have supplied.

Husband and wife have in common a fear of the brutality of that reality which both Australia and Garnet incarnate. Both retreat to the safety of first, their room in "Dulcet", and later the "narrow house" (p.137) in Hobart Town. Yet each is attracted as each is also repelled. In Austin the loosening of the coils of his intellectual cocoon is less apparent, but it still occurs. His heart-attack and his unexpected demand for intercourse are both aspects of a resurgence of that physicality which he has long been trained to restrain. ³⁵

But it is the shipwreck itself which is finally to wrest them from the secluded harbour into which they have chosen to retreat. The

³⁵ "Moods and any tendency to animal spirits had been discouraged from an early age by nurses, governesses and tutors on orders from the mother, who feared that much of either might aggravate his delicate health. Books were countenanced if not morbid in sentiment. To surround her children with the solid architecture of life was the mother's object". p.147.

elemental forces of storm and water are to invade the privacy of the quarters which Ellen had made "snug and personal", (p.25) and leave them at the mercy of experience no longer filtered through the comfort of possession.

V

Mrs Roxburgh's forehead had creased. She did sincerely sympathize with, and had suffered for, those who had been brought to her notice in Van Diemen's Land, but still had to bridge the gulf separating life from their own lives, whether stately rituals conducted behind the brocade curtains of their drawing room at Cheltenham, or a makeshift, but none the less homely existence in a corner of this draughty little ship. Neither of them had felt the cat, only the silken cords of their own devising with which they tormented each other at intervals. Yet, she believed, she would have borne all, and more, were someone to require it of her. (p.154)

On the 22nd May, 1836, the 'Stirling Castle', homeward bound from Sydney to London, was wrecked on a coral reef off the coast of what is now Queensland. The external events of the shipwreck in which Ellen Roxburgh was involved were almost identical.³⁶ But the use White makes of them bears little resemblance to the descriptions found in the Fraser biographies. The difference lies, not only in the novelist's art, but also in the use he makes of a precise probing of the particularities of the situation. The novel is concerned with shifting states of reality, a concern reflected in the construction, and with the larger question of what is reality. Thus the wreck jolts the Roxburghs from one plane of being into another. The lulling security of life in their improvised, but homelike, cabin is abruptly transformed:

But now, suddenly, the cold air pouring down from above was aimed at their defenceless bodies, and struck even deeper. Their souls shrank dreadfully under the onslaught, and would have wrapped themselves together into a soft, mutually protective ball had this been possible. (p.170)

It is not only in their own eyes that their state has changed. Physical defencelessness leads to an immediate lessening of their habits of authority. From wealthy travellers, to be treated at least outwardly, with respect, they become, to both captain and crew, "the inferior beings,

³⁶ During the course of this section I have juxtaposed incidents from this novel and from its presumed source in order to clarify the ways in which White's version allows us to trace the journey of his characters towards self-discovery and realisation.

or unwanted pets, his passengers". (p.174) The leisurely procedures of ship-board life have allowed for delicate courtesies and habits of introspection which are shattered by the new reality. Still immersed in previous custom Mrs Roxburgh stops during their flight to the deck to apologize to her husband: ". . . 'that I haven't hurt you', she persisted, and took his cold hand in her warmer ones. He found it unnecessary. 'It's no time, Ellen, for delicacy of sentiment'". (p.168)

In Mrs Fraser the emphasis at the moment of impact is on the actualities of behaviour and event. It is an emphasis which makes no allowance, as does White's version, for an essentially introspective growth of self-discovery. Events are recounted in a way which accords with the reader's previous expectations. Thus Captain Fraser, incapacitated by a sick bout, staggers from below and begins "shouting confused directions to the panic stricken crew". (Mrs Fraser, p.28)

The nature of the disaster is clear and predictable to reader and protagonist alike: "The sea struck again with renewed force and it became clear the ship must soon break up. The water was pouring from the hold and the pumps had little effect". (ibid) In White the details of the wreck itself are learnt slowly and only by inference. The ship caught on the reef as it is, is tilted sideways. It is the specific effect of this which forms the background for his description of the event. The indignities and distortions which the simple fact of a sloping deck instantly thrusts into an ordered existence are used both literally and symbolically. Thus in White the ambiguities of the actual event are brought clearly before the reader's consciousness. In the biographical accounts of the Fraser disaster the occurrence itself, as in most similar material, has been encapsulated into a series of recognizable and clearly bounded details. In fact disaster is surrounded by confusions and misunderstandings. It calls for a re-assessment of personal predicament in the light of a new area of experience. It is

this process of re-assessment and the related need for self-assessment with which White is, as always, particularly concerned.

Mrs Fraser, leaving the "Stirling Castle", takes with her three trunks of clothes, the captain's sea-chest, and a box of jams and jellies. The Roxburghs leave behind them all but a small case, itself soon to be abandoned:

So they came out on the sloping deck. Between them, though by no specific agreement, they were carrying the leather dressing-case. They stood bracing themselves against the list of the marooned vessel, which had brought upon them every distortion of grace; not to say abandon of propriety. (p.171)

This loss of possessions is the first in a series of losses which White will bring us to see can also be spiritual gains:³⁷

Then at least they laughed together. They were temporarily possessed by an almost sensual indifference to their fate. Mrs Roxburgh's stance against the bulwark was not far removed from slatternly; the scuttle of her bonnet had lost its symmetry, and the hem of her skirt several inches of its stitching, with the result that it hung in a dangerous loop. If Austin Roxburgh was more correct in appearance, he took advantage of their laughter to press himself briefly but deliciously against her side, as though they were alone, or in the dark. (p.186)

Possessions, affluence and the security and protection which both afford, have themselves been a barrier between the Roxburghs and true understanding. Suffering and loss are necessary steps in a journey which encompasses the needs of the body as completely as those of the spirit.

One possession, however, Austin Roxburgh clings to, and it is this which inspires his moment of heroism. As he and his wife reach the haven of the galley, after their precarious and undignified crawl along the sloping deck, he remembers that he has left behind "'My Virgil'!" (p.179) He makes the difficult journey back to the water-filled cabin "not so much to show his respect for books, as to demonstrate his adherence to a faith". (p.175) The water-sodden book, which he clutches for the brief time before his death, is used symbolically as a means of clarifying the

³⁷ Loss that is in the material sense. Deprivation has been a recurrent theme in the novel. See Ellen's loss of parents and home, loss of virtue, etc.

danger of life lived primarily through the intellect. Austin has again substituted culture for sensuality, intellect for instinct. The wreck of the "Bristol Maid" begins to free him from the stultifying effects of life lived through another's experience. Through the unlikely catalyst of Spurgeon's boil he begins to experience an increased awareness and sense of participation which would in time lead to the moment of illumination reserved for the "saved":

Mr Roxburgh applied the poultice to the inflamed swelling on the steward's neck . . . he had come to love Spurgeon's boil for giving him the occasion to discover within himself, if not an occult gift, at least a congratulatable virtue. (p.217)³⁸

Later, enforced participation in the birth of his stillborn son again brings a moment of acceptance in the face of actuality. "All his life he might have been on equal terms with reality". (p.228) Would-be tragedy is thus used, if somewhat ironically, to show a moment of ordeal as containing the possibility of growth.

For Ellen the wreck is also to be a means of severing the last remnants of conventional response. Shortly before it occurs she attempts to make contact with the boy Oswald. The impulse which drives her is founded upon her sense of alienation. Her time as Mrs Roxburgh has lessened her sense of security in her past and in her instinctive life.³⁹ It is this which drives her into a temporary resumption of the voice and manner of Ellen Gluyas; but it is as Austin's wife that she falls into the error which shows her to be still at the mercy of her recent way of life:

³⁸ See Voss for a related use. "When Palfreyman, a man of delicate constitution, who forces himself to the most menial tasks, is treating Turner's boils, Voss comments, 'Mr Palfreyman, in his capacity as Jesus Christ, lances the boils'", Walsh Voss, p.30.

³⁹ "If an occasional expletive escaped from between the crew's over-working lips, it was not that of a dead language, but one she had forgotten on emigrating, as it were, from the country of her birth". p.191.

Now that the boy had started he confided, 'A man can save 'is money at sea'.

'What will you do with it?' she asked.

It was most important that she should know.

'Buy a ferret'.

'Aw? I dun't remember whether i ever seed a ferret.

Praps once - to Zennor. Iss, some gypsies had 'n'.

. . . 'I'll give you one when we come home. I'll buy you the ferret, Oswald'. (p.165)

The sudden assumption of her Cornish ways creates a response in Oswald, but it is a response which is distorted by the immediate attempt to buy affection. Later Oswald is to obey a similar impulse when he tries to bring her the gift of seafood which results in his death. In the larger context of the novel Ellen is to learn to accept similar moments of shared affection without the distortion of possession.

It is not that White is waging the simplest kind of war on a materialistic society, but that he is searching beneath the assumptions and poses of everyday life for the nucleus which remains when all distortions have been stripped away.⁴⁰

In this his position is slightly different from that which he occupied in The Vivisector and The Eye of the Storm. In the former it is the emasculating and hedonistic elements of materialism which have most threatened Hurtle. In The Eye of the Storm it is greed and a desire for admiration, both a part of the materialistic society, which surrounds Elizabeth and which for so long threaten her progress towards inner integrity and self-realisation. Here the emphasis is altered for a heroine who is not at risk from the dangers which beset her predecessors. Ellen is relatively free alike from the perils of adulation, and also from those of too great an enjoyment of the pleasures that her rise in society have placed at her door. Her greatest danger lies in the threat

⁴⁰ "In advancing towards this land's end, he Austin felt the trappings of wealth and station, the pride in ethical and intellectual aspirations, stripped from him with a ruthlessness reserved for those who accept their importance or who have remained unaware of their pretentiousness. Now he even suspected, not without a horrid qualm, that his devoted wife was dispensible, and their unborn child no more than a footnote on nonentity". p.208.

of the loss of identity which accompanies her pliability and over-ready identification with the roles which others require her to play. Possession, both in the sense of being possessed and of desiring to possess, is a further accompaniment in the loss of self which follows such an acceptance of the roles demanded by others. Denied the integrity which was to be found in her Cornish childhood Ellen uses the children with whom she comes in contact as a means of sustaining her precarious selfhood. The affection and the comforts which her wealth might buy must stand in place of that she has lost by reneging on the side of her nature defined in Ellen Gluyas.

In the final moments, perched in the shifting galley of the sinking ship, Ellen reflects on the journals which she and her husband have kept during their life together, and on the "truths" which they contain:

Yet her body told her that this child was the truest part of her, of such an incontrovertable truth that she had not admitted it to the company of those 'formed' thoughts, affectations, and hypocrisies recorded in her journal, just as she had banned from its pages another, more painful truth - herself as compliant adulteress. (p.175)

Her new awareness is to be founded on the wreck of the old. "In her thoughts she was torn between reality and actuality". (p.176) In the context of the novel, White appears to see reality as encompassed by those lasting truths which the body can offer, the child growing within, while actuality is to be found in that shifting chain of events which can seem to contain the truth of the moment. Thus Ellen's marriage is an actuality, as are her roles of "loyal wife, tireless nurse, courageous woman". (p.175) But each of these functions contains only part of the truth; reality is that which lies beneath and which stress and deprivation will reveal.

The Fraser material shows Eliza as giving birth three days after leaving the ship:

She felt the pangs of impending birth and collapsed into the scuppers. Her position was such that the baby emerged under water, and though it actually lived for a few seconds, can

literally be said to have been "born drowned". The sympathetic Brown [the chief officer] tore off a piece of his shirt and wrapped it around the unfortunate infant . . .
 (Mrs Fraser, p.30)

In A Fringe of Leaves the event is delayed for a considerable, though unspecified, length of time. The concentration at the moment of birth is less upon Ellen than upon her husband. The child is born dead and is wrapped, not in a shirt, but in the "glory bag" (p.228) of the ship's boy, Oswald, himself recently drowned.

The variations are due to the novelist's need to create an awareness in the reader of the changing symbolic and spiritual values with which his protagonists are involved. The time in the boat is deliberately extended into a timeless spell in which the values and introspections of the past can be adjusted to a present from which all illusion must be stripped. Each of the little vanities a formerly cushioned existence allowed is gradually removed.⁴¹ The green shawl which has been an admired possession of former days marks a gradual progress to dissolution:⁴²

The fringe of her green shawl trailed through depths in which it was often indistinguishable from beaded weed or the veils and streamers of fish drifting and catching on coral hummocks then dissolving free for the simple reason that the whole universe was watered down. (p.227)⁴³

⁴¹ "Looking at her hands, Mrs Roxburgh noticed that she was returning and not by slow degress to nature". p.195.

⁴² Walsh takes it further than this "the fringe is not a 'symbol' with an abstract one-to-one correspondence It is a natural image, natural in a domestic context, cloudy, intricate and mobile, and carrying a whole set of intuitions and suggestions, hints both of comfort and desperation, of settled convention and the tattered ends of experience". Walsh, p.119.

⁴³ This use of the shawl is pervasive, "she held tightly to the points of her elbows inside the pretty, fringed shawl. In this manner she preserved something of her physical self from the general amorphousness in which Oswald Digman was lost and her own thoughts and hair floated as undirected as seaweeds". p.166.

The ties of affection and reciprocal love are inexorably removed. The child for which, even after the shipwreck, she had felt "hopeful at last", (p.213) is taken from her, and the boy Oswald with whom she had continued to share moments of compassion and understanding, dies in an attempt to bring her food. Finally, her husband is also killed, transfixed by an aborigine spear. Yet each of these moments of tragedy is obscured by a haze which is a concomitant of suffering and which is also a protection from what, in another context, could be near enjoyment of its pangs:⁴⁴

During a pause in his work it occurred to Mr Roxburgh to ask, "What has become of the boy, Ellen? He didn't surely abscond to the pinnacle?"

Because death promised to become an everyday occurrence in which tuberosentiments and even sincere grief might sound superfluous, she answered in her flattest voice, "No, he was drowned yesterday evening, gathering shellfish from the reef". Several steps behind in his acceptance of the situation, Mr Roxburgh was appalled by his wife's unexpected callousness. "Why on earth didn't you tell me?"

"I forgot", she answered. "There were other things on my mind".
(p.225)

Each of the ordeals which Ellen is to endure brings her closer to the core of her own being and strips from her the illusory comfort which comes from "the unreality of most human relationships". (p.226)

On the fifth day in the boats the company from the "Stirling Castle" sight land. It proves to be a small and inhospitable island, waterless and far from the mainland, but sufficient to allow time for repairs to the damaged boats. It is the "redoubtable Mrs Fraser" (Mrs Fraser, p.31) who is the first to improvise a means of finding water. "Despite her recent ordeal, she clambered up a cliff to a seeping fissure and, soaking her sleeve in it, eventually squeezed out a cupful". (Ibid) As she is offering it to her sick husband, it is seized by one of the seamen, Youlden. An almost identical incident takes place in A Fringe of Leaves.

⁴⁴ See The Living and the Dead for a similar attitude to mourning. "The poor, more often than not, are more detached in their attitude to death, as if closeness to inevitable disaster prepares for the inevitable. And death, even as a personal blow adds a kind of distinction". p.346.

"She dipped her shawl and wrung it into the tin cup, and only sucked the woollen fringes which had sopped the water out of the rock". (p.220) In this instance it is Pilcher, the mate, who took "the pannikin from her and drained it". (p.220) Here an actual incident has been used to clarify a recurrent theme. In both cases the woman is insulted by the seaman, verbally as well as physically. The insult stems from a questioning of a previously acceptable hierarchy. The shipwreck has made invalid a situation in which status brings automatic rights. Mrs Fraser is taunted for having assumed her husband's habits of authority, for being a "she-captain". (Mrs Fraser, p.31) Pilcher goads Ellen, because she seems to be still expecting the extra benefits accorded to the gentry. In each case there is some truth in the assertion. Harmless and selfless though Ellen's foraging expedition may seem, she is still free to make it because the men are working on the boat for the benefit of the group as a whole. In the terms of the values of the present community she has behaved dishonourably, "It remained inadmissible according to Captain Purdew's code". (p.220) Yet in this setting the crew must be seen to represent that society whose values Ellen is beginning to question. By such standards Ellen's action is a part of that assertion of instinctive values over intellectual judgement and is a part of the lesson she must come to learn.

In this work as previously, particularly in The Vivisector, White is concerned not only with the battle of the individual to reach a state of harmony but with the effects of inter-relationships, particularly those between the classes. Ellen's changing status during the course of the novel is an integral part of this theme. The powers of endurance which enable her to withstand the brutalities inflicted upon her are those of Ellen Gluyas, the poor farmer's daughter. The painfully achieved cultural skills which she has needed as Austin's wife are valueless in the communities of which she is now to be a part. The

scene with Pilcher illuminates her need to stand alone, separate from either the previously established hierarchy or that which may come to be set in its place. Pilcher asserts that her former role has been that of a pampered servant and that the new regime will bring a new master:

"Then you can fill me another mugful - disposed or not".

"I am not your servant".

"If we're not eaten by the maggots or the sharks, you may be yet. There's few servants didn't own to more'n one master". (p.221)

Later she is to become the "property" of the aborigines, a slave, seemingly entirely subject to the will of her owners. Yet such total subjection brings with it a new freedom of the mind and senses. The battle for survival helps her to achieve a new independence. The early Ellen Roxburgh had been essentially the creation of her husband and mother-in-law, the Ellen who struggles through the outback is stripped, not only of possession, but also of that illusion which can be brought about by affection. A cultivated outer shell no longer confines a sensual and primitive inner core. The moment of illumination which she will finally experience becomes possible as the layers of pretension, which are the result of habit and circumstance, are finally removed to reveal an inner truth.⁴⁵

After their brief visit to the island the crew of the "Stirling Castle" again take to the boats. The small amount of water previously collected was soon finished and several of their number were seriously ill. The sick were transferred to the long boat and the pinnace set off in search of water. It never returned. The newly appointed boatswain, Stone, took the opportunity to desert both the leaking long boat and its inhabitants. In A Fringe of Leaves it is Pilcher who absconds. In this instance those who are left behind are in no doubt of his intentions.

⁴⁵ We are alerted to the dangers of pretension in the opening pages of the book, particularly in the conversation between Miss Scrimshaw and Mrs Merivale.

Mrs Roxburgh is forced out of the state of weakness and apathy that follows the death of her child by the "sight of Pilcher taking an axe and hacking at the hawser on which they depended". (p.225) Again White has used an actual occurrence precisely because it is at such a time a valid action on the part of his characters. He has chosen to avoid bringing to the fore a further character, partly for reasons of economy, but also because of the possibilities it allows for exploring the idea of betrayal. At the end of the novel it is Pilcher who is the only other survivor. He and Ellen have a final confrontation in which Ellen's progression towards an inner truth is made clear. Pilcher has chosen to remember a more acceptable version of his own actions: "The storm got up and separated our two boats". (p.376) Ellen, who lives with her own betrayals, allows him to do so:

She saw that Mr Pilcher chose to manipulate the details and the persons in his life, at least since the parting from the sluggish longboat. She rather envied the mate for having become his own guiding spirit. The details of her life had been chosen for her by whoever it is that decides. (p.376)

The guilt which Pilcher feels through his treatment of his fellows is exacerbated by the possibility that his own escape depended on cannibalism. "'And what about your companions? Did they favour eating one another?' Mr Pilcher swallowed. 'Some of 'em was eaten'". (p.377)⁴⁶

It is at this point that the reader begins to be confronted with the full force of the emotive responses inherent in such a seemingly sacrilegious act. It is through Austin Roxburgh that the possibility emerges from a motif into a dominant theme.⁴⁷ As he huddles in the water-logged boat, defeated by the death of a man with whom he had

⁴⁶ Yet it is Pilcher who builds the chapel in which Ellen reaches the moment of heightened awareness which is such a necessary pre-requisite to her final growth into self-discovery and inner harmony. He too seems to share at least a part of the possibility of redemption.

⁴⁷ Not only are there frequent allusions to actual cannibalism but there are also many references to the killing and eating of near human animals.

formed a "solitary allegiance" (p.231) his dreams are shaped by his ravenous hunger:

Yet his thoughts were only cut to a traditional pattern as Captain Purdew must have recognized who now came stepping between the heads of the sleepers, to bend and whisper, This is the body of Spurgeon which I have reserved for thee, take eat, and give thanks for a boil which was spiritual matter . . . Austin Roxburgh was not only ravenous for the living flesh, but found himself anxiously licking the corners of his mouth to prevent any overflow of precious blood. (p.231)

Eventually, Ellen is also to be confronted by the need to participate in such an act. during her period of enslavement to the aborigines she has a rare moment of freedom. Her captors have left her while they go to the funeral of one of their members, a young and beautiful girl, a ceremony which is to include cannibalism. Ellen sets off into the early morning tranquillity of a forest transformed by the rising sun, "a mesh of startling if chilly beauty". (p.270) For once she feels accepted in a world which usually confronts her with enmity and hardship. As she journeys she comes upon her captors. They too are transformed: "Their faces when turned towards the intruder wore expressions which were resentful and at the same time curiously mystical". (p.271) White is setting before us an experience which, however horrifying, is still part of the battle for survival and is not, therefore, outside humanity. The savagery inherent in such an act does not, of necessity, remove the participant from an awareness of a more immediately acceptable frame of mind, or set him in a separate category from those in whom it arouses revulsion.⁴⁸ All experience can only usefully be judged from the standpoint of understanding and truth. Further than that he is saying that even the ultimate in bestiality can retain a possibility of innocence and beauty. As with the "Dreck" motif in The Vivisector we are being reminded that the sordid may still retain

⁴⁸ "But with the passing of time she would not have known how to exculpate herself, or convey to the convict the sacramental aspect of what could only appear a repellent and inhuman act". p.315. Terry Goldie points out that "through cannibalism, Ellen not only participates in Aboriginal life, she partakes of the Aborigine". "Contemporary Views of an Aborigine Past: Rudy Wiebe and Patrick White". WLWE. Spring (1984). p.435.

the potential to bring illumination. There is, however, no attempt to gloss over the ugliness which must be the reverse of such a moment.

Both sides must be found within totality and true harmony.⁴⁹

Ellen is left alone on the forest pathway as her captors leave the "scene of their rites as quickly and as far behind them as possible".

(p.271) She finds herself, in her state of starvation, picking the meat from a discarded thigh-bone. "She was less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed that she had been moved to do it". (p.272)

Nonetheless she cannot escape from the repercussions which such participation was bound to induce:

But there remained what amounted to an abomination of human behaviour, a headache, and the first signs of indigestion. In the light of Christian morality she must never think of the incident again. (p.272)⁵⁰

The degradations which Ellen's own will to live force on her are not to be lightly escaped. They are a part of the necessary journey down into the pit in which the needs of the body must be recognized before the spirit can be released and the soul find redemption. The shipwreck breaks into the settled pattern of the Roxburgh's days. It allows for escape from the confines of a world in which possession and the desire to possess and be possessed, have come between the individual and the need to heal the raw dichotomy between the several selves which are a requirement, not of selfhood, but of society. Ellen, through the shipwreck, is placed on

⁴⁹ Veronica Brady states "ultimately the world is a place of worship and submission to the physical necessity which governs it, the act to be performed in it - this is why Ellen Roxburgh understands that the moment when hunger drives her to eat a piece of human flesh is in fact a sacramental moment". Brady. p.189.

⁵⁰ While Ellen continues to be haunted by what she has done it is clear that White regards it with at least some affirmation. "Just as she would never have admitted to others how she had immersed herself in the saint's pool, or that its black water had cleansed her of morbid thoughts and sensual longings, so she could not have explained how tasting flesh from the human thigh-bone in the stillness of a forest morning had nourished not only her animal body but some darker need of the hungry spirit". pp.273-4. It is the conventional Ellen who needs to come to terms with her own act, the instinctive woman can accept it.

the way towards a new recognition of the strengths in her Gluyas-self which have been smothered by the comforts and luxuries of her life at Cheltenham. She mistakenly equates Austin's arid, and ultimately life-denying, pursuit of culture, with her own instinctive reaching after a spiritual unknown. It is this last that has led her away from self-realisation towards a role-playing in which she denies the growth of the spirit. The final section of the novel will be concerned with the fight to absorb the bitterness and guilt which self-knowledge has brought, without losing the new harmony between instinct and intellect, body and spirit.

VI

Mrs Roxburgh barely flinched, not because sustained by strength of will, but because the spirit had gone out of her. She was perhaps fortunate, in that a passive object can endure more than a human being. (p.243)⁵¹

Ellen is to suffer every possible degradation and loss. She is to be left without the power of love and possession to sustain her; pride in her personal beauty and social skills is removed, as are the last vestiges of dignity. She must come to accept total abasement, and will be brought to beg for the disgusting remnants of the food left by the aborigines. Even human flesh will not be beyond the desire inflamed by starvation. She must come to recognize that every possibility of bestiality lies within the limits of the will to live. The "spirit", which is a part of a false comprehension of self must be broken. The Ellen of the past was sustained by a sense of well-being which was compounded from possession and skills, themselves the fruits of society and its approval, and was not an integral part of the woman who is left when all else is gone.

All that is left as she battles for life is her will to live, a will which is founded on instinct.⁵² She is to be stripped, literally and metaphorically, naked. It is in this state of original innocence, cleansed of misconceptions and impositions forced on her by those she has loved, and able at last to face the dark side of her own nature, that she will finally be led from the wilderness which has been the scene of her re-birth.

⁵¹ Veronica Brady sees this passivity as an affirmative force used by White as an opposing value to those more commonly admired: "White Australian culture tends to value aggression, energy and material possession, but in his choice of this story and this heroine White throws the emphasis on passivity, subjection and dispossession". Veronica Brady, Westerly. p.62.

⁵² "She must cultivate a strength of will to equal that of her sturdy body". p.237.

VII

The starving crew of the "Stirling Castle" finally decide to risk the overland journey. They beach upon a shore which is not, as they suppose, the mainland but the northernmost end of Great Sandy Island. Mrs Fraser's first knowledge of the presence of natives comes from the sound of the extended "Cooo-ee" used as an identification call. The first contact is cautious but not hostile, a putrefying kangaroo carcass is exchanged for clothing. Later more dangerous advances are met with warning shots and the aborigines retire.

In A Fringe of Leaves it is Ellen who finds the decomposing animal. Water is found by a member of the crew and a brief moment of relative tranquillity follows their long ordeal. The differences between the texts are due partly to the need for the novelist to interpose high points of drama with contemplative periods, but they are also due, in this instance, to White's particular thematic devices. It is another of the occasions as Peter Beatson⁵³ has pointed out, when White's protagonists are involved in a journey which takes them down into a pit of suffering through which they must pass before they may arrive at a moment of illumination. Such a journey has its cessations and respites and follows a downward spiral rather than a straightforward descent.

Several days pass before the party from the "Stirling Castle" are attacked. During this time there has been a split, the stronger members of the crew go on ahead and the weaker follow some days behind. Due partly to their increased vulnerability the latter are gradually deprived of their remaining possessions. When the party is finally united a pitiful picture is presented:

⁵³ Beatson, pp.10-12.

The captain was bleeding profusely from the cheek. They were all naked; Mrs Fraser, however, had made a modest effort to string round her loins a wreath of the mauve-flowered sea-grape that trailed everywhere across the sandhills, secreting her wedding ring and earrings among the tendrils. (Mrs Fraser, p.45)

For Ellen such a moment comes after the death of her husband. Surrounded by hostile aborigine women she is taunted, and stripped of the last of her clothing. She too, dresses herself in convolvulus vines:

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

Apart from the link with the title, the imagery conveyed by the wedding ring is to be recurrent throughout the rest of Ellen's ordeal in the wilderness. Just as she is to re-enter civilisation "almost as naked as a new born child", (p.33) she finds that she has lost it. Her reaction is violent, the more so by its contrast with her relative tranquillity during her other deprivations. Jack harshly reminds her that the ring will not bring back her husband, nor will it alter their own relationship. "'And ringless didn't prevent you an' me becomin' what we are to each other'". (p.330) The ring has been for Ellen the last remnant of a way of life which has brought society's approval and a measure of security. It is, however, a further illusion. It is part of a facade which could seem to reflect an inner truth but which may be a distortion. Ellen's marriage, while within the accepted code of behaviour, was no more, and is in some ways, less real than her relationship with the convict. At this point, White is concerned not so much with personal relationships as with the need for the individual to grow towards a freedom of the spirit uncluttered by the constraints of other relationships. Here Ellen is akin to Hurtle in her desire to take possession of herself and protect the vulnerability of the spirit. Momentarily, she shares some of the

ruthlessness of Elizabeth. She must come to be her own creation, no longer the "work of art" of her husband, her mother-in-law, or the aborigines.⁵⁴ The primacy of this requirement in White's novel causes a divergence from the source material.⁵⁵

In Mrs Fraser the captain is also Eliza's husband. His earlier invalidism, together with the ordeals he has suffered, combine to bring about a religious melancholia, bordering at times on madness. In A Fringe of Leaves this motif is retained, although it is separated from the character of Ellen's husband:

Captain Purdew's wits took a turn for the worst when it came to abandoning the incapacitated long-boat. Like Bristol Maid it lodged in his conscience and would probably fester there as long as he lived. (p.237)

Madness, with the inevitable inwardness that it involves, has been a part of the processes of growth undergone by White's protagonists in the past but here it would cloud the issue. Husband and wife must separately find, or fail to find, their own route to self-discovery and eventual realisation, the escape into a turmoil of the mind taken by Captain Purdew would distract from this process.

A further divergence is found at the moment of death. In A Fringe of Leaves this occurs soon after the party begin the walk along the beach. In Mrs Fraser it does not happen for several weeks. "In the fifth week of her enslavement Mrs Fraser came upon her husband in a forest clearing". (Mrs Fraser, p.53) There are, however, strong similarities between the

⁵⁴ "An almost tender sigh of admiration rose in the air as the women achieved their work of art. Laughter broke out, a stamping of grey-black feet, a clapping of hands. Only the work of art sat listless and disaffected amongst a residue of black down and sulphur feathers shaped like question marks". pp.251-2.

⁵⁵ Much has been written of the effects of the works of Jung on Patrick White. This attitude to the individual psyche is akin to that found in Jung and divides White from those who write within an essentially Freudian tradition, which gives greater stress to the need to develop a mature and lasting relationship. In a letter written in 1975 White states that he "had not read any Jung till about the time when [he] was writing The Solid Mandala". Tacey. ALS (1979-80). p.245.

deaths themselves. In both the death is brought about by an arrow through the back, in each case the woman runs forward and removes it, in both it is followed by a spout of blood. Although the timing may differ, the essential point remains the same. The women are deprived of all sense of familiarity and security whether of possession or companionship. Ellen and Eliza are left alone in the company of a group of beings with whom they have no language in common and whose ways are those of man in his primeval form.⁵⁶

After her capture by the aborigine women, Eliza is brought to the encampment:

A haphazard collection of crude shelters - mere strips of bark and wattle laid over hoops of withy. Dilly-bags their simple grass-woven hold-alls, hung from the branches of trees, smoky fires burned, families squatted around, lean and mangy curs rummaged among old bones and garbage. Tribesmen, bedizened with paint, tinkered with their weapons and hardly looked up as the female prisoner passed. Pot-bellied children ran up and stared, a yellow dog snarled and nipped her ankles.

(Mrs Fraser, p.49)

She is taken immediately after arrival to aid in the feeding of one of the children and is also required to tend the sores of the child's mother.

The camp to which Ellen is brought shares the same features. She too is required to give the milk provided for her dead child to an infant who is in many ways abhorrent to her, "her disgusting charge". (p.247) Ellen is, however, unsuccessful. Her milk has dried. Her role is reduced to that of porter, she is required to carry the sick and ulcerated child until its death a short time later. The variations appear to stem from the need to prevent the growth of a bond of affection, at least of too personal a kind. But it is also a part of a more complex theme. Milk has been used throughout the novel, as elsewhere in White, as a symbol of comfort. It is closely related to Ellen's role as mother.

⁵⁶ The ephemeral quality of the aborigines in Voss is not to the fore here, rather they serve to give stability in the midst of transience.

Immediately before the shipwreck Ellen goes to the galley in search of milk for her husband. She holds the cup for him as he lies against her recovering from the pain of a heart attack. "As he sank his mouth she greedily watched, until she saw the string of milk hanging and swinging from his lower lip". (p.160) Later he lies against her breast. "The breast had escaped from its covering, at its centre the teat on which his struggling mouth once or twice threatened to fasten". (p.161)⁵⁷ Ellen is one of a succession of earth-mothers. She is related to such characters as Alma Lusty, Amy Parker and Mrs Godbold, but she also has affinities with another type of mother, one White has interpreted with increasing sympathy, which began with Catherine Standish and culminates in Elizabeth Hunter, where the role of mother comes dangerously close to that of tyrant, through the bond of affection stunting the emotional growth of the "child".

In spite of the use of milk, the symbol of fecundity, Ellen is barren. The children born to her soon die, and it is her ageing and sterile husband whom she comforts at the breast. While White may deprive her of the commitment that the ability to feed the infant might have brought, he does not deny her moments of fulfilment and shared joy with the children to be left in her charge. The emphasis here seems to be on the need to accept transience. Ellen is to learn that joy is not of necessity a noncomitant of security. Her rare moments of delight can be as fully shared with the companion of the moment as with one of a lifetime. She will not be allowed to misuse her motherhood; rather, it will increase her compassion and understanding. Such a moment occurs when she is returning to the camp from the occasion during which she has come upon the charred and blackened remains of the first mate. Dazed by shock, she is

⁵⁷ The use recurs in an episode with Jack. "He did in fact nuzzle a moment at breast, not like an actual child suckling, more as a lamb bunting at a ewe . . .". p.323.

found by two of the camp children. Taking her by the hand, they lead her back pausing on the way to play together. "The young children might have been hers. She was so extraordinarily content she wished it could have lasted for ever, the two little black bodies united in the sun with her own blackened skin and bones". (p.257)

Ellen's time in the encampment has a further and related purpose. It is used to heighten the effect of the dualism that has already formed so central a pattern in her life. Moments of utmost degradation and bestiality are contrasted with awesome natural beauty, a beauty which is not confined to the environment:⁵⁸

Round her the blacks were proceeding with their various duties, beneath a splendid sky, beside a lake the colour of raw cobalt shot with bronze. Despite her misery and the child in her arms, Mrs Roxburgh could not remain unmoved by the natural beauty surrounding her. Evening light coaxed nobler forms out of black bodies and introduced a visual design into what had been a dusty higger-mugger camp. What she longed to sense in the behaviour of these human beings was evidence of a spiritual design, but she could not, anymore than she could believe in a merciful power shaping her own destiny. (p.247)⁵⁹

Ellen is again confronted by the need to free herself from the last vestiges of conventional Christian belief. She is to discover no signs of a providential purpose. Nor will she be able to escape into a delusion concerning her own part in a divine plan. Further she has to move beyond the safety she feels in her concept of civilisation, symbolised for her by Austin as rational man, into an ability to accept the state of flux, of change, and above all in White, of decay. The essential mindlessness of her desire to share in the safety of a structured religion is shown in her equally valid impulse to join in "the kind of lament" with which her captors meet the coming of morning and evening:

⁵⁸ "Surely she could not sink any lower". p.266. "At least it would never enter the heads of any of her acquaintance, not even Maggie Aspinall slopping her Madeira, that Mrs Roxburgh could sink to the level of bestiality at which she had arrived". p.267.

⁵⁹ Manly Johnson sees these moments of "grace" as illustrating "one of Carl Jung's major objectives which was to 'resolve the thesis of pure nature and its antithesis of the opposing ego into the thesis of conscious nature'". Johnson. p.95.

By the time the surrounding trees had risen through a mist, the tribe appeared to have re-assembled, and the lamentations of the evening before were repeated in a cold dawn. Whether the wailing was intended to exorcise malign spirits, the captive felt that some of her own more persistent ghosts might have been laid by this now familiar rite. (p.249)

The point seems to be that in wishing to join in worship with her captors Ellen is in part expressing an urge for spiritual release and in part needing the security of being on the "winning side". (p.108) In the new society in which she finds herself she is amongst the company of the outcasts, those whom she had observed at Christmas at the back of the church. In this setting it is her captors who are a part of the company of "hosts". (p.248) It is instinct that draws her to join in a service which she is unable to understand, its language and its purpose are equally foreign to her. White is not condemning her impulse; on the contrary such a moment of communion is an essential part of her growth, but her relationship with God must also include the intellect. Both sides of her nature must be joined before true harmony can take place.

In an interview in 1969 White clarified his attitude to religion:

Religion. Yes that's behind all my books. What I'm interested in is the relationship between the blundering human being and God. I belong to no church, but I have a religious faith; it's an attempt to express that, among other things, that I try to do. Whether he confesses to being religious or not, everyone has a religious faith of some kind. I myself am a blundering human being with a belief in God who made us and we got out of hand, a kind of Frankenstein monster. Everyone can make mistakes, including God. I believe God does intervene; I think there is a Divine Power, a Creator, who has an influence on human beings if they are willing to be open to him.⁶⁰

Ellen must be "open" to her Creator, but she will only be ready to do so through a pursuit of absolute truth. To look for a pattern is to believe that behind the terror of her daily existence is a divine plan which condemns, and also excuses, those devastated by it.⁶¹ Such a notion is contrary to the concept of a "Frankenstein monster" which "got out of

⁶⁰ McGregor, In the Making, pp.218-22.

⁶¹ "She encouraged random images rather than consecutive thought which might have driven her to search for a cause or reason for her presence in a clueless maze". pp.252-3.

hand". Rather, Ellen must come to understand the "unprofessed factor"⁶² which lies within herself.

Official documents show that Eliza was brought to safety as a result of the efforts of the convict John Graham. Graham was a member of a party sent, as a result of information received, to attempt the rescue of the survivors of the "Stirling Castle". Through their efforts Mrs Fraser was brought by sea to the comparative haven of the penal settlement at Moreton Bay. The alternative version stems from the memoirs of John Stuart Russell. According to this, a convict named Bracefell, who had been living in the wild among the aborigines, had come upon Mrs Fraser when his tribe was called to a gathering. During the resulting celebrations, Bracefell found the opportunity to rescue Eliza. Together they completed the long and arduous overland journey to safety. The choice of such an interpretation allows White the opportunity to explore a relationship which had, from the first ambiguities. Both were survivors in the desparately real sense that they had found a way to live in circumstances that were seemingly unendurable. Both lived only through an intense will for life itself. Yet while both were in a sense victims, Bracefell was a convict and Eliza a captain's wife. In the Russell version Eliza, once the boundaries of civilization are reached, turns on her rescuer.

In White it is, as always, primarily a journey of the mind. As such, it is the stresses which the historical events have suggested that form the focal points of Ellen's struggles to reach an outward haven and inward security.

⁶² "I suppose what I am increasingly intent on trying to do in my books is to give professed unbelievers glimpses of their own unprofessed factor. I believe most people have a religious factor, but are afraid that by admitting it they will forfeit their right to be considered intellectuals". Beatson. p.167.

Ellen and Jack Chance, like Eliza and Bracefell, are locked in a relationship in which guilt plays an important part. A convict who had once succeeded in escaping from the hell which Moreton Bay had so recently been would, like Jack, be tortured by fears of renewed horrors. Like Jack, he could also have to bear the memories of the crime which had distorted his life. Ellen is also, like Eliza, in a position which places her outside the accepted conventions. The Russell biography hints that it is the fear of the gossip that would be the result of a return, after the intimacies of life alone with such a travelling companion, which causes Eliza to deny her rescuer. Ellen is also far from free from the fear of sexual guilt. The "sensual side of Ellen's nature" (p.256) has been since her childhood visit of exorcism to St Hya's well a source of disturbance. Earlier in the novel it is this which drives her to her act of infidelity with her brother-in-law. During her time with the aborigines it is suggested that she finds the "physical splendour" (p.247) of the males attractive. It is with a mixture of fear and fascination that they enter her dreams. "During the night she returned to her body from being the human wheelbarrow one of the muscular blacks was pushing against the dark. There was no evidence that her dream had been inspired by any such experience. . .". (p.249) A similar possibility occurs in Mrs Fraser. "The story of the championing of the captain's lady by a savage nobler than the rest may have covered a more romantic relationship than she was prepared to admit". (Mrs Fraser, p.64) Each of these relationships, whether or not they exist beyond the world of dream, is a necessary part of the recognition of the needs of the body. Ellen must be brought to an acceptance of the dark side of her own nature. The hint of a sexual relationship with an aborigine, culled from Mrs Fraser, is useful to White precisely because it delineates social boundaries. The early scenes with the Merivales have established the abhorrence with which such a suggestion would have been met in the society

of which Ellen is a part. Like the act of cannibalism it is used as a measure not only of the distance Ellen must travel before coming to terms with such a desire but also of the need to recognize the existence of such "secret depths". (p.20) It is a part of Ellen's journey into the "awfulness" (p.11) of her own nature and also a stage on the way towards a compassionate understanding that will enable her to stand outside the conventions of social behaviour. It is not that White is asking her to overthrow such conventions, indeed her response to Mr Jevons is to suggest the opposite, but that he requires her to be clear-sighted in her acceptance of them. Just as the moment in which "silence enclose[d] her like a beatitude" (p.391) is a transient one, so too are the moments in which she must come face to face with the consequences of human vulnerability. She is bounded by the society in which she has lived and to which she will return, a context which is reflected by the structure of the novel, but she must learn to soar above such confines. Veronica Brady seems at first to posit an alternative view when she states:

Miss Scrimshaw, typically still lives by the delusions of grandeur Ellen has learned to see through. She longs "to soar" . . . to reach the heights! . . . look down on everything that lies beneath [her]! Elevated, and at last free. But Ellen has learned that true humanity comes from acceptance and thus remains 'ineluctably earthbound'.

But she goes on "what is necessary is to learn as Ellen does, to acknowledge our vulnerability".⁶³ Ellen's need is to remain earthbound while becoming spiritually free.

Jack and Ellen are throughout enmeshed in a relationship in which their former lives play a particularly significant and recurrent part. White uses flashback as a means of clarifying this and of suggesting the nightmarish and only partially conscious state in which they battle through an endless ordeal in which starvation and utter exhaustion are always present.⁶⁴

⁶³ Veronica Brady, Westerly, pp.63-4.

⁶⁴ The use of flashback keeps the Roxburgh side of Ellen's nature before us, without it the journey would be almost entirely Gluyas.

But Ellen is not the Captain's wife. White has made her social status an ephemeral and changing affair. It is Ellen Gluyas who struggles to freedom, and it is this Ellen who shares in the joyful sensuality of her relationship with Jack.⁶⁵ It is, however, a dichotomy that must ultimately be resolved. Mrs Roxburgh is also a part of the totality which is Ellen, and, as she approaches civilisation, it is her claims and needs which begin to be re-asserted. On their last night together Jack confesses that he had been sent to the colony for murdering his mistress. It is this girl, Mab, whom in his delirium, he has frequently confused with Ellen. This confession forms a catalyst for their mutual fears and results in their parting. "When he had taken his pleasure, he said abruptly 'Your heart isn't in it, Ellen. It's like as if you went dead on me'". (p.324) It is Ellen Gluyas who has stepped back. Jack is no longer at the forefront of the needs of Ellen Roxburgh, although it will be his spirit which will form the focus for the guilt with which she struggles. His body has been a part of the primitive resurgence of the dark side of Ellen's nature. Her Gluyas-self has functioned as Nancy did for Hurtle and has brought about the release of the instinct.

Important though Jack is at this stage of the novel we are not given direct access to his mind as we are to Ellen's and as we have been to Austin's. His continuing involvement in his past relationship with the dead Mab is conveyed through broken fragments of speech during nightmares, and through the recollections which he shares with Ellen. It is however an involvement which is central to the main theme. Jack was brought to the act of murder through an obsession which is linked to possession. Just as he has caged the songbirds he loves, so he tries to cage Mab and keep her for himself.⁶⁶ In each case the result is death.

⁶⁵ "It was love, whether selfless or sensual, which had restored the youthful skin to her breasts, the hollow in the smooth leaf patterned flank; the tendrils of hair singed off ritually by her black mentors were again stirring in the armpits". p.316.

⁶⁶ Ellen is also forced to sing for him.

The use of flashback which allows us access to Ellen's thoughts, is concerned primarily with Old Mrs Roxburgh. It is her mother-in-law and not her husband who is Ellen's constant companion on her journey. It is by this device that White keeps the theme of dualism continually before our eyes. Ellen's feelings of guilt towards her mother-in-law are in part a reflection of the continuing consideration of the dominance and possessiveness of the mother-figure. More centrally though her guilt concerns the sensuality which is always a part of her nature and which old Mrs Roxburgh fears. "'Love', the old thing reminded in a more than usually tremulous voice, 'love' is selfless, never sensual". (p.316)⁶⁷

In one of the many dreams and half-dreams which make her mother-in-law a part of the present "darker myths of place" (p.111) Ellen is lying stretched on a scrolled couch:

The striped cerise silk blazed in a sunlight such as Cheltenham had never seen, the gilding of the scroll-work bronzed and blistered by unnatural heat (the gold leaf was in fact peeling like sunburn skin). She shaded her eyes and re-arranged her neck on the bolster as though expecting an assignation. She had shed, she noticed, the fringe of leaves which was her normal dress, and the hair in her thighs appeared to have been formally curled in the same style as the scrolls of the daybed on which she was waiting, on cushions melting into a dark cerise sea.

(p.311)

The sensuality which has for so long been submerged is here linked with the artifice which is the greatest part of the intellectual development Cheltenham has offered. It is Australia which has developed her sensual gift to the full, "a passion discovered only in a country of thorns, whips, murderers, thieves, shipwreck, and adulteresses". (pp.311-2) Just as in her "days of minimum discouragement", (p.50) in the bleak Cornish countryside, the sun and the furze had been the sweeter for the contrast with the days of barren struggle, so Australia, during rare moments of

⁶⁷ David Tacey sees old Mrs Roxburgh as representing "the old ethical attitude . . . which taught one to run away from one's own darkness and to repress evil. Tacey. p.186.

respite, sharpens and sweetens her appetite. It is this wholehearted enjoyment of what is offered, that she learns from the aborigines; an enjoyment which itself stems from an earth-rootedness lost in her Cheltenham days.

It is at this point that the theme of convictism is most explicitly linked to the need for individual wholeness unhampered by the possessive element of love. Continuing her dream she sees the felons coming towards her with an almost sensuous rustling of chains. "She would listen no more. And smother her lover rather than allow him to be drawn back into a ritual of chains and licence". (p.312) Thus the elegant and fastidious Ellen of her married days becomes one with the Ellen who, stripped of all but her sensuality, is able to continue a battle which is not for life alone. The former Ellen is incorporated and not destroyed within a duality which approaches the union which the last chapters of the work will give.

Ellen has not, however, at this stage in the novel reached the state of grace in which illumination will be possible. On the contrary, the last stages of her journey are used to cast a light on her nature which is far from affirmative. Throughout the work there have been moments when the sensuality of her nature has been seen as dangerously close to greed. She is subject to a form of gluttony which is akin to that found in Amy Parker. "It became a shared hunger. She would have swallowed him had she been capable of it". (p.299)⁶⁸ In Ellen it is usually associated with food. "She could never match his [Jack's] delicacy. Gluyas's Ellen a regular gobble-gut - and otherways greedy slut." (p.320)

As she approaches civilisation, the re-assertion of the Mrs Roxburgh side of Ellen's nature is also seen to contain dangers. In their last

⁶⁸ "'My love? My darling?' She gathered in her arms this detached object, or rare fruit, his head". p.313.

days together Jack is seen increasingly as convict rather than as lover. "She might also have wished to remain alone, but could hear Jack Chance the convict crawling in behind her". (p.321) This mood reaches its culmination on their last morning, when in a scene which recalls earlier moments where violence had been used to convicts, she takes advantage of his momentary weakness to vent her anger:

She began kicking his thigh. 'Wake up!' she shouted.
 'At this rate the sun will be up before we're started'.
 Anybody must have agreed that the situation called
 for sternness on Mrs Roxburgh's part, so she kicked again,
 and hurt a toe. 'Jack? Aw, my Gore!' She could have
 cried, less for the pain than her failed attempt at dignity
 and authority. (p.327)

Comic though the tone may be, the inference is clear. Ellen may lack the physical ability to compel her companion to recognize her authority, but she has the desire. As the outside world begins to return to the consciousness of the fugitives, so its viewpoint begins to be imposed. Ellen's reactions stem in part from a sense of shame. She fears that co-habitation will make her an accessory to Jack's crimes:

She realized with resentment that in the eyes of her
 brother-in-law she must stand equally condemned since
 unrestricted association with the convict made her his
 accomplice. (p.316)

This fear is closely linked to her earlier awareness of a bond with the convicts, a link which White emphasizes by the reference to Garnet. As safety draws near it is her shorn hair, rather than her nakedness, which is her constant preoccupation. "She was distressed thinking of her hair, still short enough to suggest it had been cropped as punishment for some crime she had committed". (p.320)

But there is a further aspect of this treatment of the convict theme, one in which Ellen's portrayal is treated more sympathetically and shown to have associations with that of Duffield. Lying with her lover, in a moment of contentment, beside "a sheet of water strewn with lilies" (p.316) she sees a tree of the type her captors had taught her to

scale. "Jack the convict, her saviour lover, must have been dozing. His hand gave like a weakened lock to allow her her freedom. (p.317) The tree symbolizes her need to be free from a confinement created by love. It has, however, a further and archetypal function, one which connects the earth and the spirit.⁶⁹ Ellen's pit of suffering is beginning to release her and allow her to climb towards a resolution of her dualism and the possibility of spiritual contentment:

She was soon climbing, breathing deep, planting her spongy, splayed feet on sooty rungs. She was rejoiced by the solitary nature of her undertaking at the same time as it released tremors of guilt from her. She continued climbing, and as she rose the sun struck at her through the foliage furbishing her with the same gold. (p.318)⁷⁰

To see love as a possible confinement is not, however, to negate its idyllic qualities. The moments in the lake also provide an epiphany. "It was sad they should destroy such a sheet of lilies, but so it must be if they were to become re-united, and this after all was the purpose of the lake". (p.317) The moments of shared understanding are the first steps on the ladder formed by the tree, we are not however intended to see Ellen's movement towards illumination as final and unchanging. Touched by gold though she may be, she is not prevented from again turning to her lover with anger. "She would not have cared if she had put out one of the brute's eyes". (p.319) But it has happened.

As they emerge from the trees and look out upon a landscape which contains fields and a distant farm, Jack turns and goes back towards the wilderness which has sheltered him:

"Ah, Ellen, I can hear 'em settin' up the triangles in the gateway to the barracks! They'll be waitin' for me!"
Immediately after, he turned, and went loping back into

⁶⁹ The importance of the symbol of the tree has already been shown by its use in The Tree of Man.

⁷⁰ The use of the shadowing of gold links Ellen with Hurtle, particularly to the scene in which he tries to convey to Hero the meaning of the "golden hen". The Vivisector, p.392.

the bush, the strength restored to his skeleton.
 Her torn hands were left clawing at the air. "JACK!
 Don't leave me! I'd never survive! I'll not cross
 this field - let alone face the faces".
 But she did. (pp.332-3)

The end of their physical relationship is not, however, the end of their emotional bond. Ellen's return to safety is followed by a period of total collapse in which fever releases her from the re-assertion of conventional behaviour. It is this period of respite which allows her to resume her role as Mrs Roxburgh without a renewed denial of the other side of her nature.

It is in the growth through suffering that White's Ellen most differs from her historical counterpart. Her time in the bush has not been seen as so wholly a time of anguish:

Disgust might have soured her had it not been for the delicious smell of dew rising from the grass their feet trampled and the bushes they brushed against in passing. The sky was still benign. Were she presently to die, her last sight, her last thought, would be of watered blue. (p.252)

Deprivation has brought with it a new appreciation of the satisfaction to be found in life in its simplest form. Suffering has been used, once again in White, as an opportunity for the growth of the spirit and a resultant harmony between the warring aspects of an individual nature.

VIII

A pulse began fluttering in her throat. 'It does concern me - why the good and the bad are in the same boat - and the difference between killing and murder. Until we know, we shan't have justice - only God's mutton for Sunday dinner - those of us who are lucky enough'. (p.342)

Ellen is "concerned". She is inextricably enmeshed in the intricacies of human behaviour and suffering. She no longer has "to bridge the gulf" (p.154) separating life from her own life. The last section of the work uses a series of parallel events to contrast the Ellen who has survived with the woman who had never "felt the cat, only the silken cords of their own devising". (p.154)⁷¹

Ellen's return to comparative safety is accompanied by the outward signs of a spiritual rebirth. Her final moments in the outback have stripped from her the last fragments of her former way of life. She is bereft of even her ring and her fringe of leaves. She is returned, literally naked, to the capacious and motherly arms of Mrs Oakes.⁷² In this state she is bathed, fed and nursed without conscious effort on her own part. But through the blur of re-established comfort it is guilt that obtrudes: "'Even if Jack is not destroyed - if he simply lies down and dies - I must give myself up as his murderess'". (p.344)⁷³ A complex link with both convicts and aborigines continues to be made. They haunt her dreams. Released by fever, her unconscious mind is freed.⁷⁴ Parallels

⁷¹ The last section of the work completes the circle of experience; there are echoes of Voss in this, and in such scenes as Ellen's questioning by the commandant which recalls the episode in which Laura meets Colonel Hebden.

⁷² The name Oakes, itself suggests stability.

⁷³ "The patient shook her head. 'You won't persecute me? And string me up to the triangles? No one will believe, but a person is not always guilty of the crimes they's committed.'" p.337.

⁷⁴ The feverish dreams of the dying Elizabeth Hunter are also used as a release of the spirit as is the onset of "madness" in Theodora Goodman.

are made and boundaries dissolved. Black and white are equally guilty and equally innocent. "'They've murdered Mr Roxburgh, but will the whites - kill Jack'". (p.339) The point is being made, repeatedly, that suffering has not brought false comfort; rather, it offers clarity of vision and compassionate understanding.⁷⁵ Such involvement means an acceptance of shared guilt. Her earlier sense of comradeship with the convicts is here endorsed. She too is capable of every depravity. The only purpose left to her is to secure Jack's pardon and to align herself with the other dispossessed:

'I must try', she uttered, low and dry. 'Yes, you are right. If only on account of my petition, I must not forget I am responsible to someone - to all those who have been rejected'. (p.351)

It is this sense of herself as "a lost soul" (p.353) that makes her an uncomfortable companion for many of those associated with the settlement. Leaving her, the young doctor feels "relief and exhilaration". (p.352) "Lieutenant Cunningham's sang-froid was only restored as he urged his horse along the homeward track regardless of branches whipping and tearing". (p.352) The companion sent to remove her from the refuge offered by the Oakes, is not, however, easily awed. The redoubtable Miss Scrimshaw completes the link with former days, and shares with Ellen some of her sense of apartness. As Ellen sits alone in the last few minutes before leavetaking, "hunched against whatever was prepared for her", (p.353) she hears Miss Scrimshaw approaching. The sound forms for her "a frail bridge . . . suspended over the chasm of silence". (p.353)

Her arrival at the commandant's clarifies her feeling of degradation:

⁷⁵ David Tacey argues convincingly that Ellen is "now forced to bear her own darkness . . . By accepting her own evil Ellen arrives at a new ethical situation, one which is not merely conventional but which takes into account the totality of the personality and which has its roots in a state of being in which light and darkness are alike contained." Tacey. p.193.

Mrs Roxburgh realized that she was standing stripped before Mrs Lovell, as she must remain in the eyes of all those who would review her, worse than stripped, sharing a bark-and-leaf humpy with a 'miscreant'. To the children, she was of even greater interest: they saw her squatting to defecate on the fringe of a blacks' encampment. Only the children might visualize her ultimate in nakedness as she gnawed at a human thighbone in the depths of the forest. Finally these children might, by their innocence and candour, help her transcend her self-disgust. (p.357)

But such disgust is only one side of a dualistic response. As she wakes the next morning, she is glad to discover she is at the settlement, and not returned to the hypocrisy of her former visits "to a friend". (p.358)

"Yes, she was happy. She would have enjoyed dressing her hair in style had there been enough of it". (p.358)

The difference between her response in her former life and her present experience lies in acceptance. She is no longer prepared to shackle her own instinctive needs in the coils of another's requirements. This change is made clear in the episode in which she confronts the chaplain, Mr Cottle. She has agreed to the requirements of convention and is prepared, if reluctantly, to see him, but social pressures are no longer sufficient to bind her response. As he attempts to force her to join him in prayer she responds by screaming:

Still on his knees, Mr Cottle had opened his eyes, to see the woman who was also Mrs Roxburgh screeching like a peacock in Mrs Lovell's lesser parlour; while out of the distance, from across the creek, through the humid ranks of lemons, shaddocks, citrons and guavas, the voice of a human being answered or appealed in such unearthly tones the chaplain might not have realized had his intended convert not drawn his attention to them. (p.387)

Ellen is now at one with the miscreants. Her cry is answered. The fainting fit which follows her emotional outburst is closely paralleled to the earlier occasion in the church at "Dulcet", when she had wished to faint and free herself from social obligations and sensual desires.

Her refusal of the Christian ethic, coupled as it is, by the

rejection of the children who have formerly been her comfort,⁷⁶ leaves her at the mercy of her emotions of guilt and loss. It is in this mood that she comes to the chapel in the clearing built by the only other survivor of the "Bristol Maid". It is during her meeting with Pilcher, a meeting that takes place at the urging of the commandant, that further light is cast on the progress which both have made through the depths of suffering to which they have been exposed.

Pilcher and Ellen have in common a guilt which stems from the nature of their betrayals.⁷⁷ Both have to some extent substituted a more bearable truth for the actuality of the events, but both continue to be demoralized by their inner awareness of their own evasion of responsibility. While Ellen's betrayal of Jack has an ambiguity which allows her a measure of protection, Pilcher's rejection of the memories of the long-boat allows him no such escape and forces him into a lie which he struggles to believe. While the survivors are bound together by the enormity of their shared experience, neither can entirely avoid lashing the other with his or her own knowledge of an alternative truth. Thus Pilcher goads Ellen:

'And was brought to the settlement by some bushranger or bolted convict I am told'.

'I was so fortunate'.

'Who bolted again just when he might have expected justice'.

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

⁷⁶ "Early morning, once the source of innocent joy, had become for her a breeding ground of dread. The children no longer came to her since the fright they got on finding her lying, as they thought, dead, a deception which could not be soon or easily forgiven". p.389.

⁷⁷ Manfred Mackenzie finds that Pilcher stands in the same relation to Ellen as "Waldo Brown does to his brother, or as Dorothy and Basil Hunter do to their mother; in his gross perversion he takes something of her ambiguity upon himself". He goes on "In this earliest, indigenous church, even Pilcher's act has its sacred aspect; his victims have not so much been killed to be eaten as eaten because they have been killed in a ritual founding of a culture". Mackenzie. p.165.

She would have expected a wave of malice to rise in the man she remembered aboard "Bristol Maid", and again, the evening on the cay, but he only murmured, 'That is true', looking old and ravaged. 'So', she said, after she had turned, 'I hope we can accept each other's shortcomings, since none of us always dares to speak the truth. Then we might remain friends'. (p.378)

Also shared is the hideous remembrance of their acts of cannibalism.⁷⁸

To escape such memories both attempt restitution, Pilcher with his offering of the chapel, Ellen in her accepted bond with the felons.⁷⁹ But White makes clear that, racked though they may be, each has progressed along the path to knowledge. Together in the small back parlour into which the kindness and ruthlessness of friendship has forced them, they look once more at the garnet ring which was once the focal point of their scene of mutual recrimination. The ring recalls a memory which both are able to accept. Pilcher feels no need to hide from himself his own motivation, "And stole your ring". (p.379) Each has reached the point where the comforts of possession for which it has stood no longer have validity. "So she took it from between his tremulous fingers and going to the window, threw it into the nasturtiums below, where the broad leaves closed over it". (p.379)

Ellen's final moment of illumination awaits her, once again, in the clear light of early morning. It recalls that earlier occasion of shared communion with the aborigines: a moment which, however tainted with horror, is seen throughout the novel as one of insight. Alone and feeling "abandoned even by her shadow", (p.389) she struggles through the undergrowth which momentarily returns her, figuratively at least, to the rigours of the bush. It is then that she comes upon her first sight of

⁷⁸ "She looked at him out of eyes which he [the surgeon] afterwards failed to describe for the commandant. 'All dead. Some of them probably eaten. Only the condemned survive'". p.343.

⁷⁹ "As for Mrs Roxburgh, she was united in one terrible spasm with this rabble of men . . . ". p.370.

Pilcher's chapel: "she was arrested by a glimpse of something which at first suggested floating, flickering light rather than any solid form: it was such a refractive white". (p.389) Standing at the entry she fears that to set foot inside would be to be caught "in the act of trespassing", (p.390) for the chapel is Pilcher's territory of the mind and to go beyond the threshold is to violate the privacy of another's consciousness. But the chapel is an act of atonement and the mercy it offers is available to them both. "GOD IS LOVE", she reads within in a "dribbled ochre", (p.390) that is in sharp contrast to the blue riband which proclaimed the "LORD GOD OF HOSTS". This chapel has no boundaries and allows no demarcation between worshippers. Through its open windows birds are free to fly. "There was little to obstruct, whether flight, thought or vision". (p.390)⁸⁰ Her moment of vision is, as always in these times of illumination, incorporated in an increased clarity of sight:

At last she must have cried herself out: she could not have seen more clearly, down to the cracks in the wooden bench, the bird droppings on the rudimentary altar. She did not attempt to interpret the peace of mind which had descended upon her (she would not have been able to attribute it to prayer or reason) but let the silence enclose her like a beatitude. (p.391)

But such a high point of spiritual and physical harmony can never be a permanent part of the human condition and Ellen returns from it to a settlement which, the imagery makes increasingly clear, is in every sense a place of imprisonment. From it she is soon to begin another journey, one which will return her to a life which will have much in common with that lived before the tragedy; but she has, like Elizabeth Hunter before her, been given her moment of vision early in a life which it will have changed. When she meets Jevons, the man she seems intended to marry, she

⁸⁰ The condition of the chapel has something in common with the argument expressed by Will in his outburst to Anna when they first visit Lincoln cathedral, both Lawrence and White seem to find a greater holiness in the Romantic concept of near ruin than in a perfected building. See also 'Fête Galante'. "She was only aware of a sanctity which pervaded all the churches she had ever entered, and perhaps most noticeably the poorer, the more dilapidated among them." Patrick White. Meanjin. 36 (1977). pp.3-24.

is able to speak to him on her own terms and as herself. The two sides of her nature are no longer in conflict. The girl Ellen Gluyas and the woman Mrs Roxburgh are incorporated in

the smouldering figure in garnet silk beside the pregnant mother in her nest of drowsy roly-poly children, a breathing statuary contained within the same ellipse of light. (pp.404-5)⁸¹

⁸¹ Manly Johnson sees our last view of Ellen as representing her place in an ordered universe. She sits between "the pregnant Mrs Lovell . . . and the barren Miss Scrimshaw, the practical visionary . . . Ellen the mother who has been denied her motherhood, and who has had all her expectations of an ordered universe time and again destroyed. Yet there she is as the novel ends, with both of these - motherhood and the exemplar of hope for an ordered universe - at either hand." Johnson. p.92.

IX

Ellen Roxburgh's journey is not only concerned with space and time, and with the now well-trodden path of the mind, but is also a voyage of self-discovery, subtly different from any that has gone before. Its closest analogue is to be found in Voss, but far more than in that novel, it concerns not only the hidden territory as uncharted areas of the innermost self, but also that self in relation to the outer world. In this case it is the social world, and is suggested by the context that begins and ends the novel, and also the world that is peculiarly Australian.⁸² It is Australia herself that releases and makes possible Ellen's process of discovery of the instinctive self, a self which has been a more potent part of her Cornish girlhood than it has been of the more recent Cheltenham past. In this she is contrasted to Eddie Twyborn who is unable to find peace through contact with the Australian soil. Australian Eddie needs the wider world of a Europe engulfed in war as a background for his personal struggle with the divided-self. Ellen is from birth rooted in a secure heritage which through her marriage includes the cultural.⁸³ It is the essentially untamed primeaval landscape of Australia which releases the psyche for rebirth. Ellen has to learn the doubly difficult lesson of how far the inner Ellen is separated from the outer, socially imposed, self. She must also find the limits of the

⁸² Kiernan compares this prologue to The Solid Mandala. Both novels he says "establish the social framework as a contrast to the themes and experience to be pursued within it". Kiernan. p.126.

⁸³ In an interview with Manfred Mackenzie in March 1980, he suggested to me that Ellen Roxburgh can be seen as successfully re-enacting the myths for which Austin dies, still vainly clutching his Virgil. This followed from a wider interpretation of White in which he suggested that those characters who endorse a literary tradition in the sense of Austin Roxburgh or Waldo Brown, are inevitably doomed.

demands which degradation can impose.⁸⁴ She has to learn to explore "the depths of [her] own repulsive nature . . . To peel down to the last layer . . . [to] another, and yet another, of more exquisite subtlety".⁸⁵

It is the instinctive self in its most elemental form which is released by Ellen's suffering, but even at such moments it remains tempered by the needs of an intellect which in this novel is closely associated with the spiritual. Ellen has to learn to satisfy the needs of the body, no less physical hunger than sexual appetite. Yet even when the demands of the flesh are most blatant they are not all-consuming, nor do they prevent her from participating in moments of love. Her times of suffering still allow for spiritual growth.⁸⁶ It is in this that Australia is seen, not so much as a testing ground for the spirit, as a continuation from the experiences of childhood. Ellen, since her Cornish days, has yearned for something above and beyond the temporal. The novel warns us early that there is to be no easy solution. Ellen's romantic yearnings for a mythic knight are answered by the arrival of the hypercondriachal Austin Roxburgh; her need for children by the elderly infant she suckles against her dry breast, and her fulfilled and fulfilling love is to be given to an escaped convict. But in her lowest moments of

⁸⁴ Walsh appears to feel that it is Ellen's capacity for suffering which is the "unravelling secret or mystery, the mystery which is indeed at the heart of the novel". He goes on to quote Miss Scrimshaw "'I only had the impression that Mrs Roxburgh could feel life had cheated her out of some ultimate in experience. For which she would be prepared to suffer if need be'". Walsh. p.120. There is a suggestion here which is borne out by the novel that it is Ellen's powers of endurance which mark her out for both suffering and growth. She to some extent chooses the apartness which is the first stage in the final lonely contest between the two sides of the self, what Tacey calls the shadow side and the light side.

⁸⁵ Voss, p.179.

⁸⁶ Michael Cotter says that at the "point at which this goal [the reduction of being to an essential core] is reached . . . self knowledge is richest and awareness of the interrelatedness between spiritual mystery and its physical manifestations is greatest." Michael Cotter. South Pacific Images. p.174.

degradation she finds comfort. "She felt accepted, rejuvenated. She was the 'Ellen' of her youth, a name they had attached to her visible person at the font, but which had never rightly belonged to her". (p.270) Like Elizabeth before her she has been brought to value that core of herself that remains when all pretence is stripped away and, again like Elizabeth, she has tested that truth against the needs of the spirit.

But the Ellen we leave is not as close to her deathbed as Elizabeth and Hurtle have been. Her time of ordeal has occupied only a few months of her life. She remains, as she began, an "ordinary woman" as capable of petty mindedness and vanity as she is of heroism. Indeed it is possible to feel with Kirpal Singh that the lessons she has learned will have no lasting value:

A fairly common note amongst most reviewers is that here at last we find White relaxed, confident and full of the milk of human kindness. The novel, I am told, contains a certain compassion which the earlier novels lacked. In Ellen Roxburgh's return to society as a sane and responsible individual readers find, at last, the acceptable White visionary. I fear my own reading of the novel is almost diametrically opposed to this view. For me the novel is a tragic endorsement of the supreme insidiousness with which the average can inhibit or even destroy that quintessence of self-realisation which the suffering individual has come through. Ellen Roxburgh's return is to me, not a triumph but a defeat. Her guilt and shame of her experience in the wilderness - precisely the experience which has liberated her from conventionality - is a painful, almost pathetic, spectacle. Slowly but surely the average society will claim Ellen for its own as well as consume her in the very normalcy of her new life. Tintagel is never possessed.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Kirpal Singh, "Patrick White: An Outsider's View". A Critical Symposium. p.122.

Adrian Mitchell finds that in A Fringe of Leaves "the role of the visionary has changed, and with it the nature of illumination, Ellen Roxburgh . . . comes closest to all White's protagonists to reconciling the flesh and the spirit, the human and the divine, because her experience of suffering leads her to a recognition of the persistence of the human spirit, and particularly as it is expressed in love and compassion. Adrian Mitchell. p.154.

It is the differing possibilities of interpretation suggested here that remain the crux of the problem in analysing the text. Are we to see Mrs Roxburgh as having spent her time of ordeal in learning to accept her own needs as a social animal? Following from that do we see the text as an affirmation of society and the demands it makes on the individual? Or do we see the anguish which torments her after her return as a measure, not of revulsion from her experience in the outback, but of a rejection of a resumption of that way of life which she had formerly found sufficient?

The difficulty comes from two contradictory elements in our reading of the text. In this work as elsewhere, it is immediately apparent that the main thrust of Patrick White's writing is towards the isolated individual. Ellen may well be an ordinary woman, and as such not one apart as the majority of her predecessors have been, but she is also extraordinary. It is not only her powers of endurance which so characterise her, but also a sensitivity and self-containment which have been observable since her first introduction. (Indeed we are aware through Miss Scrimshaw and the Merivales that this is so even before we meet her.) Against this the major concern of the novel is with the desperation of her struggles to return to the society of which she has been a part. Ellen has to come to terms with a self-image which can encompass a recognition of her own capacity for depravity and degradation. Further she has to place this new image of self within an acceptable social framework, a society to which she returns shorn of both possessions and status. (It is this last loss which so harrows her when she finds she no longer has her wedding ring.)

It is the tension between these two expectations which produces the central ambiguity both of the text as a whole and in the character of Mrs Roxburgh, and it is one that remains at least partly unanswerable.

In the last pages of the work Ellen is wearing the garnet silk which has first attracted her in her time of convalescence. The use of the colour, the jewel, and the man of the same name, has been interwoven throughout the novel with Ellen's process of self-discovery. Her sexual awakening with her brother-in-law, marks the first stage towards not so much self-knowledge as self-acceptance, and another is reached when she is able to discard as a no longer important possession the jewel returned to her by Pilcher. In causing her to wear the dress White may be giving weight to the interpretation favoured by Kirpal Singh, but the last lines of the work seem to suggest an affirmation denied by this. Rather, it seems, we leave her, an admired and sensual woman, like Elizabeth before her, basking in the reflected glow of the garnet silk.

I

There was the oval room, at one end the garden, at the other the great gilded mirror, all blotches and dimples and ripples. I fluctuated in the watery glass: according to the light. I retreated into the depths of the aquarium, or trembled in the foreground like a thread of pale-green sapphire. Those who thought they knew me were ignorant of the creature I scarcely knew myself.¹

Tortuous though the paths they take may be, the destination of White's illuminates has hitherto been clear. The moment at which harmony of the flesh and the spirit occurs may vary, both in its intensity and its timing, but its importance in the context of the novel is undoubted. In The Twyborn Affair, where the ambiguity in which White has always revelled is at last given full rein, this certainty is removed. Is such a moment of insight reached as Eddie lies bespattered upon the bomb-torn streets of war-time London? We are left in doubt:

A detached hand was lying in the stream of blood nor'-nor'-west of Eddie Twyborn's left cheek. It was neither of the soldier's hands he began to realise, for these were arranged on the pavement, a dog's obedient paws had it not been for blunt fingers with nails in mourning, still attached to bristling wrists. It was his own hand he saw as he ebbed, incredibly, away from it. 'Fetch me a bandaid, Ada,² 'he croaked over his shoulder, while flowing onward, on to wherever the crimson current might carry him.³
(pp.429-30)

¹ Patrick White, "Flaws in the Glass", The Bulletin. Centenary Edition (1980), p.146.

Some of the quotations used in this chapter refer to the article rather than the text, where this is so the reference will be enclosed in inverted commas. This material, which he chose to publish separately, frequently has direct reference to The Twyborn Affair.

² Throughout the novel, moments of high drama, and sensitivity of response are undercut by a sometimes crass use of humour. Never before has the sense of tongue-in-cheek been so apparent, or contributed so much to the insecurity of the reader.

³ All references in this chapter which give a page number only will be to Patrick White, The Twyborn Affair (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1979).

The novel is concerned with fragmentation and disintegration, but it also turns on the redemptive power of love. It is in a final parody of his one-time self that Eddie meets his death:⁴

As he crossed this seemingly deserted city, a scapegoat again in search of sacrifice, his steely tonsure parried the steely evening light. He glanced sideways through the gathering dusk and saw himself reflected in plate-glass: the distorted shoulders of the shoddy suit, the pointed shoes, the cropped hair. He was disgusted to see he had forgotten to take off Eadith's make-up. The great magenta mouth was still flowering in a chalk face shaded with violet, the eyes overflowing mascara banks, those of a distressed woman, professional whore, or hopeful amateur lover. (p.428)

Yet death occurs after he has achieved moments of selfless and sexless love, both with the mother whose influence has pervaded his thinking since childhood and with Gravenor, the English peer who represents for Eddie, love beyond carnality.⁵ In Gravenor also is found a further theme, which, in this more than any other work, links White with the ranks of Australian authors who have explored the opposing poles of Europe and Australia.⁶

Is it possible then, in a book at least overtly more concerned with disintegration than with resolution, to follow the central protagonist on the usual voyage of self-discovery in which he resolves the dualistic concerns of his nature? To do so may well distort a novel which at first, or even second sight, may no longer have such a need as its

⁴ In these last moments Eddie reverts to the clothes and memories of the Eddie of the first world war. Such a resumption might seem to suggest that it is in this role that he comes nearest to his true identity, however such a possibility is counterbalanced by the element of parody. He is on his way to meet his Australian mother, and a possible return to Australia. In doing so he is recovering a part of his childhood, a recovery which in White always suggests an element of affirmation, we are nevertheless being reminded that other Eddies also exist.

⁵ In this, the most overtly sexual of all his novels, Patrick White seems finally to be saying what has often been suggested before, that love is not love unless it reaches beyond carnality into a purely spiritual understanding.

⁶ Veronica Brady expresses it as: "a life suspended between the two sides of the world as well as the two poles of the self". In a review article of Flaws in the Glass, Westerly (March 1982) p.104.

centralising theme. Indeed in all the works since the publication of A Fringe of Leaves, White may well be following a different route, or even returning to reassess earlier material. It would not, for example, be difficult to make a case for The Twyborn Affair as having strong affinities with that favourite child, The Aunt's Story. Again many have seen it as the opportunity a fully acclaimed, and Nobel prize-winning, author needed to rid himself of autobiographical material which had long been waiting publication. Referring to his homo-sexuality Veronica Brady sees The Twyborn Affair as taking "on a new, more personal significance as an interpretation of his own life, suggesting that his ambivalence provides if not the cause at least the occasion for his work."⁷ Such a view could be supported even before publication of Flaws in the Glass with well-charted biographical data such as the years as a jackeroo and his known Greek connexions.⁸ But persuasive though such arguments may be the one certainty that remains, in spite of the critical attention that the work has received, is the difficulty in discovering intention as opposed to plot, pervasive theme as opposed to anarchic jest.⁹

Why then has The Twyborn Affair created such puzzlement? First and most obviously it is, at least at first sight, an unexpected follower to the seeming simplicity of A Fringe of Leaves. Secondly, it revolves around ambiguity and the pun. Eddie, Eudoxia, Eadith, Eadie, Edward,

⁷ Veronica Brady, Westerly, p.104.

⁸ John Coates in "Byzantine References in The Twyborn Affair" points out that his "own Greek connections are well enough known and more precisely, the Vatatzes of the title recalls another later Byzantine royal name, Lascaris. In fact the Emperor John Vatatzes married the niece of the Emperor Theodore Lascaris. The names suggest a concealed allusion to White's long-term companion, Manoly Lascaris. ALS (1983-84). p.508. David Blamires adds: "In addition to its literal meaning, the name Eudoxia belongs to a Byzantine Empress, Eudoxia Makrembolitessa (1021-96), who was called the wisest woman of her time. Vatatzes too, is the name of one of the Emperors of Nicaea, John III Vatatzes, whose major work was to regain territory at the expense of the usurping Latin Emperors of Constantinople and whose reputation for goodness caused him to be canonised . . . a mere half century after his death". "Patrick White: The Twyborn Affair" Critical Quarterly 22 (1980). p.81.

⁹ Much of this attention has been critical. Beston writes for many when he finds: "The Twyborn Affair is a repulsive novel on the whole". John Beston, "Review of The Twyborn Affair" WLWE (Autumn 1980) p.201.

the twice-born Twyborn writes, in the privacy of his diaries, of innumerable permutations of the un-nameable "E". The reader is left precariously balanced on the shifting sands of the author's intention, never sure where humour ends and intensity begins. The narrative itself helps to enforce this sense of insecurity, not only by the fragmentation of its approach but also by an abrupt dislocation into three starkly contrasted sections,¹⁰ held together only by the central protagonist, and a few tenuous and frequently puzzling connecting links. Thirdly, Eddie's difficulties in establishing even a sexual identity tend to lead to a loss of empathy for many readers, who reject such a dilemma even where they have felt able to share in the questionings of earlier protagonists.¹¹ Nor are the problems of the novel reserved for such doubts. Noel Macainsh points out that the larger question arises: "how a work of art can be made from such seemingly incoherent material? What constructional principle's literary devices, have been applied here to produce a concerted work in the face of such marked discontinuities."¹²

Interpretation must remain open to possibility, and, in such a circumstance it seems pointless to abandon totally a way into the novel which has been White's primary concern through a life-time of work.¹³

¹⁰ The tripartite structure also reflects the three personalities of the central protagonist.

¹¹ A loss of social identity has however been a commonplace for the spiritual seekers. Karin Hansson is referring to this when she says: "a kind of extinction of social identity, a death implied by the total renouncement of will and the unconditional surrendering of rationalist and materialist values is demanded from the questers." "The Indigenous and the Metropolitan in A Fringe of Leaves", WLWE, 24 (1984) pp.180-81.

¹² Noel Macainsh, "A Queer Unity - Patrick White's The Twyborn Affair" Southerly. p.143.

¹³ Benjamin De Mott in a review of the work is however in no doubt: "It's a case study of human proteanism and the thematic core is the mystery of human identity. "The Perils of Protean Man", The New York Times Book Review. April (1980). p.3.
John Beston seems less certain: "In all of White's previous novels there is a theme of some significance. The Twyborn Affair does not seem to have such a theme and one wonders why White wrote it." WLWE. p.202.

There are also some clear pointers. Whatever else the novel may concern, it certainly turns on dualism, maybe not the pull between the instinct and the intellect, but between the male and female principle, the animus and the anima. It also follows previous patterns in that it takes a relatively submerged theme from an earlier work and establishes it in the foreground. Hence it can be seen as continuing from the point at which A Fringe of Leaves ends.¹⁴ Ellen Roxburgh has been thrust into a series of roles. Before affirmation she must probe beneath them and find the true Ellen who lies buried. Eddie Twyborn, for whom role-playing reaches an extreme form, goes beyond Ellen's uncertainty into a doubt which even includes sexual identity.¹⁵ The centralising symbol of The Twyborn Affair is the mirror, the flawed mirror of the autobiography, in which Eddie endlessly searches for an image which he will recognise as containing his inward self.

In this novel, which White is now claiming as his last, it may well be that it is with fragmentation that he wishes us to be content. The completed mandala towards which his illuminates strive has always contained

¹⁴ Manly Johnson uses different data to arrive at a similar conclusion: "Each succeeding novel developed from a germ, or germs in the novel that went before . . . in theme the latest of White's novels is a sequel to its predecessor." He goes on to discuss the passage through hell which he sees as an inevitable part of reading White, he continues: "Suggestions of hell, both topographical and psychological are present in White's account of that oddly joined pair, the Roxburghs. There is also the pattern of death and resurrection which again figures in The Twyborn Affair, and the symbolic association of its protagonist with its author." Manly Johnson "Twyborn: the Abbess, the Bulbul and the Bawdy House." Modern Fiction Studies, 27 (1981-82). pp.159-163.

¹⁵ Veronica Brady reminds us that: "White's work highlights the current conceptual crisis about the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' and at the same time points to a resolution. For him the distinction between the sexes is neither absolute nor biologically determined: rather, every human being is by definition androgynous, with a masculine and feminine aspect, Jung's animus and anima, implicit in all his novels this belief is the burden of his argument in his most recent novel . . . The Twyborn Affair." She goes on "this rejection of the stereotypical distinction between the sexes challenges the conventions and indeed the proprieties of our culture." Veronica Brady. Who is She? pp.178-179. Colmer goes further in stressing the risk in seeing Eddie's ambivalent sexuality as central to his quest: "What is central is the search for personal identity; and to introduce such terms as homosexuality and transvestism is to impose society's defensive categories on what is essentially a psychic quest." Colmer Patrick White. pp.78-79.

a danger. "Complete," says the girl in Ham Funeral, "for you death in two syllables".¹⁶ White has always been attracted by the haphazard, by the disorderly and by a vigour which he finds there which is lacking in the chilly perfection of the closed circle. It is with a similar interpretation that Riemer is concerned:

I would like to think that the author wishes us to receive The Twyborn Affair as a complex contrapuntal edifice composed of difficult and at times quite incompatible strands which nevertheless achieves harmony, integrity and proportion, rather than as a "novel" - a narrative, a story, a local habitation and a name - which requires the figured bass of philosophy to give it substance and meaning.¹⁷

The work is saturated in ambiguity and is pervaded by an insecurity centred on a protagonist who, before involving in self-discovery, must first retain - or gain - a hold on identity. Eddie is a claimant to a name and to a self and the novel is concerned to establish who and what he is, not so much in the eyes of those who surround him as in those of a "fragmented blue and gold blazing in their tension" (p.422) with which he surveys himself. It is with Eddie's need to come to self-understanding, then, that we can most usefully begin. Instinct and intellect must, at least for the moment, be merged in the wider concepts of the masculine and the feminine. The Eudoxia with whom the novel begins has shed the strictures of her former male role, in an attempt to allow freedom to that instinctual understanding which is again to be equated with sensuality, and which begins to flow in the warm and undemanding landscape of Provence, uncluttered by the rigidities and restraints imposed by the growth to a Sydney young-manhood.

¹⁶ Four Plays. p.32.

¹⁷ "Eddie and the Bogomils - Some Observations on The Twyborn Affair". A.P.Riemer, Southerly (1980). pp.28-29.

II

The Twyborn Affair, like A Fringe of Leaves, opens at a distance from the central protagonist. It is through the eyes of the wealthy, failed socialite, Joannie Golson, a middle-aged Australian, that we catch our first glimpse of the glamorous Eudoxia Vatatzes. With Joannie comes the first mention of a central dualism:

So discreet, so English, such a dedicated member of the serving class, he surprised his employer by his remark. She would have liked to know what he had heard, but would not be so indiscreet as to ask. She suspected that English servants were given to taking liberties in the service of Colonials. It made her feel inferior. (p.11)

England and Australia are to occupy contrastive poles during the course of the novel. It is to be a part of Eddie's burden that he will suffer from an insecurity seemingly endemic to those Australians with a foot in both an Antipodean and a European culture.¹⁸ It is an insecurity shared by White himself:

It was the summer of 1926. I was 14, and they had taken the house at Felpham, Sussex. For my mother it was English, pretty, so much more desirable than glare and drought and the threat of snakes. My father saw it as pasture for prime lamb and beef. For myself it meant solitude, in which wounds were healed, until country voices reminded me I was a foreigner.

"Flaws in the Glass" (p.146)

With this duality comes a second, linked, we are to see, to the first:

She [Joannie Golson] was unconscious that she lumped her husband in with her very considerable material possessions, perhaps because Mrs Golson was wealthy in her own right (not to be compared with E.Boyd Golson in his, but rich) and because, in her heart of hearts, she considered a woman could face the world with more panache than a man, anyway an Australian one. (p.12)

¹⁸ Richard Coe sees this as a part of the struggle the Australian writer undergoes in an attempt to resolve the opposing values of a landscape which has stimulated and informed his early years, with a debased, or even non-existent, culture: "The significant myth of the Australian Childhood consists in doubting whether the country in which the child-self grew up possesses a culture at all." "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian: Childhood, Literature and Myth". Southerly (1981) p.126.

Eudoxia also finds a greater confidence in the role of a woman. It is as a woman that she spends the greater part of the book, but it is as a male that her life begins and ends. Joannie Golson shares some of this sexual ambiguity.¹⁹ We are soon to find that she is attracted to the lithe Eudoxia, wife of an elderly Greek, and it is a part of the shifting and distorting ambivalence with which this work is imbued that, at this point neither Mrs Golson nor the reader is sure of the true sex of the elegant figure towards whom the clumsy and perspiring Joannie is so irresistably drawn.²⁰

It is not only through the central protagonists that the dominance of the elusive and the unpredictable is felt:

Emerging from the pine-grove as they mounted, they almost shaved what proved to be the containing wall of that charming villa lurking beyond the branches of probable almond trees, less equivocal olives, the clumps and spikes of lavender, and lesser spikes tufts stained with the faded, archetypal carnations. (p.14)

In The Vivisector, the opening scene captures the importance of childhood; its memories and its influences pervade the rest of the work. In The Eye of the Storm we are immediately made aware of the spiritual understanding which flows from the dying figure of Elizabeth Hunter, and its importance in the context of the lives which are to be explored. In this novel the note to be struck is one of uncertainty. All perceptions can be seen as dangerously apt to shift and distort. Even the seemingly solid and invulnerable can come in many guises, "the last mile quickened her [Joannie's] vision of the desirable villa, shutters a washed-out blue, walls a dusty, crackled pink. A workaday cottage rather than a villa, one might have

¹⁹ "She [Joannie] started searching for her handkerchief. On finding it she fell to dabbing where the moustache would have been". p.15.

²⁰ Patricia Morley states: "Here the ambivalence stands at the centre and becomes a metaphor for aspiration, hope, fear, failure, shame, and the possibility of redemption". "A Geography of Flesh" CRNLE Reviews Journal (1979-80). p.57.

decided, if it were not for those who were presumably its owners". (p.14)
 Joannie Golson misinterprets the villa just as she misinterprets those who live there. It is through her distortions that the reader begins to learn the details of Eudoxia's life. Our first glimpse of her is lit by the romance with which Mrs Golson imbues the scene:

With almost reluctant parsimony Mrs Golson proceeded to restore to her picture of the garden the two figures trailing towards the terrace on which the house stood: the elderly man, a stroke of black and yellow, ivory rather, in a silver landscape, and ahead of him this charming young woman (daughter, ward, wife, mistress - whatever) leading her companion through the rambling maze, the carnation tones of her dress dragging through, catching on, fusing with those same carnations which she reflected, while absorbing something of their silver from the lavender and southernwood surrounding her. (p.14)

It is also through Joannie that we learn something of the background from which Eudoxia has come, although in this, as in so much else, ambiguity is retained through the use of several contiguous devices. First, neither the reader, nor Mrs Golson is fully aware of the relationship between Eudoxia and the Twyborns. Secondly, we are being introduced to the sexual ambiguity of Joannie's relationship with Eadie, which in turn casts light on her feeling for Eudoxia and Eudoxia's for her Greek. Thirdly, the reader's awareness that these layers exist is already being implanted through such devices as "she rejected her elderly lover, left the stool, and practically striding, one would have said . . ." (p.18) and in the hints about "the other life", (p.18) which at this point seem to be equated with homo-sexuality:²¹

As she [Joannie] stood by the wall watching the scene through the open window, the tears were streaming down her cheeks, for joy, from the music she was hearing, and out of frustration for the life she had led and, it seemed, would always lead, except for the brief unsatisfactory sorties she made into that other life with Eadie Twyborn; probably never again, since Eadie had been aged by her tragedy. (p.18)

²¹ The equation is strengthened by continuous asides, "as she turned smiling to encourage the dispensable (anyway for Joannie Golson) man in black". p.14.

The punning ambiguity which surrounds this section of the novel is intensified by a narrative device that imparts to the reader the doubts and misconceptions of the character concerned. Although we doubt Mrs Golson's reliability from the first, we are not fully aware of the seemingly contradictory piece of information, that the random connexions she makes are based on an instinctively sound set of premises. The flittings of Joannie's mind, between the glamorous Vatatzes and the stolid Twyborns, are based on intimations of which her conscious mind is not at first aware, although for the reader such ephemeral strands have the more solid backing of the title.

Again it is through Joannie that we are introduced to a further strand of the book. One which we have met before in A Fringe of Leaves:

If she sounded stern, it was that Joannie Golson had never felt so much her own mistress. In her naughtiness she made haste to get away before her servant should offer advice, or turn into a nanny or a husband and exercise some form of restraint. But he did not murmur, and as she escaped up the hill, she was conscious of her foolishness in thinking she might be of importance to him, to anybody, except as a source of rewards (to Curly perhaps, though he, too, expected rewards) least of all to the charmed couple at the villa for whom she was risking, if not her neck, her ankles, to catch sight of once again. (p.17)

Eudoxia is continuously to be exposed to the conflicting demands of her need for shared love and the desire for spiritual freedom. She will be aware, paradoxically, both of the attraction she has for others, and of her lack of real importance in the course of their lives. It is a problem that will combine the dilemmas of both Ellen Roxburgh and Hurtle Duffield; but in these opening chapters it is the smothering and possessive qualities of love which is to occupy the foreground.²² The love Eudoxia feels for

²² "I ignore my lover and unlatch the shutter. Outside, the past is spread, in pools of blue, in black limbs, in felted voices. I lean against the sash, if only to be drawn back into what I could not endure, but long for . . ." p.40. This sense of love as a trap is also conveyed by the need to mislead. "'Anything happen, sweetheart?' he [Curly] asked somewhat angrily. His wife sounded equally peeved. 'We had a puncture'". p.19. The implications here pervade the book. Joannie cannot tell her husband the truth about an innocent, if somewhat silly episode, because to do so would be to allow him to enter from what Walsh calls the world of semblance, to the world of dream. It is this world from which the central protagonists draw their sustenance. In its most extreme form the desire to mislead is of course characterised by Eudoxia's transvestite leanings. Riemer, 'Some observations on The Twyborn Affair'. Southerly. 1 (1980), pp.12-29.

Angelos constrains as well as delights her and will lead to the moment in which the equivocal figure in the dark cape will plunge into the sea at the mercy of the urge to self-destruction.

But it is not as a solitary that Joannie Golson first perceives her, as she spies on the two figures combined and surrounded by "the waves of music dashing themselves recklessly against the solid evening silence".

(p.17) The Vatatzes, seated on their austere stool are "united in their incongruity". (p.17) It is this note, together with that of uncertainty, which is to pervade the work. Joannie herself, peering shortsightedly in "her rush to humiliate herself" (p.17) into the lit window of her imagined perfection, is essentially incongruous, an awkward Australian stranded precariously in a landscape, and amongst a people, with whom she has nothing in common.²³ Eudoxia is at this stage of her life, as the

imagery makes clear, at one with the setting in which she finds herself. But in spite of this seeming harmony she is not what she seems. The love she shares with her ageing Greek though lightened by flashes of sensuous joy is illusory. This sense of illusion is conveyed partially by sexual ambiguity, but also, and perhaps at this stage more importantly, by the Byzantine imaginings with which Angelos sustains them. The fairy tale setting in which Joannie implants the objects of her romance, a world of dream in every sense, is in many ways a true reflection of the illusions with which the Vatatzes sustain their relationship:

The freedom of one's thoughts . . . My thoughts were never a joy - only my body made articulate by this persuasive Greek. Then I do appear consecutive, complete, and can enjoy my reflection in the glass, which he has created, what passes for the real one, with devices like the spangled fan and the pomegranate shawl. (p.27)

Illusion and disillusion merge into a reality which requires endlessly to

²³ The precariousness and fragility of the life led here is emphasised by the rumblings of threatened war. The Golsons are united at least in the sense that it is in Australia that security lies. It is through them at this point, and not through Eudoxia, that we are made aware of the dualistic nature of the opposing cultures.

be questioned and a fantasy which verges on necessity:

By the light beneath the cedars he has the teeth of an old Alsatian dog - well, why not, if he's devoted to me - nuzzling at my calf, nozing at the hem of my skirt.

Normally Angelos's teeth are a brilliant white, those of a demanding, sensual man. (p.29)

It is only in the world of dream, whether that of night or of a day shot through by the indolence induced by the Provençal sun, that Eudoxia and Angelos are ever shown to be lovers. Even their physical relationship is subjected to the ambiguity which permeates every layer of the work.

"Joséphine looks good, smells good (that smell of innocent soap, unconscious virtue, and honest exertion) enfin Joséphine is unmistakably GOOD". (p.24) But Joséphine's seeming virtue belies an avarice as unmistakable as her mother's "weeping ulcer". (p.26) Not only is her tale of the woes which necessitate her leaving the Vatatzes as much a fantasy as Angelos's Byzantian forebears, but she is to recur again in the lush hotel favoured by the Golsons, her innocent face again provoking a mistaken trust. Madame Reboa's ulcer is to be a recurrent motif in this section of the work, a symbol of a corruption which is continuously at work destroying from within. It is this that Eudoxia fights endlessly. She seeks to keep on the surface of her awareness the hidden evil which undiscovered can lead to self-destruction. "Madame Reboa's ulcer is by no means pretty but most of us have one while concealing it". (p.26)

III

With the beginning of the diary-entries comes our first direct exposure to Eudoxia's mind. A marked, and at times obtrusive, change of tone weans us from the manner of our first narrator. "Could not believe as this sporty motor surged up our hill that it was Eadie's pal J.G. sitting in the back seat. But crikey, it was!". (p.22)²⁴ With her comes another layer of ambiguity. "If I hate him [Angelos] at times it's because I hate myself. If I love him more deeply than I love E. it's because I know this other creature too well, and cannot rely entirely on him or her". (p.23) The possible identity of the nameless "E", whether Eudoxia herself or the "E's" of Joannie's recollections is rapidly linked to another recurrent motif:

It isn't possible to explain to those one loves the reason for arbitrary fears if shame is involved. Angelos should understand but doesn't. My flight from the screened tennis-court at 'Beau Séjour' on the coast road above Les Sailles can only seem ridiculous because it cannot be transposed. Beyond the screen nobody, as yet, has run from the court, while his partner stands, hemline stationary, racquet poised for the decisive shot, her enviably shallow eyes still only faintly suspicious of what may be a blow prepared for her. While he runs up into and through²⁵ the house. (p.29)

The emphasised "he" brings from out of the shadows the other persona of our Provençal Eudoxia. As in The Vivisector, White is showing the power of a fleeting moment irrevocably to change the lives of his protagonists. This time, though, the moment is one from a past as yet unspecified and the context in which we are to see it is that of a present dilemma. The decisive moment in which Eddie rejects a conformist future already carved

²⁴ The transexual hint is there from the beginning, the manner is that of a young man rather than a woman.

²⁵ There is a frequent use in this novel of a cinematic technique which may be related to the almost simultaneous filming of The Night of the Prowler (1979), directed by Jim Sharman, based on White's short story from the collection The Cockatoos: Shorter Novels and Stories (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1974). "Film is the most creative medium today . . . if I had the chance I would have liked to begin as a film maker". Patrick White, "A very literary luncheon," National Times, 30 June 1979.

for him from Australian soil, and turns instead towards a quest for identity is never set before us in the clear-cut sense in which similar scenes are used in The Vivisector. In A Fringe of Leaves White chooses to view a moment of disaster through the distorted vision caused by a sloping deck; here the climactic moment reached in the tennis court will continue to reverberate but always from a present which is clouded by the haze of memory.²⁶

Eddie flees from a self in which instinct is subjugated to intellect and he finds himself in a present in which the force of such a moment cannot be shared. "I pulled free of his supporting arm. I was hurrying towards the safety one always hopes to find ahead". (p.30) He can only exchange one illusion for another he cannot find security in a shared dependence. Memory "can only seem ridiculous because it cannot be transposed". (p.29) Eddie's quest must be, as are the quests of all the illuminates, towards an individual coherence; and it may well be the tragic irony of the work that such a moment can only come at the point of fragmentation. Such an essential awareness does not, however, preclude all the rewards of shared understanding:

Neither of us could ever walk out on the other. We've explored each other's scabs, experienced each other's airs and graces. I like to think we understand as far as it is possible to understand. (p.31)

It is at this point that we first fully realise how adroitly Patrick White is creating yet another layer of ambiguity this time by taking, and turning upon their heads, the devices of metafiction if such a device can be briefly defined as a means whereby the author keeps his reader aware of the bones beneath the skin of fiction, then White can be said to be using just such a method, but paradoxically at a submerged rather than an

²⁶ The image is kept before us by a use of reference which extends beyond Eudoxia. "It went on clanging in Joannie Golson's ears, who, nevertheless, had been known for her game of tennis, and who now played a devious shot". p.53.

overt level.²⁷ Through Joannie Golson we have already been made to question the scenes which are set before us, a device which, by the use of the third person, allows us direct access to a further, and gently ironic voice. It is not, however, until a closer analysis that we begin to realize how few of the impressions made upon the reader are sustained by those detached authorial interventions. From the first we recognize Eudoxia's sexual ambiguity, but that very observation tends to obscure the further awareness, that it is in the eyes of the Golsons and Eudoxia herself that she is presented as beautiful.²⁸ White tells us that she has large feet, a heavy jaw and strides. He shows her posturing before a mirror clothed only in a pomegranate shawl and a fan, a garb, which, given the sex of the wearer seems likely to have comic implications. Doubts are cast at all levels. Is the "good" Joséphine aware of her employers' oddities? Are they lovers in the sexual sense of the term? By such devices White causes us to question the terms of the novel, and, by extension, those of the novelist's art. In so doing he casts further light on the central question of illusion and uncertainty. Night after night the young Eudoxia and the elderly Angelos sit in their villa of "dusty, crackled pink", (p.14) reconstructing the seemingly imaginary heraldic past of the Vatatzes. The question which White sets before us is how far are these Byzantine gleamings further from distortion than the endlessly to be recollected scene at the tennis court? Marian's eyes are "enviably shallow", (p.29) it is from such an escape that Eddie is forever barred. His eyes, like those of Elizabeth Hunter, blaze in an endless

²⁷ The use of the dramatic mode, see pp.30-31, is also a device of meta-fiction in that it deliberately breaks down the shared and established illusion between writer and reader.

²⁸ She is also "charming" in the eyes of Miss Clotheroe. However this is ambiguous and has something in common with the portrayal of Miss Scrimshaw.

and searing search after truth. It is with the impossibility of such a task that White is concerned to confront us. Eddie's eyes are of a "fragmented blue" and will never gaze with completed vision. It is this which sets this novel apart from those by which it has been preceded. Few of the previous works carry a bleaker message.

Bleak though a final interpretation may be, it is not the prevailing tone of the work. Not only do we find a more overt humour than that to which we have grown accustomed, but we are again to find a potential stability in a relationship with the land "a synthesis of living sensuality" (Flaws in the Glass p.27) and with the roots secured in childhood:

How enviable this olive tree encased in its cork armour, hardly a tremor in its gnarled arms, its downthrust roots firmly holding. To have such stability - or is oneself the strongest stanchion one can hope for? to realise this is perhaps to achieve stability. (p.33)

As so often before, instinctual and vital life is related to the two-fold need, to become rooted to the earth itself and to achieve self-discovery.²⁹ It is in a commitment to the land, whether to the bleak Monaro or to the sun-drenched South of France that Eddie will find himself near to understanding, but it can only offer temporary release. Unlike Ellen Roxburgh who is revitalized by contact with Australia, Eddie must wait for spiritual realisation, if he is ever to achieve it at all, until he has plunged into the depths awaiting him in Beckwith Street. He is to be denied the ease the land might bring. Eddie is an eternal vagrant allowed

²⁹ "Would I have been sentenced in Australia? The masochist in me might have seen to that. As it was, memory helped flesh out an English school boy's idyll; riding a pony bareback through girth-high tussock, stripping leeches from my body after a swim in a muddy creek, my solitary thoughts as I plodded through the dripping sassafras towards the waterfall. My parents played no active part in this country of the mind". Flaws in the Glass. p.151.

only momentary tranquility. Similarly he will be denied the expurgation offered to Elizabeth Hunter and to Ellen, an annihilating but revitalizing possibility which comes through a naked confrontation with elemental forces. Eddie's road to freedom has to encompass a coming to terms with society. In former novels the road to self-discovery has been a lonely one, Eddie is also essentially an outsider but it is a part of his processes of realisation that he must find a way to re-enter the society he left in his flight from the tennis court. Colmer sees this as inherent in the quest for truth within a materialistic society which has informed White's work from the first:

The early works chart the unresolved tensions between the individual and society as the characters pursue the paths of solitude, isolation and individual vision; the middle novels celebrate the powers of the privileged artist to reach truth - and White is quite dogmatic in saying 'I think the artist is privileged'.³⁰ The last three novels suggest that some kind of reintegration into society is possible for the lonely spiritually elect. This new vision of a potential reconciliation between the alienated individual and social groups is accompanied by an altogether more compassionate view of human nature.³¹

But the instincts of Eddie's body are at odds with the demands of his fellows in a way which former protagonists have not shared. All have been outcasts in a sense, all have needed to reject the glib and conformist demands made by a too rigid society, but Eddie is alienated in a unique and fragmented way. His search for identity is linked to sexual ambivalence, but it is an ambivalence rather of role than of sexuality. In spite of his preference for the female role it is only as Eddie Twyborn that we are given scenes which explicitly include his sexual arousal.³²

³⁰ "Patrick White Interview: 9 December 1973", by Rodney Wetherell, Sunday Night Radio 2, Australian Broadcasting Commission.

³¹ John Colmer, Patrick White. p.87.

³² Instinctive life seems to be linked to the female role, as Eudoxia he can protect and enfold Angelos in a maternal warmth which is affirmative and fulfilling. In the scenes with Don and Marcia he is either raped, or finds degradation in the act of sex. His love for Gravenor is a part of his assumed role of woman and again encompasses compassion and instinctive warmth. His sex with Marcia is, like Duffield's with Hero, "sex in the head", related to intellect rather than instinct.

There is, however, never any suggestion that this sexual apartness in any way removes him from a relationship with the land. It is never the land but only its occupants that force him to flee. Hence in two pivotal scenes, both of which use the imagery commonly associated with water, he is shown as feeling himself at one with the elements but an outcast amongst his fellows.³³ St Mayeul nurtures him and rejects his attempt at suicide, yet the combination of the implications of the imagery surrounding Madame Reboa's ulcer and the Golsons' curiosity force him to flee from all that the earth seems to offer. Muttering beyond the charmed circle of the over-grown garden are the first intimations of war; and it is war, itself the archetypal image of society gone mad, which will twice enter, and finally totally disrupt, the completion towards which he struggles.

Tossing in the dream-laden bed by now so familiar in White, Eddie re-enacts an encounter with his father. The dream begins with the ritual of nightmare:

That very real one: the shutter has flown open, the whole cliffside a churning mass of pittosporum and lantana scrub pressing in upon, threatening all man-made shoddiness. The giant emu's head and neck tormented by the wind. As its plumage is ruffled and tossed, its beak descends repeatedly, almost past the useless shutter, almost into the room where I am lying in my narrow bed, fright raised in goose-pimples, when not dissolving into urine. (p.33)

Fantasy is, however, rapidly rejected and the moment becomes, like that in the tennis court, another of the catalysts with which Eddie is continuously to re-engage.³⁴ Throughout the first two sections of the work, Eddie's

³³ See pp.72-80, Eudoxia's suicide attempt. Also pp.248-251, the scene in the Monaro where Eddie's homosexuality is revealed to Don Prowse.

³⁴ The dream interspersed with memory here is part of a narrative structure in which Eudoxia Vatatzes is at more than one remove from the reader. Macainsh states: "Nevertheless [she] is not an historically real figure but an invented one; her diary exhibits the structure of real statement but not its authenticity, thus it is neither historical nor fictional statement but an imagined statement of reality." Macainsh. p.251.

attempts to integrate the self he sees reflected in the mirror and the self he feels at the core of his being seem to be linked to a failure in his relationship with his father:

When I said he need not change me. Father re-latched the shutter, and managed a smile. The night-light made the smile dip and shudder on his long face. Then incredibly, he bent and, whether by accident, kissed me on the mouth. It seemed to me I was drawn up into the drooping moustache, as though inside some great brooding loving spider without being the spider's prey; if anything, I was the spinner of threads trying to entangle him more irrevocably than his tentative sort of loving could ever bind me. (p.35)

Again, as with Hurtle, the dilemma is to find a redemptive love that will strengthen rather than constrict. In contrast to earlier works we seem, at this point, to be intended to explore the incestuous possibilities of a relationship between father and son rather than between son and mother.³⁵ We are, however, denied too simple a transference.

This mother has herself transsexual inclinations:

She was dressed in a pair of check pants and a coat which could have belonged to my father. Certainly the waistcoat of crumpled points was his. She was wearing a hat, its brim pulled low, which I recognised as a Sewell Sweatfree Felt. Chugging along in the rear was Joannie Golson, her bosom expiring in palest blue charmeuse . . . Though the shutters were closed, and only a feeble glimmer from the night-light brimming in its saucer, a green moon could have been presiding over a painted scene. Its most incredible detail was that mummy had corked on a moustache: the perspiration had worked its way to the surface and was winking through this corked band, while behind Mrs Judge Twyborn, Mrs Boyd Golson glugged and panted, her charmeuse melons parting and rejoining, parting and rejoining.³⁶ (p.38)

³⁵ Eddie's relationships with both his father and his mother shift and distort throughout the novel. In part this is due to the ambivalence surrounding the "E" so frequently mentioned in diary and memory but it also stems from the hints of incest which occur throughout: "What makes this a particularly disturbing an enigmatic novel is that so many of the relationships are implicitly, if not explicitly, incestuous." Colmer, Patrick White. p.83.

³⁶ The mothers of the earlier works seem, since The Eye of the Storm, to have lost much of their destructive quality. The Eadie of the end of the work, shares some of the wisdom of the dying Elizabeth. David Blamires sees this differently: "Gradually we begin to piece together a picture of this woman, Eadie Twyborn, who hovers over everything that happens, dominating her son's search for the key to his emotions. Eudoxia/Eddie/Eadith's whole life is a quest for his mother, a determination to come to terms with an obscure controlling power, to throw off its mesmeric effects and become its equal. Eadie Twyborn, though a blurred presence for most of the novel, has affinities with Mrs Courtney . . . and with Elizabeth Hunter . . . The relationship of manipulative mother and child (perhaps especially the son) is a key theme in White's novels." David Blamires. p.77.

The mixture of fascination and revulsion found here has been noted before, but in this work it has central associations with the major protagonist and as such is closely entwined with what appear to be the affirmative values of the work. In The Vivisector something of the same mixture is found, but it comes in those passages where Hurtle is most in danger of allowing an intellectualised response to damage his instinctive needs. Hence the sexual depravities he shares with Hero, the meagre experience with Boo Davenport, and the thwarted love he offers Cathy, all show the sexual act as damaging and distorting the relationships it might have enhanced. Similarly the transvestite inclinations of Waldo Brown, indulged in the scene in which he struggles into his mother's clothes, succeed only in creating a grotesque parody of the vision he has drained of revitalizing power.³⁷

In this novel the sexual love between the Vatatzes, whether emotional or physical, is occasionally grotesque, frequently humorous but almost always handled with tenderness. Later, a homosexual relationship is to take place between Eadith and Gravenor, this time the love is unambiguously shown as unconsummated. White appears to be associating homosexual love with the affirmative values he gives to the instinct, but with such affirmation comes a distrust. In exploring relationships so removed from conventional idealisation he is giving himself a difficult task, and appears occasionally to fall into the trap he is setting for his reader.

³⁷ In the context of the novel it is clear that Waldo Brown's transvestite leanings are a part of a sexuality he has denied, and that such a denial has been a vital part of the misuse of the intellect. It is this that has led to his sterility. In his struggle to reincarnate his mother, and in his moments in the shared bed with Arthur, he comes closest to recognising the force of the intellectual cocoon which binds and smothers him. It is the need for sexual passion which is continuously explored, at least in the first section, of this work. "Oh yes, you've got to have passion, give way to lust, provided no one is destroyed by them. Passion and lust are as necessary as a square meal, whether its only a loaf you tear into, or devour a dish of beans, with a goose's thigh, a chunk of bacon, buried in them". p.77.

Sexual love is fundamentally linked to those instinctive forces with which he wishes his protagonists to relate, and it is as much the preserve of the old, the transvestite and the homo-sexual as it is of the young and socially acceptable. White is as determined that we should accept this as he has earlier been that we should recognise his illuminates, however unlikely their guise; but nevertheless, there is in his writing, in this area, a measure of fastidiousness which at times seems to separate the teller from the tale.³⁸

At this point in the novel at least he seems to be regarding affirmatively the instinctual love shared both by the Vatatzes and by father and son, a love which in the latter case might have been greater if its incestuous implications had been more fully and frankly explored. But sexual love is, as has been clearly shown ever since Ham Funeral, only a stage on the way towards spiritual wholeness; and it is with wholeness that White is most engaged, in spite of the surface paraphernalia of a novel which seems to be primarily concerned with the more specific problems and alienations of a transvestite. It is for this reason that he uses a now familiar technique, a two-fold method which removes from a provocative subject much of its power to shock. On the one hand we find a gently deflationary style, which, while not avoiding inflammatory material, never lingers too long, on the other he gives his central protagonist a setting whereby his particular oddities become just another form of a near universal dilemma. Hence amongst the other characters met, or discussed, at St Mayeul, several share Eddie's sexual insecurity. The Golsons are

³⁸ Writing of The Solid Mandala he says "I see the Brown brothers as my two halves . . . Waldo is myself at my coldest and worst". It seems possible that it is the Waldo in his nature that leads to this continuous fascination with, and fastidious revulsion from, the seamier sides of life. "The puritan in me has always wrestled with the sensualist". Flaws in the Glass. pp.146-151.

both attracted, if in Curly's case unwittingly, by forms of homosexuality, as are the Twyborns, and it is the sexual ambiguity of the cloaked figure glimpsed by Monsieur Pelletier that causes his arousal. Such a universality far from adding unnecessary emphasis, defuses and makes such material a part of a shared human condition. It is not with Eddie's transvestite problems that White's chief interest lies, but with his attempts to see by a light which offers only momentary illumination, yet is still a part of the aura with which he is surrounded. An aura which, in this novel at least, is particularly the province of those who are ambiguously sexed, and are, therefore, in their sensitive awareness of a fundamental insecurity, likely to be peculiarly alive and free from the rigidity which can be a concomitant of security:

Joan Golson thought she had probably lost. She would be carried back out of the iridescence into a congealing of life, from which only Eadie Twyborn had rescued her at brief moments. And she had neglected Eadie. That letter she had started and never got down to writing. But what could one say when all was surmise, suspicion, doubt or dream? One could only conclude, never live out the promises.

(p.59)

IV

Limping along the corridor of the Grand Hotel Splendide des Ligures, supported by the eager arm of Joannie Golson, Eudoxia glimpses her defaulting maid. "I've never been brave enough," she says "to live out the truth", (p.51) but it is the attempt to live by it which separates her, as it has Elizabeth Hunter before her, from those by whom she is surrounded. In this work though, Eudoxia's quest is not only a reaching towards self-understanding, but is a part of a "common malaise". (p.76) Europe is gripped by "a world despair gathering in sea-damp newspapers", (p.76) and Eudoxia's abortive attempt at suicide is as much a reflection of this as of a personal need.³⁹ The Vatatzes and the Golsons merge in their attempts to escape through fantasy - the Vatatzes through a continuous recounting of a fabled past and the Golsons in the sugared music and cream-laden meals of their luxury hotel. The confrontations between them, occasion embarrassment and boredom but also verge abruptly on to the edge of discovery. The relationships fail through the same malaise which endangers the world. It is a failure to confront truth, and to escape instead through the false and momentary safety of illusion and familiarity. In the last section of the work we are to see illusion itself confronted, but for the present Eudoxia is to choose escape, first through flight, later through conformity: it is an escape also chosen by Joannie and it occurs through a similar inability to trust to a truth which defies reason:

³⁹ The imagery reflects both this prevailing mood, and an empty viciousness that has, at times, a ring of The Wasteland. "But the eyes: if only they had been less daunting; and the ferocious mouths. All the veils had been raised to allow the parrot-ladies to fall upon le goûter, the black, the white, the beige gloves unbuttoned, folded back like superfluous skins for the ivory-skeletal or white-upholstered claws to fork unencumbered at confectioner's custard, whipped cream, chocolate pyramids, and chestnut worm-castes". p.84

Reason is the most unstable raft as Mrs Golson was learning. She suspected that she, and any other refugee from life lashed to its frail structure, was threatened with extinction by the seas of black unreason on which it floated, sluiced and slewing. (p.71)

The intellectual resources with which both Joannie and Eudoxia attempt to confront their personal dilemmas are themselves limited, it is only through listening to the truer voice of instinct that either can hope to find comfort. Instinct, however, tends to elude rational explanation and leaves Joannie helpless while trying to justify the inexplicable bond that binds her to Eudoxia. "'No,' she agreed. 'There's no reason'". (p.71)

It is just such a failure to recognize any part of life which extends outside the bounds of the individually known, which is to bring Europe to war, and which fantasy, in seeking to evade, in fact helps to create:

There was no real reason why Monsieur Pelletier should exist. At times, at dawn in particular, outside his kiosk, this was what he suspected, while not exactly giving in to his suspicion (any more than Mrs Golson gave way to hers, churning on her bed in the Grand Hotel Splendide at St Mayeul amongst the scum and knotted tresses of dreams) Monsieur Pelletier and Mrs Golson had not met at any point; they would not want to meet; they did not credit each other with existence.

It was only in the figure now climbing down over rocks, that the two might have agreed to converge. (pp.71-2)

Eudoxia, also, is a fantasy for both, but above all she is a fantasy for herself "nothing of me is mine, not even the body I was given to inhabit, nor the disguises chosen for it - A. decides on these, seldom without my agreement. The real E. has not yet been discovered, and perhaps never will be". (p.79) The bi-sexuality and the ambiguity with which White surrounds his major protagonist are a part of the need to discover a true identity. "E" is faced with the same need as that which confronts Ellen Roxburgh. What is left under the disguises which life and the expectations of others force onto the wearer? This complex use of fantasy does, however, create a seeming paradox. All the central characters indulge in fantasy, all are shown as needing to confront actuality, and yet it is a failure in imagination, a term with which fantasy is frequently equated,

which brings about an inability to recognise the existence, let alone the rights of others. Joannie Golson and Monsieur Pelletier are only able to accept that which comes within their own personally limited range. By extension it is just such a lack which is to bring Europe to war and make its barbarities possible. White in making us discriminate between fantasy and imagination, and the usage here is of course mine and not his, may seem to want us to dance on the head of a pin, but the distinction is a valid one. Fantasy, in this context, is escapism, imagination is true empathy, the ability to accept and to respond to that which is not a part of one's own existence. It is the latter state which Eudoxia has begun to reach, and it is such an awareness which trembles on the brink of existence during the awkward meetings between the Golsons and the Vatatzes:

Ultimately resuced at the Louvre, here Mrs Golson remained lost, long-winded, irrelevant: looking at Madame Vatatzes she realised that she and her close, giggly, schoolgirl friend with the lettuce ribbons hanging from their mouths were of different worlds. (p.85)

Seated in the awkward shabbiness of the music room at Rose Cottage, the Golsons and the Vatatzes totter on the verge of understanding. It is an understanding which, unexpectedly, emanates from the "husbands", and stems from a brusquerie which is, in Curly's case unaccustomed. "Hands deep in his Harris pockets, Curly found the courage to suggest, 'If you didn't want us, why did you invite us?' 'That you must ask E,' Monsieur Vatatzes replied, 'who may now be going for a swim instead of fetching the porto. E. is inclined to attempt suicide at all those moments one doesn't care to face'". (p.101)

The rumblings of war have brought to the surface a sense of impending cataclysm; a sense which has, however, always surged on the edge of consciousness:⁴⁰

⁴⁰ "When suddenly he [Curly] was overwhelmed by his own anonymity, which did not protect him from the suspicion that the world of menace held him in its sights. He tried creeping out of range, away from the open window at least. Must be this war which you could otherwise avoid by not understanding the French papers and resisting your inclination to go in search of The Times". p.91.

Curly Golson hadn't had it so bad since Inverness, though that was different, like contributing a detail to some old time-darkened painting, harmless enough in theme, but lethal as dreams can be, with their load of buried personal threats; whereas the threat lurking beyond the window of St Mayeul was of a more general nature, at the same time one from which the speaker's will might not succeed in waking him.
(p.91)

Again we are to be brought up against the concept of will, a term which, as always in White, uses the religious implications of free will, while retaining purely secular concerns. Eudoxia, in bringing the Golsons to the cottage, has made a choice:

' . . . now that I have done the deed, now that I have invited them, shall I be brave enough to tell? To commit myself to the Golsons even in a moment of crisis: to Curly's alcoholic breath, cracking seams, Joannie's steamy bosom, her gasps and blunders, the smell of caoutchouc - to dismiss all the mistakes of the past culminating in Marian's driving the tennis ball against the ivy screen in which sparrows are nesting.
(p.98)

If she chooses the Golsons and rejects Angelos, she is returning to her Australian past, and with it the ethics, the mould, and above all the sex, which has been chosen for her, and which she had exercised her will in rejecting.⁴¹ How far, we are being asked, was she free to choose? How far has her past continued to inform and even create her present? In the cinematic terms so frequent in this work she is reversing the reel which captures the moment in the tennis court. Later she is to recognize that such an action is not so easily possible:

I realize now that we can never be separated, not by human intervention (no Golsons!) only of my own free will. There I come up against the big snag. Shall my will ever grow strong and free enough for me to face up to myself? If I wanted that. To leave my one and only lover. I don't, I don't.
(p.122)

She is still constrained by the need of a redemptive love. The strength needed to gaze alone into the mirror is not yet formed.

⁴¹ Australia is also linked, however ironically, with truth, "she [Joannie] fled towards Curly, honesty, Australia". p.115.

The first section of the work ends, as it began, with Joannie Golson. Eudoxia has gone, leaving behind her only the tattered remnants of the illusion with which Mrs Golson has been sustained. It is fitting that in her last lonely forage into the dream which has been Rose Cottage, she should be accompanied by Madame Reboa of the weeping ulcer.⁴²

Eudoxia takes with her those momentary gleamings of further possibility which have opened again for Joannie the awareness of an "other life". (p.59) In an inevitably to be destroyed letter to Eadie Twyborn, Mrs Golson writes of the possibilities which will now forever escape her; again sexual ambivalence and fully explored sensual and spiritual experience are linked together. Together they might have escaped beyond the confinements of a world which offers only a constraining and ultimately debilitating comfort saturated by fear of an annihilating war. To give herself to such a love would not be to escape doom but to accept and flow into it:

There was a moment when I would have made this mistake had I been given half an opportunity. I would have allowed myself to be destroyed not only by a love such as I had never hoped to experience, but by a war which we are told is impending. (p.128)⁴³

⁴² There is humour, "an enema of enormous proportions", (p.115) and disgust in the description of the sordid remains once romance and sexual desire have been removed. "Her guide . . . let in an unexpected burst of light, illuminating the Vatatzes' last hours of tenancy: the squalor of unwashed dishes, smeared glasses, coffee grounds, a great over-ripe tomato melting into the papered surface of a dresser shelf". p.114.

Riemer comments: "The shy devious strategy whereby Eudoxia's true identity is revealed creates an extraordinary fictional experience: from the designs of the Australian voyeuse, Joannie Golson, or the elderly man and the desirable young woman she glimpses in a derelict garden, to her horrified reaction as she inspects the enormous enema (an allusion to the Cathars?), the most eloquent relic of the Vatatzes' tenancy of 'Crimson Cottage', the familiar 'tragic world' of White's other novels is notably absent". Riemer. "Some Observations on The Twyborn Affair. pp.13-14.

⁴³ At the end of the novel Eddie does accept commitment in a direct parallel with Joannie's refusal here. When we meet Lady Golson in the last pages of the work we recognise that she has been destroyed by the convention which took her back to Sydney and to the approval of society.

V

War brings with it a new image. It is Eddie Twyborn who now stands before the mirror, a mirror clouded by memories of pain and death. His accidental heroism adds yet another layer to the falsity with which his outer image belies his inner self:

So she went off into a recitative of gush, 'It's so so so . . . the DSO . . . we're so so . . . Well, real courage is not for every mortal to achieve.'
By now quite desperate, he replied. 'Courage is often despair running in the right direction.' And stalked off. (p.138)

It is not only a new persona which confronts us, but a new technique. In this section of the work White returns to the greater simplicity of A Fringe of Leaves, and to something of the idealism which lurks behind the surface discomfort of the Hunter children's re-union with "Kudjeri". Australia is to be encompassed, figuratively and literally, in this central section of the work.⁴⁴ In it Eddie is to reclaim the identity and the sex with which he was born. He is "going as myself". (p.139)⁴⁵ In the last pages of the work he will again return to the persona in which we find him here, and it is on his way to visit his mother and a possible return to Australia, that death overtakes him. Is this then the course which White is suggesting should always have been taken? "But Fremantle, the first glimpse, the first whiff of a fate which can never be renounced, is enough

⁴⁴ Jennifer Strauss points out that: "Eddie is not, like the Hunters, going back to a personal past. Rather, he has hopes of reclaiming an historical national past: the mythical territory of innocent masculinity, known in Australian idiom as 'being on the land'". She goes on, "the pastoral world has no place for him. He cannot disappear into the myth: so in the final section he goes forward into art, constructing for himself a life which, paradoxically, allows his 'self' to exist within, even to be expressed by an elaborate fiction." WLWE (1984). pp.284-85.

⁴⁵ Pierce finds a weakness here: "The trouble with the Australian part of the book is that White relates it almost entirely through Eddie's eyes. In consequence the only irony playing over his narrative is a variation of the self-pity which is Eddie's dominant attitude. White is in much more earnest complicity with Eddie than with Eudoxia". "Recent Fiction: Futurism and other projections". Meanjin, 39 (1980). p.261.

to drive the pretensions out of any expatriate Australian". (p.142) As we follow Eddie through his attempts to accept and redefine the past, we see how Australia herself, while offering with the one hand, takes away with the other and leaves Eddie, as so many before him, stretched across the dilemma of contrary needs.

Eddie is Australian, "Oh, God, but I feel for them, because I know exactly - they are what I am, and I am they - interchangeable", (p.142) and is also Australia, his European heritage largely eroded by the dust of the new continent. But tied though he is to the land of his birth, it is still essentially alien. He belongs to the land but he is not a part of it. His language is the language of Europe, and its core, and therefore the core of his culture, has not been nurtured by Australian soil.⁴⁶ In the Monaro it is only the inarticulate who wholly belong. Eddie has further intellectual and emotional needs which cannot be met by sinking into the ways of the earth. The land holds him but it is not sufficient to give him peace. He is an outcast. "I'm a kind of mistake trying to correct itself". (p.143)⁴⁷

It is in an attempt to resolve this that he returns to his parents:

Here he was, surrounded by all the details of the classic jigsaw waiting for him to put them together, more alarmingly, to fit himself, the missing piece, into a semblance of real life. (p.146)

⁴⁶ In an essay on Judith Wright Rodney Hall examines the same problem: "She had been brought up on the land, she lived on the land and loved it, but she knew she was not of it. The problem can best be illustrated by a simple example: the spiritual power of an outcrop of rock, as an aborigine might respond to it, is wholly outside the collective experience the English language embodies - and therefore outside the vocabulary of meanings an English-speaking person can comprehend. We share the profound problem of all colonial cultures, that our society has never been through a pre-literate stage of learning in this land." "Themes in Judith Wright's Poetry." The Literature of Australia. Ed. G.Dutton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. Revised Edition 1976). p.389.

⁴⁷ The argument here recalls an interview quoted earlier in which White discusses his views on man's relationship to God. McGregor. pp.218-222.

In the Twyborn household time has stopped at the moment in the tennis court. Eddie's room continues to contain his childhood. "Nothing appeared to have been disturbed, neither objects such as books, trophies, a sea urchin on a window sill, nor the nightmares and unreasonable romances with which the narrow bed was still alive". (p.149) Eadie and the judge are frozen into the caricatures which memory has made of them. Eadie's stiffened tweeds and tangled, yapping dogs are as he left them. The Judge's spider moustache still "descended and withdrew as on the night the shutters flew open". (p.156) Time has darkened but not changed the essentials of memory, "the place where Raffles had pissed was only slightly darkened by time". (p.147) To return to his home is to return to the moment of crisis:

Considering that the geography was so little altered, the furniture disposed to receive him back, there was no reason why he should not resume both his rational and unconscious lives, if the unreason with which he was cursed, and worse than that, a rebellious body, would allow him to. (p.150)⁴⁸

To do so is not a resolution. Such a choice would confront him with the full force of his mirror image. Eadie is his alter ego:

Anywhere else it might have been unbearable to realize that the son with whom she had wrestled, perhaps even tried to throttle in the agony he had caused while forcing his way out of the womb where he was not wanted in the first place, had become the mirror figure of herself. (p.149)

She had chosen the other path from the tennis court and has remained, at least outwardly, within the acceptable confines of society. But in making such a choice she has negated her own full potential and chosen seeming instead of being. "He had hardly sat down after Eadie's exit when the Judge began. 'What do you think of doing, Eddie?' You could hardly answer, Nothing; surely being is enough? Looking, smelling, listening, touching". (p.160)

⁴⁸ This personification of place and furnishings has appeared in this guise at least since Ham Funeral. The solidity of place lends permanence to the transience of being.

The motif with which the Australian section begins, the shipboard party with its incongruous fancy-dress emphasising the inward needs of outward conformity, is to continue here.⁴⁹ Eadie, the Judge, and Eddie, all explore the uses of disguise. "Would Eadie of the corked on moustache flinch if he casually produced the spangled fan and pomegranate shawl, flung them into the conversation? Wait perhaps, till the Judge was wearing his high heels and black silk stockings". (p.153) "Lieutenant Twyborn" (p.153) is no less a façade than the Empress Eudoxia, Eddie the jackaroo is as much a falsification as Eadith Trist. Throughout the novel the use of clothes to contain, and also to explore, the individual, will be a continuing theme. It is not that White is simply telling us, you are what you seem; but that dressing-up is an essential part of the role-playing with which the work is most deeply concerned. In the characterisation of Eddie, the subject is dealt with in its most extreme form, but it is there, as an undercurrent, in the portrayal of each of the cast. When Greg Lushington comes upon Eddie lounging in Marcia's clothes upon Marcia's bed, he goes away satisfied that it is his wife to whom he has been speaking, and it is. Eddie has stepped out of himself and into Marcia. Again we are confronted by the devices of self-referential fictionality. Eddie is a fictive Marcia, both Eddie and Marcia are fiction.

Eadie and the Judge have been contained in the aspic of the past until the moment of re-union. Now they need their son to re-assume the role which best befits their lives. Eddie cannot exist in isolation.

⁴⁹ The party which Eddie attends with Marcia continues this theme. Outward guise substitutes for communication: "The greatest diffident of all, Eddie Twyborn saw through their play too clearly. If he could have shown them the defenceless grub inside what they took to be flawless armour, they might have established some sort of bumbling relationship. But he could not. Instead he and Harold fell back on alcohol and the momentous question of what Eddie should have to drink. p.264.

The impact of his life on other lives brings with it demands. His escape into the seemingly undemanding landscape of remote Australia will not allow a further escape from such responsibilities. In the Monaro, as in France and in London, the blazing blue eyes will continue to reflect the needs of others as well as his own fragmentation. It is the impossibility of satisfying such warring needs that forces him to flee, both from the selves he unwillingly confronts in the mirror and the selves others need him to play. As before in A Fringe of Leaves White is exploring the multiplicity of roles which are open to his characters, and the need to escape from those forced on an unwilling psyche by the demands of society.

VI

His horse had carried him perhaps a mile when he was overcome by drowsiness. He dismounted, and after tethering the mare to one of her front fetlocks, lay down beneath a tree, on the pricking grass, amongst the lengthening shadows. He did not sleep, but fell into that state between sleeping and waking in which he usually came closest to being his actual self.

(p.280)

The moment beneath the shadow of the tree, in which Eddie explores the boundaries of the subconscious mind, is akin to a scene in A Fringe of

Leaves:

She was so entranced she sat down in a small clearing intending to enjoy her surroundings while resting, in a dappled shade, on the compost of decaying leaves and bark, regardless of any possibility of damp and spiders . . . she was probably closer to the being her glass could not reveal, nor her powers of perception grasp, but whom she suspected must exist none the less.

(A Fringe of Leaves, p.82)

Ellen, resting under the giant ferns beneath which she is later to be seduced, is, like Eddie, released from the mould of her daytime and conventional self by the spell of Australia. It is this spell that the Monaro, like "Kudjeri" in The Eye of the Storm, brings to the fore. Stripped, frequently literally, of the pretensions and hypocrisies enforced by his former guises, Eddie is able, at least momentarily to rest in the peace offered by the land.⁵⁰ In doing so he accepts all that it offers, an offer which frequently includes "Dreck".⁵¹ As so often before, White intends us to see the offal of existence, as not only a necessary part of the life-force, but as having a vitalising, enriching and strangely

⁵⁰ "A relationship was waiting to develop between himself, the higger-mugger buildings, even the bitter landscape. If the river appeared at first sight hostile, it was through the transience of its coursing waters to one who longed for the reality of permanence". p.179.

⁵¹ Michael Billington suggests that this aspect of his work is still of importance. Writing of Signal Driver he says: "White's intention is to provide an image of the spiritual and environmental decay of Australia over the years through his married duo". Theatre Criticism. Plays and Players. May (1982). p.35.

beautiful quality. The landscape which refreshes Eddie has not only a physical integrity but a spiritual possibility. Yet it is harsh. The Monaro episode reeks of mutton fat and sweat. The biting wind tears at the flesh, as Eddie tears at the matted wool which protects the vulnerability of the sheep:

Prowse chose the cleaner sheep. Eddie noticed himself drawn, it appeared, to the daggier ones. It was an aspect of his own condition he had always known about, but it amused him to recognise it afresh while snipping at the dags of shit, laying bare the urine-sodden wrinkles with their spoil of seething maggots, round a sheep's arse. At one stage he found he had picked a ewe who must have detached herself from her own mob and joined the wethers. Before becoming fully aware of the difference in the sheep he was handling, he had cut off the tip of the vulva. Nobody noticed his clumsiness or distress.⁵²
(p.279)

The life related to the land can be heedlessly cruel. The sex of the sheep is destroyed by an instant of carelessness. The child to whom Denny is a loving father, is not his but the child born of an incestuous union. Gentle though the hands that touch the infant may be, they are, ironically, the same hands which destroy the new life in the warren:

Denny started slobbering. 'Ere she is - the bloody mother!' he shouted. He flung out a shovelful of bleeding fur which his matted hounds slavered and gobbled. 'An' 'ere's the kickers! Denny shovelled out the litter which followed the doe down the gullets of the ravenous dogs. (p.249)

But linked with such violence is affirmation. "The logic of those with whom he had been brought together was as simple and direct as the glimpses of illogic in the landscape around them were subtly diffused". (p.195) Eddie is an "outcast-initiate" (p.194) for whom "the scene's subtler depths were reserved". (p.194) His illogicality matches that of the land, "and was immediately depressed by the lack of logic in his remark". (p.195) In the Monaro section, as elsewhere, White appears to be offering us contradictory possibilities. Eddie and Marcia, both strangers to the area,

⁵² The sheep is, like Eddie, denied a clear sexual role.

are at home there, as those whose birthright it is are not. "Marcia's of the land if you know what I mean. Greg only inherited it". (p.187) Eddie, torn by the conflicting demands of Sydney and his war years, and scarred even by his time under the undemanding sun of Provence, finds a spiritual ease which is directly linked to the harsh demands made on his body: ⁵³

As he continued thumping automatically at his wholly unresponsive mount, loss of faith in himself was replaced by an affinity with the landscape surrounding him. It happened very gradually, in spite of a sadistic wind, the sour grass, deformed trees, rocks crouching like great animals petrified by time. A black wagtail swivelling on a grey-green fence-post might have been confusing an intruder if he had not been directing one who knew the password. (p.194) ⁵⁴

Yet in spite of a perception which, in its unity of spirit and flesh, allows for a greater harmony than is possible to those limited to "knowledgeable remarks", (p.194) there is a different, but still affirmative, level of animal acceptance and contentment denied to those who actively seek spiritual possibility. Eddie's diffident visit to the "Allens' huggermugger shack" (p.275) finds them locked in an embrace of the life given to them that Eddie envies. "As Eddie Twyborn untethered his horse and rode away, he wondered whether he wasn't leaving the best of all possible worlds". (p.278) The intellectual needs and insights of the chosen are of no importance to those who are in dumb accord with the earth. Denny lacks the skills of spoken language but excels in those of the instinct. "Denny had got together one of his miraculous fires out of

⁵³ "He was coming to terms with his body. He had begun to live in accord with appearances". p.201.

⁵⁴ It is in the minutiae, the intricate patterning of life that Eddie finds ease. "Eddie Twyborn found refuge at last, less in the trees themselves than in the sounds of life in their branches . . . The hen wren's industry drew him back, out of the abstractions propounded by the hillscape and the glazed air into the everyday embroidery of life, the minutiae to which Eudoxia Vatatzes had clung as insurance against the domes of Byzantine deception". p.175. It is a safety net shared with his author.

a handful of dead grass and another of twigs". (p.250) The toothless Peggy shares a similar perception, but hers is related to the body rather than the land. She is adept at funerals, at the laying out of bodies and, conversely, at producing new life. She is an embodiment of the Monaro itself; from its harsh ugliness comes life and death and an inarticulate comfort and tenderness. With her Eddie is at home as he is with the land. She, more than any other, is able to accept the Eddie that exists:

While he fumbled with and lit the lamp, she busied herself investigating a cabbage for slugs. 'I'll like 'avin' you around,' she told him: you an' me 'ull get on like one thing.' She sighed again disposing of a colony of slugs. 'It's the girls I miss out 'ere. Never the boys. Not that you isn't a boy,' she realised. 'But different. A woman can speak out 'er thoughts'. (p.185)

It is Peggy, together with Prowse, a figure of some complexity, who share the nursing after Eddie's fall from "the Blue Mule", (p.202) the accident which anticipates his final disintegration:

The figure by the edge of the road began stirring. Eddie Twyborn, realising that he was still himself, grew conscious of the pains shooting through his ribs, legs, head. He must have been concussed by the fall. None of him was manageable, anyway by his own efforts but oh God, he was still here if he wanted to be; he was not yet sure. He would have liked to eat an ice, a sorbet delicately flavoured with cantaloup, morello, or pistachio. (p.203)

During the time that it is possible the bleak, comfortless cottage gives Eddie sanctuary. "'No, no,' he protested, already belonging to the dun-coloured, draughty, weatherboard room". (p.203) This sense of belonging which is linked to a rough tenderness, is in turn a part of the continuing theme of motherhood, expressed by the conflicting concepts of sterility and fecundity. Fecundity is of the land. It is shared by those who are deeply rooted, and are without the intellectual and spiritual aspiration which can displace those same roots. Peggy, her mother, her daughters, Marian, Eddie's former fiancée, and Dot Norton, are all thoughtlessly fecund. "'Go on! There's no mother wouldn't 'uv chose to be a mother'". (p.182) They are contrasted with those whose sexuality is

denied the validity of the life force. The Twyborns have a child, but he is lost to them, twice, a loss which through Eadie's letter to Marcia is explicitly linked to Eddie's own sterility. Marcia's children die soon after birth, like those of Ellen Roxburgh, and are entombed behind an "elaborately designed, iron gate, a rich folly if ever there was one". (p.184) As is the child we are to assume is Eddie's. Don Prowse has a daughter, but his empty marriage reduces his relationship with her to a sterile image staring from the pages of an album.

This major theme is echoed in the minor. The "Winterbotham party", (p.269) to which Marcia takes "my men", (p.268) recalls the earlier ship-board episode. Here, once again, the excesses of the party spirit pare away disguise and show the rich parasitically clinging to the surface of the land, reproducing almost nothing but their empty wealth. Eddie is confronted by Helen, the deformed daughter of the house. "As it was, she stood grinning through her affliction at what he saw she recognised as his". (p.268) Fecundity is reserved for those who have the resources for parenthood or for the artist. Greg Lushington's possible children lie buried with Marcia's, but the creative act is not altogether denied him. "He was obviously obsessed by words, when Eddie had thought his obsessions lay almost anywhere else: sheep, worms, the sons he hadn't got". (p.234)⁵⁵

The treatment of motherhood in this work is at times a faint echo of that we have been accustomed to hear before in The Eye of the Storm, but the prevailing emphasis is of a different nature, and is linked to Eddie's dilemma as a transvestite. It is because he is a woman trapped inside a man's body that he is denied a fulfilled relationship, "to be rent between

⁵⁵ Greg in this novel takes over the role usually reserved for the father. He has a gentle diffidence linked with an element of the artist which is akin to Alfred Hunter's spiritual integrity. The judge remains a shadowy figure, his lack of dominance seeming to stem rather from White's lack of interest than from the needs of plot or characterisation. His interest to us, such as it is, seems to lie in his use as a gauge of his son's and his wife's sexual needs.

birth and death was the luxury of normal women". (p.208) We are continually confronted by reference to deviance. Riding into the biting winds of the Monaro in a rare moment of shared tenderness with his mistress, she unknowingly rejects him, "'But darling,' she screamed against the wind while seizing his wrist, 'leaving Joan Golson aside - and Eadie? it was you who brought your mother up - I just don't care to associate with abnormality'". (p.228) But to be denied parenthood is not to be denied spiritual affirmation. Helen's deformity may keep her childless but it does not preclude her from clear-sighted vision, when she sees Eddie at the party she recognizes their affinity, and later in a dream this is endorsed. In life they meet only once, but in that spiritual state so necessary in White where the spirit is released from the compulsions of the body and mind, they are united:

They were seated on the brink of a rock pool, its water so clear and motionless they dare not breathe for fear they might ruffle its surface into some ugly and disturbing pattern. Whether the emotions they shared were joyful, it was difficult if not impossible to tell, only that they were united by an understanding as remote from sexuality as the crystal water in the rock basin below. (p.273)⁵⁶

The implications of their sexless relationship are clear; it is just such a state which Eadith finally achieves with Gravenor. In earlier works the protagonist has needed to sink into depths of degradation before he can attain the possibility of illumination, here such a progression also takes place but it is largely associated with Beckwith Street. The Monaro is also at times equated with the bush of A Fringe of Leaves or Hurtle Duffield's time with Nance Lightfoot. But here there is a movement through carnality, not to compassionate love such as that shared by Ellen and Jack Chance, but to a spiritual sharing which refuses the experience of sexual arousal. "'I expect it's about love'" says Greg Lushington. "'- that's where everything

⁵⁶ Brian Kiernan finds that in "the later novels birds, light and water are the constituents of that true and essential life glimpsed within the flux of historical, or merely quotidian - existence". "Treble Exposure". Southerly, (1982). p.170.

seems to lead - in some form or other. Unfulfilled love'". (p.232) It is a recognition of his need for such a celibate love which makes Eddie refuse the possibilities of a relationship with Don Prowse, for the reader it poses a problem. How far is White saying that sexual need limits homosexual love? The premises of the work seem to indicate a belief in the tenderness and possibility of a transexual or homosexual relationship which is exploratory in every sense, yet Eddie recognises a need to separate sexual impulse from physical love. Hence his acceptance of Gravenor's nephew, who means nothing to him, and his refusal of Gravenor, whom he loves; and his sexual enjoyment of Marcia and inability to respond to her attempts to reach a deeper intimacy. Finally, he is forced to leave Prowse and the Monaro because of the ravages their sexual experience would inflict on the sheltered world of "Bogong". The question is important because it turns on how fully White is himself in control of the final emphases of the work. Is that sexual repugnance earlier observed again clouding the meaning which he intends? The water into which Eddie and Helen gaze is clear, they can see beneath its unruffled surface into depths which hide no "ugly or disturbing pattern". (p.273) The calm pool takes the place of the mirror image and allows Eddie to gaze at his own image untroubled by the intimations of sexuality with which he is always confounded by his reflection.

But it is not Don Prowse alone that brings the need to leave the haven of Bogong. Like Rose Cottage, with which it is contrasted, the cottage in the Monaro ceases to be a refuge when subjected to the pressures of the outside world, pressures which once again take the form of a visit by the Golsons. It is not just that Eddie fears the recognition, in every sense, in Joannie's eyes; her coming forms the catalyst for an already recognised need to fly the nest and to return to the one permanent role open to him, that of "eternal vagrant". (p.270) The times in which we scrutinize the minutiae of Eddie's existence occupy only a relatively brief

part of the life lived within the span of the novel, but they are those in which he is attempting to find a suitable climate for permanence. Joannie is the face at the window of his momentary contentment and her coming into each of the four periods of sanctuary announces, and precipitates, his flight. Eddie flees before all she represents. In her is incarnate, greedy curiosity, sexual longing and the corrosive power of seeming normality. "'You couldn't hold it against Joan - not altogether - because she's in most ways - so - so normal'". (p.228) She is not a monster. She has pathos, and a consuming need to be taken beyond the boundaries of her own limitations. But for Eddie she means constraint, like the outside world which she represents, she will break down the retaining walls of his composure and trample on the remnants of his dreams.

In the two central visits, those that take place in Australia, her coming is associated with society in its most limited and limiting conventions:

He [Eddie] set off the following day as Marcia, Joan, and Curly were hitting golf balls on the mini-course below the house. They were wearing the clothes, their limbs assuming the attitudes, of the Philistine upper class. Behind a hearty façade, they appeared somewhat lethargic as they put in time till lunch. (The Golsons would not have admitted to boredom because country life is virtuous). (p.272)

At the beginning and end of the work Joannie is associated with society gone mad and with Europe at war. Against the quieter but also corrosive images her coming brings in Australia are set, directly, the values of the natural world. As Eddie looks at the distant golfers, he merges into and becomes a part of the landscape. "At that distance no one's attention was drawn to the insignificant figure of a horseman, and he was soon well along the road which stretched through the white tussock, skirted the emerald upholstery of a lucerne pasture, and wound finally into the hills". (p.272) His escape is to be only temporary, and will be ended by the demands of destructive affection. Both Prowse and Marcia will play a part in the final lonely flight along the "track" (p.299) which leads back into

a confrontation with man the social and lustful animal, and with fantasy in its most extreme form. But while it lasts, Eddie's time in the wilderness brings harmony. "He could not remember ever having felt happier". (p.272) Such tranquility is not only a re-enactment of the spiritual ease found by both Voss and Ellen in the quiet centre of Australia, it comes from a cessation of the conflicts caused by sexual ambivalence and desires. The Eddie that sits slouched, and at ease, in the saddle of his mare, is released from the demands of sexual relationships, and from the role playing which he finds an inevitable concomitant of such a need. The interior presents him with no mirror in which to watch his own disintegration and asks no more affection from him than honesty can, unaided, provide. "He got up to retether his horse. She whinnied to see him, and he stroked her muzzle. Theirs was an honest relationship". (pp.271-72)

As before in The Vivisector, we are clearly intended to see human relationships as containing an almost inevitable element of destruction. It is hard to find another reason for the placing of the brief episode describing the visit of Peggy's mother Ma Corkhill. Almost immediately following Eddie's return from the hills we meet "the she-ancient of she-ancients". (p.286) The affection which unites the unprepossessing pair leads to a shared bed and a shared dunny and to an interchanging of quiet confidences. "As the smell of extinguished wick ascended, the women's voices would entwine in a duet embellished by roulades and trills worthy of a more rococo age". (p.286) On the third day it ends.⁵⁷ "Ma Corkhill's visit to 'Bogong' had its climax in her flinging a kettle of boiling water at her daughter". (p.287) Such violence also plays its part in Eddie's

⁵⁷ The imagery used in this scene gives it a religious flavour that presages the material used in the last section.

conflict between instinct and intellect, psychic wholeness and spiritual disintegration. Directly after the moment in which Eddie recognises his complete contentment, submerged in the "mountain cool" (p.272) of his solitary expedition, he recognizes the contrary pull of his conflicting needs.⁵⁸ It is these needs which will take him on along the path that leads to Beckwith Street:

At the same time he wondered if he could really exist without the sources for unhappiness. Half-dozing, half-waking to the tune of his horse's regular cropping, and in his half-sleep what sounded like pricking of early frost or needling by stars, he knew that his body and mind craved the everlasting torments. (p.272)

⁵⁸ Manly Johnson puts it: "The Twyborn Affair is another rendering of the transcendence of spiritual matter, and the oxymoron as a figure is the germ of a narrative technique White employs for presenting the contrast in this novel." Manly Johnson. Modern Fiction Studies. p.164.

VII

In the Monaro Eddie has been in direct, physical, contact with his homeland. Bleak and uncompromising though it may be, there is no barrier between the earth and the completion his body craves. Walking the battered streets of a between-wars London,⁵⁹ itself a reflection of what he has become, there is no such accord. Only momentarily can a tamed and fettered townscape offer relief. "Best of all she loved her stroll through the deserted park (thanks to the keys with which patronage had provided her.) Hair damp, a naked face somewhat battered in a light turning from oyster to mauve". (p.310) Eddie is now caught within a transformation which he will never entirely leave.⁶⁰ Once again the break with the past seems total:

What I [Eadie] would like to convey to you is that losing a child in death is so much better than losing a grown - what shall I say? reasoning child, to life. As happened to me for the second time. And to my darling Edward, of course. Though I think men must - they can only feel it less, for not experiencing it in their depths - dragged bloody from their own entrails.⁶¹

Oh I mustn't go on like this. You ask what news I have of Eddie. I can only answer NOTHING. As the first time, so the second. He is swallowed up. Whether in death or life, it is the same. We should not have aspired to possess a human being. (pp.301-2)⁶²

When we meet again, a further rebirth will have taken place. As before, particularly in The Vivisector, White is subjecting his illuminate to a process of growth similar to that found in Jung, where it is a part of the

59 "Like London itself, Maud and Kitty in their reduced circumstances were distinctly post-War, without realising to what extent they were also pre-". p.308.

60 As Eddie goes to his death he is once again in the clothes of a man but he has the face of a whore.

61 White's method of linking images continues in this novel as elsewhere. Eadie's description recalls the death of the rabbits.

62 The timeless vacuum used here recalls the time at sea in A Fringe of Leaves.

development which culminates in psychic wholeness:

In the process towards maturity Jung and White both see childhood and dying as two poles of a continuous chain of being where we are normally incited to struggle for fulfilment, development and ultimate rebirth. White's seekers, before they are granted final illumination are led on through a number of spiritually heightened moments, often implying some kind of sign to the right direction, and, similarly, to Jung 'the great arc of life whose ultimate aim is the rebirth of the whole personality will consist of many little "rebirth moments" and "rebirth events"'.⁶³

The years which divide the still youthful Eddie from the aging Eadith Trist will be left largely unexplained. Eadith comes upon us ready-made, the stages of her metamorphosis left deliberately vague. Partly this seems to stem from a dislike of clumsy, and possibly titillating detail. Only the slightest hints are ever given of the personal problems of a transvestite. But further than this White must always have had in mind the need to keep his reader's attention centred on the real purposes of the novel. The daily risks of exposure to which Mrs Trist would have been subjected must be underplayed or they might well divert our attention from the struggle for instinctual awareness and the movement towards self-discovery and realisation.

The attempt to leave behind the past is, however, again a way of commenting on the present. The twin beings of the twice-born Twyborn carry within them all that they have been. The gulf between Europe and Australia is crossed by time remembered. There is though, in the terms of the novel, a new beginning, and it is signalled again, not only by the change of scene, of name and of sex, but by a similar distancing device to that used at the beginning of the other sections of the work. This time it is the elderly sisters at "Ninety-one" (p.305) who observe through the cloistered window of their "narrow red" London House, (p.309) "the

⁶³ Karin Hansson. The Warped Universe (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1984), p.92.

goings-on at Eighty-Four". (p.305) What they see, and more importantly, what they imagine, is artifice attempting, and sometimes attaining, art and lust removed from the tenderness and, conversely, the corrosiveness of love. ⁶⁴

"The Bellasis girls" (p.308) are overtly linked to Eadith Trist only through their nephew Gravenor and a concept of aristocracy which the novel will be concerned to explore, but they share with the object of their fascination two further elements: one is found in the voyeurism into which Eadith's escape from the bonds of sex could be seen to lead, and the other is in a concept of virtue, an issue in which both are linked. In the sisters virtue is reduced to outward form and to an enforced abstinence from sexual activity:

At first they had been prepared to pit their prudery, their virtue against the goings-on at Eighty-Four. Kitty's virtue in her younger days hadn't been much more than a theory which members of her class professed in order to divert censure, and an admirable arrangement it was, till with age and reduced circumstances she suddenly found herself set cold in the aspic of fact. As far as anybody knew, Maud the elder, flat and plain from the beginning, had never had the chance to test her virtue, and nobody, not even Kitty, would have been indiscreet enough to probe. Now indeed she was safe, as indeed was Kitty, though less willing to resign herself to safety. (p.305) ⁶⁵

In Eadith Trist it is a part of the familiar attempt at an integration of self. ⁶⁶ As before, we have had a descent into the depths of sensuality

⁶⁴ "Leave alone her moral account, there was this material mansion which had taken possession of her, and which her taste was converting from a drab and musty barrack into a sequence of tantalising glimpses, perspectives opening through beckoning mirrors to seduce a society determined on its own downfall". p.321.

⁶⁵ The Bellasis sisters incorporate another flirtation with the devices of metafiction. Their "incompetent cook" (p.308) in a device which recalls Muriel Spark in The Comforters, is "a crypto-novelist" (p.308) and writes of the events in Eighty-Four even as they are taking place.

⁶⁶ "Purity . . . 'she [Mrs Spencer-Parfitt] snuffled. 'That daisy is at any rate pure.' She pointed with the toe of an abraded brogue at a clump of pink-to-white daisy which had shot up since the lawn-mower razed Ursula's lawn to perfection. 'I'd like to think you were,' she turned abruptly to the bawd. 'In spite of what I hear, my instincts as a cat-lover tell me you may be too pure even for your own good'". (p.381) The parallels with Eadie have been made unmistakably clear, and help to prepare us for the chastened and purified version we meet at the end of the novel.

and a wallowing in the "Dreck" of existence, the latter to be found in the rancid mutton fat and near squalor of much of the life in the Monaro, the former in the sexual acts shared with Marcia and with Don Prowse. Now, in the final brothel-set acts, White is to attempt the ultimate irony. It is from within the lush semen-stained house in Beckwith Street, a "hell upholstered by Heal", (p.321) that Eadith is to reach beyond carnality into the freedom of the spiritual self. Already in The Eye of the Storm he has forced us to recognise the integrity and spiritual wholeness of a spoiled socialite lying on a decaying, if splendid, death bed. Here he will use the imagery more frequently evoked to celebrate the natural world, to exalt the bodies of those about to submit to the embraces of paid lust:

Sometimes in the late afternoon her girls might assemble without their gorgeous habits in what had been the withdrawing room, which extended the whole of the first floor front, and expose themselves to the pigeon-tones of light slanting down the street from the river, their nipples and the soles of their feet emblazoned with rose and gold, a suggestion of ashen mauve adrift in the clefts between breasts and thighs.

It might be the rosy spiral of a navel at the apex of an embossed belly, or elephant-creases in upturned buttocks, or the sculptured ebony fetish from the hills above Freetown which most delighted madam when she came in at a slack hour to consort with the roly-poly of girls, clustered on divans and overflowing on to the pile of the still untrampled Heal's carpet. Herself always fully clothed she sat amongst them, caressing tender flesh with her tongue, dabbling her fingertips, almost always making music as she combed youthful skin with her brittle crimson talons. (pp.324-5)

Eadith shares with Elizabeth Hunter the inability to find permanent peace in the rooted integrity offered by Australia's heartland. It is not in such a seemingly appropriate setting that she will seek after the truth which White here seems to ally with a narrowly defined concept of virtue, but rather in the seeming depravity of her whore-house. It is in this inversion that so much of the reader's puzzlement lies. Tongue-in-cheek Patrick White allies the artist, the convent and the brothel. "An artist must guard against the tendency to sentimental indulgence, an abess

resist threats to a vocational ideal. The inspired bawd has in her a little of each". (p.323)⁶⁷ Continuously engaged in overlooking the hive of sexual activity which she has called into being, Mrs Trist links the body's most humiliating depravities with the possibility of spiritual aspiration. Lust-making, with its analogy to love-making, is seen as a purification of the demands and limitations of the body. Her own voyeurism becomes both a purge and a purgatory:

A craftsman had fitted a concealing eye to each cell⁶⁸ of this elaborate comb of which she was the animating principle. She would not have disclosed to anyone the existence of what was in a sense a humiliating toy, least of all to Gravenor, whom she must continue to admire, but who, as voyeur, would have been reduced in her estimation. She could not have explained how a common peep-hole becomes an omniscient eye, how it illuminated for her the secret hopes and frustrations struggling to escape through the brutality, the thrust and recoil, the acts of self-immolation, the vicious spinsterly refinements which shape the depravity of men - her own included. She would have liked to believe that, even if it did not purify, lust might burn itself out, and at the same time cauterize that infected part of the self which, from her own experience, persists like the core of a permanent boil. (p.329)

The boil recalls Madame Reboa's ulcer and with it the need to be aware of the hidden self the mirror fails to show. But the image is not a simple one, it reaches back into A Fringe of Leaves and Voss. When Austin Roxburgh tends Spurgeon's boil he moves away from a basically conceptual, enclosed and artificial self into the beginnings of a dynamic and demanding present. In Eadith Trist Patrick White is struggling with a protagonist who is already fully aware of the need to face a reality in which Madame Reboa's ulcer remains undisguised, but who shares with Austin a failure, or refusal fully to participate.⁶⁹ From the first relationship

⁶⁷ "She was devoted to her most dedicated girls and decorated with her jewels those most likely to act out her gospel. The nucleus of her order lived in. Then there were the novices on call". p.329

⁶⁸ The image here is both with the complexity of the honeycomb and the queen bee, and with the penitential chambers of the convent.

⁶⁹ Later in the bawdy house she will fully explore the areas of experience suggested by the ulcer. Manly Johnson calls such areas: "'the cries and whispers of life' which are not to be separated out for examination apart from the whole symphonic utterance in which they occur. They are the discords, the dissonances that give meaning to harmony. In their modern forms as explicit realism, naturalism and expressionism, they correspond to the classic descent into the underworld - providing a mode of expression for the otherwise inexpressable. Manly Johnson. Modern Fiction Studies. pp.162-3.

in which we meet her, that with Angelo, to the last with Gravenor, Eadith remains essentially free from commitment. It is only with her mother, the subject of the first rejection, also an outsider, that she tentatively begins to reach towards involvement. It is this perception, of a dispassionate observer recording the squalor of a society which engages but does not encompass the central core of being, that has been the main factor in creating the sense so many readers had even before publication of Flaws in the Glass that in this work, White is closest to autobiography. The details of the life-style, the inclinations of his protagonist, were presumptuous trivialities in such an alignment; but the fastidious fascination with which both regard the sexual relationship is important. The image of the "omniscient eye" is central to this novel, not only for the obvious link with the artist and his observation of his characters, but also for its parallels with that other eye, the eye of the storm. The Norwegian who sits beside Dorothy de Lascabanes as they experience the centre of the hurricane, is given the role of the author himself. Dorothy fails to enter into the experience, but her mother fully participates. In The Twyborn Affair Patrick White gives us a protagonist who plays both roles. Eadith Trist is, as the quotation emphasises, an observer, but she cannot escape, and neither can White, from the demands which two world wars and the ability to love make on the resources. The self which lies behind the image in the flawed mirror is penetrable and drags the external being into unwelcome and demanding participation. In the final section of his most annihilating⁷⁰ work there is an attempt to resolve the dichotomy which lies behind all he has written. Eddie's struggle is White's own; the battle to shape an intellect which governs instinct in spite of an admiration for those who are informed by, and understand their own instinctive needs. Eadith Trist is not a Dorothy de

⁷⁰ To say so is not to deny the strong element of the playful and the ludicrous.

Lascabanes: she sees and responds to all that is implicit in the eye of the storm. But neither is she an Elizabeth Hunter, nor an Ellen Roxburgh; her nature forbids total immersion in the forces which the storm exemplifies and which are also to be found in a society at war. It is this struggle which leads to the need for a sexually innocent relationship with Gravenor and for a cleansing of all the corrosive effects of a powerful, but sometimes distasteful, sensuality.

'It isn't natural,' he [Gravenor] said before they burst out laughing.

'Who's to decide,' she replied, 'what is natural and what isn't? The most touching marriage I've known was that between an imbecile and an incestuous strumpet.'

. . . 'What I wanted to say when we shot off at a tangent was that I'd like your help in establishing myself in a large house, for purposes the world considers immoral, but which can be aesthetic - oh, yes, and immoral, we know - but no more so than morality can often be. Better to burn than to suppurate'.

(p.317)

It is with the "stylish knocking shop" (p.319) that the final section of the work truly begins. The early pages suffice to establish a mood, to give solidity to Eadith and to her relationship with her whores. Beckwith Street is a part of a faded and seedy London, which had once had greater pretensions to grandeur and which recalls Hurtle Duffield's house in Chubb Street. It is, however, a continuation from the earlier and simpler image. Beckwith Street is also balanced between worlds but here the analogy is not with the hubbub of working-class society as a revitalising mainstream, but rather with the cul-de-sacs to be found in the midst of hectic rush:

Although their relationship was only a tangential one, Beckwith was not unconscious of the river as a source of life. On gloomy days, brick which might have been reduced to a sullen ruby, seemed to respond to the glimmer off water. On brighter occasions the street acquired dash from the clatter and importance of traffic as it surged at right angles, parallel to the silent river. (pp.318-319)

The river and the energy of London's daily life are adjacent and fulfil a similar function to that experienced in both the Monaro and Provence. "The disquieted and disquieting sea" (p.73) that first lures and then

releases the young Eudoxia becomes the "warmth, the light, the glistening flow of brown water" (p.250) of the healing Monaro, but the Thames is still and silent, flowing remorselessly, unaffected by the violence of contiguous life. It is also the river of life, but Eadith feels no temptation either to immerse in it or to use it to end an unresolvable dilemma.⁷¹ It flows at the edge of her consciousness only momentarily impinging upon it. The use of such an image further reinforces the implication that Eadith has deliberately chosen to retreat, both in the cloistered sense, an implication which is also to be found in the imagery, and in a sense of a withdrawal from the risks of the wounds implicit in commitment. There had been times when she had risked involvement. The reverberations of Eddie's DSO continue to resound in the quiet house in Beckwith Street, but that momentary impulse had itself been illusory and ambiguous.

The cloistered life of the convent is linked with the apartness of those who inhabit the brothel. Camaraderie and shared intimacies are possible with either choice, as is at least a seeming innocence. "In Ursula's assessment, Audrey and Helga were charming simple girls in unpretentious floral frocks", (p.348) but in the latter case at least it is not without dangers. Two acts of violence and death disturb the tranquillity of life in Beckwith Street. In each the link with the religious is made clear:

Lydia was one of Mrs Trist's most beautiful and accomplished whores. She had hoped to become a concert pianist, and worked hard enough at the piano at the convent where she was educated. In spite of the enthusiasm of the nun who was her teacher, and the prospect of going to Paris to study with a famous virtuoso, she realised her music was less a vocation than the desire to dazzle. (p.330)

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

The conflict between lust and religion is too much for one of her clients. "Lydia didn't return from mass. Days later her body was found in a North London canal. Her confessor was arrested for her murder". (p.331) The other incident involves the abortion which forms the finale to Lady Ursula's visit to the "bawd". Again, though more subtly, the link with the convent is made. "Her [Ada's] manner and the brisk sound of her cinnamon habit suggested that she had the situation under control". (p.350)

It is not, however, with such dangers that White appears most concerned. Sexual and religious fervour share another and strangely more disturbing element. The convent and the brothel are both sterile. The dead child whose mother "'had a go at herself with the knitting needle'", (p.350) is only one of the series of aborted and distorted children who have clung to the edges of this barren world. Eadith's dreams are filled with them:

Throughout this flesh-coloured, infra-natural light, she became aware of a fluttering of the bird-voices, moth-like hands, of a brood of children she did not attempt to count. They were too many and too unearthly, also too frightening, in particular the eyes and the mouths, which were those of flesh-and-blood children, probing, accusing the room's focal point, herself. (pp.413-4)

To be separated from the life-force is to end in a cul-de-sac from which no new life may spring.⁷² The artistic achievement of Beckwith Street is not sufficient to overcome the sense of denial. Again and again throughout his work, Patrick White's aversion from the possession of the family is shown in the failure of his protagonists to create satisfactory new life. Here the message is absolute. Stan Parker may be allowed a grandson, Ellen Roxburgh is left a sense of new beginning, but the blood of the Twyborns leads only to disintegration.

⁷² "The child was the rosiest, the most enviable the dream walker had ever encountered. She dropped to her knees beside the bath to join in the simple game of bathing this most radiant of all children. The mother seemed to have invited collaboration, but as their hands met over soap or sponge, resentment set in: the dreamer became an invader. She was warned back, at first not overtly, but by implication, till finally the fleece on which both were kneeling turned to grit, stones, road-metal. Dishwater, sewage, putrid blood were gushing out of the faceless mother from the level at which her mouth should have been. The intruder was desolated by a rejection she should have expected". p.352.

VIII

As he moved about the flat distributing his baits, little squares of bread soaked in some lethal liquid, she found herself following him for a reason she could not have made sound rational: she was fascinated by the whorl of hair just above the nape of his neck. (p.314)

Before she moves to Beckwith Street, Eadith is besieged by a plague of mice. Their exterminator entices them to their doom by way of sensual pleasure. It is just such a trap that Eadith sets in the more elegant surroundings of her luxurious brothel. But in each case our attention is not on the victims or the bait, but on the central protagonists. The clients and the whores of Eadith's establishment are necessary furnishings delineated by rapid character-sketches. Even Ada is rather a continuation of Elizabeth Hunter's faithful retinue than an incisive portrayal:

Ada might have been a gloomy companion, black hair scraped back from the forehead, thick, glistening, eyebrows, high cheekbones and a heavy mouth, which suggested Slav origins or the face of Verlaine. What saved her from being a menace were her bursts of electrifying laughter for some private joke, usually unfunny when coaxed out of her, and a sweet illuminating smile for those in whom she had put her trust. That somebody had betrayed that trust seemed probable. It was what drew her closer to her mistress. In time Eadith grew to believe that Ada might die for her. (p.323)⁷³

The inmates of Eadith's "social orgasm", (p.351) form a living backdrop and are brought into momentary highlight only as the consciousness of their mistress requires. It is the house itself which is to form an ironic contrast to that other form of decadence, the remnants of the aristocratic ideal. Members of London's social élite are attracted, moth-like, to the bizarre setting of the "whore-mistress". (p.337) They linger as performers, or observers.

Madame Siderous, whose lineage can be traced to Hero Pavloussis,

⁷³ Ada, in common with many minor characters in White, seems to have close affinities with similar portrayals in Flaws in the Glass. Eddie feels for her an affection shared by White for Lizzie the young nurse of his childhood who becomes the object of life-long love.

volunteers to participate in the rites and is rewarded for her descent into the ultimate degradation of the flesh by the gift of a ring "on which an ancient black scarab was rolling in perpetuity a ball of agate dung". (p.340) Ursula Untermeyer is roused only intellectually by "the first madame she's met . . . rare objects are her obsession". (p.341) She is also given a ring, "a ruby carved in the form of a rose and set in a cluster of silver leaves". (p.345) She is, like the rose a concept rather than a living organism, essentially artificial, cut from the surface of the glittering society to which she uneasily clings. "She looked like an exquisite plank". (p.356) She and her brother are cushioned by wealth and position from the maturing process:

Longing in and out of season for the cosiness of the nursery fire, with Nanny and a fender to protect them from its perils, in their still childish middle age they hankered after other more perverse dangers which Nanny Trist was able to provide.
(p.355)

It is Lady Ursula's house which is the first in a series to be contrasted with Beckwith Street. The "columned façade" (p.355) shelters an interior in which only objects belong. "Eadith was led through a succession of smaller though no less imposing rooms filled with furniture too valuable to be lived on". (p.357) The house and its furnishings are works of art and as such are contrasted with Eadith's whores. "She aimed at cultivating in them that effect between the tremulous and the static which the flowers in an expensive florist's derive from artificial dew". (p.324) Each appeals to an aesthetic ideal; one is intellectualised, the other gratifies an instinctive appetite, but neither is a part of a renewing life-force.

The Untermeyer country-house is, however, less harshly observed. Like those belonging to the Lushingtons and the Twyborns, it has about it a flavour that is not distasteful to White. Time should have bred into possession an aura which extends beyond the moment and has at least the potential to succour and to warm. In both the Australian houses

generations have created at least the beginnings of a fine blending of instinct and intellect, symbolised, as so often in White, by the shabbiness of much-used furniture. "Wardrobes" should have a similar attraction, but finally fails to satisfy: "The house was cool to cold, furnished with mock simplicity to disguise genuine luxury". (p.371) Later a similar link is forged between Rose Cottage and Gravenor's "Folly" in East Anglia.

The difference between the potential of town and country houses is shown most clearly in the lands which surround "Wardrobes". Ursula, so much a part of her London mansion, is here at odds with the landscape. "She herself was as unnatural in that casually devised work of art, an English garden, as would have been a meticulously executed Persian miniature fallen amongst a herbacious border". (p.371) The jarring note in the episode comes from the people, not from the place. Life in the form of the garden has not been divorced from art. The bitchiness of the society that congregated within the walls has about it a failure of honesty which is contrasted with Beckwith Street. "You'll find 'Wardrobes' more like a whorehouse than baby would ever let herself see". (p.370) The analogy between the two is carried still further by the juxtaposition of the episode to the visit Eadith pays to Maisie, "the Victoria Station prostitute". (p.362)⁷⁴ Musing in what may well be her final illness, Maisie attempts to make a statement about truth and love:

'My trouble is - I've always been an amatcher. Not that I don't given an honest-to God professional fuck. And collect the money that's due for it. But I've always done it - now don't laugh, Eadie Trist - I done it for love. Whether it was with some Hindu steward, or Gyppo stoker, or poxy British corporal. That was how I built up me business. Anyway I think it was'.
(pp.362-3)

⁷⁴ A further light is cast on Ursula's house by the description of the prostitute's home. "Only on the attic floor did life return, in a flowering of crochet and knick-knacks, the lank bodies of empty dresses hanging half-hidden by a faded cretonne curtain, face powder merging with spilt flour, tea becoming grit on an unswept floor. It was pretty much of a mouse-hole, but snug". p.362.

The Untermeyer guests use sex as a part of a cynical grasping after power. Eadith attempts to find both an art form and a means of burning out the corrosive effects of lust. Maisie offers a gift, a moment of shared intimacy in which deceptions are set aside. In such a consideration the taking of money is incidental, as is any continuing relationship. Her speech is akin to that of the Australian captain, remembering the moment in France when he mounts an unknown farmer's wife. "In certain circumstances lust can become an epiphany". (p.417) Without shared language, or even understanding, they reach beyond the limitations of space and time:

'An' then this funny thing happened. It was not like I was just fuckin' a Frog woman with greased thighs. I reckon we were both carried, like, beyond the idea of orgasm. In my case I was too fuckin' tired. Just joggun along like it was early mornun, the worst of the frost just about over. As you doze in the saddle. The light as warm and soft and yellor as the wool on a sheep's back . . . it was like as if a pair of open wings was spreading round the pair of us.
(p.418)

Again the link is made between the created world and the lustful body; the imagery usually used for the former here bathes the latter. Such a potential is also to be found in Eadith's relationship with Gravenor. "He reminded her of the clear creeks running through her Australian childhood. Clear water flowing over sand, pebbles, skeleton leaves, a rusty tin, the possible discovery of a fortune in zircons". (p.316) But for Eadith the possibility of true communion through a moment of sexual intimacy seems barred. The only occasion in the London section where such a union takes place is the brief encounter with Gravenor's nephew, a moment which happens off stage and seems underplayed. It springs from generosity and a spirit of kinship in Eadith and is complete in itself, and as such is given few of the reverberations common to the high points of experience. The spirit in which she offers her body is closer to that in which she gives help to Maisie and moments later to Joannie Golson. All three are trials of physical commitment and as such bear a relation to the

lessons Voss has to learn as he journeys through the desert.⁷⁵

With Gravenor the aura of sexuality is not absent, their attraction for one another is frequently conveyed through tactile and sensual experience. "A little further on, in a peaceful stretch of road, he put out a hand and she accepted it. She must persuade herself to be grateful for the crumbs". (p.369) But it is limited. Physical communion and lust seem to be strictly separated. The series of meetings in settings which are themselves comments on the use of a house as anything but a home, culminates in the visit to East Anglia and Eadith's last temptation of the flesh.

⁷⁵ Blamires sees it differently: "This incident corresponds beautifully to the death-bed scene of Angelos Vatatzes when he whispers to Eudoxia: 'I have had from you, dear boy, the only happiness I have ever known'. (p.126) Eddie once more is the bestower of happiness, of self-acceptance and the way to confidence and hope. As whore-mistress he is the keeper of the temple of Aphrodite, and it is only the most privileged who is granted the totality and secrecy of the priestess's gift". Blamires. p.80.

IX

She spilled some gravy on her bronze tunic and fell to rubbing surreptitiously. All the stains in her life were concentrated in this greasy emblem as she rubbed and rubbed with the spotless napkin. She reduced it at last enough to satisfy her conscience. More startling was the bloody mark left on the napkin by nervous lips; he hid it with such vehemence he might have been sitting with Prowse among the mutton fat in Peggy Tyrrell's kitchen. (p.383)

In the last months of Eadith's life the persona which she has so carefully created begins to break down.⁷⁶ Increasingly the stubble of Eddie Twyborn is felt beneath the smooth cheek left by Fatma's "wax-and-honey treatment". (p.375) The face in the mirror begins to reflect both the self within and the progress towards psychic completion: "She stood bathing her face in front of the bathroom glass. He burped back at her, out of the past or the future. She felt the better for it, however." (p.381) The visit to "Wardrobes" has about it the flavour of courtship. "They went down like an engaged couple, hand in hand, or stars from an operette from which the organdy frills were missing". (p.372) It is though, as the imagery suggests, essentially artificial. The love relationship, experienced to the full, needs to be free from the layers adopted to protect the vulnerable consciousness. It is this failure in truth which damages the Parkers in The Tree of Man and it is, conversely, a total exposure of self which sustains Ellen Roxburgh and Jack Chance. The deception involved in hiding her masculine body is, in Eadith Trist, no more than an extreme version of a form of the role-playing which White sees as damaging to both committed relationships and individual coherence. It is this, together with the consideration of virtue and the possibility

⁷⁶ "For the invisible bird, throbbing and spilling like blood or sperm, had brought Eddie Twyborn to the surface. Abandoning what the Quirks would still work into their travelogue on a cosy occasion, he started skittering across the lawn, the brilliantly illuminated terrace into the house, in his ridiculous drag, the wisps of damp-infested cocks' feathers, trailing skirt, stockings soaked with dew." p.391.

of a transcendent spiritual existence, which brings about the complexity of the connexion between Eadith and Gravenor.

The relationship which the young Eudoxia shares with her elderly Greek is not imperilled by the knowledge of her true sex, but it is stimulated by the artifice of all that is invoked by the pomegranate shawl and the Vatatzes' fabled past. Harmless though such an imaginative decoration of event may seem to be, it is set against the mutter of a world soon to be at war. Eadith and Gravenor have also lived in a present which is sustained by illusion, an illusion which, in this context, is frequently seen to be no more than another version of the aristocratic failure to leave the nursery:

They sat holding hands regardless of the incised masks of the Mileses and Gileses, the Muffs and Cecilys, at Baby's party - all of them nourished on the boiled brains and milky rice prescribed by Nanny and rammed home by the under-nursemaids, the pap which under-housemaids, their cracked fingers black with coal dust, produced off trays, or in more impressive households, from the nursery hatch. (p.387)

Once more the final acts are to be played out against a backdrop of war.

War for the bawd of Beckwith Street is a time of universal licentiousness. The conventions uneasily maintained in peace-time disintegrate when juxtaposed with fear and the fragility of passing time. "As for the black-out, only puritans regretted what others saw as a cloak for normal human behaviour". (p.396) It is not a freedom which extends to Eadith herself, "sombre as a nun". (p.383) Her feeling for Gravenor appears to have a different basis. "Without so much as touching hands they were at once united in a sober bliss unrelated to their sensual bodies or the period of time in which they were living". (p.397) It is this basis which is finally tested in the "comfortable-primitive . . . place he had in Norfolk". (p.405)

It is a stripped landscape which awaits her as she makes her despondent journey. "From the direction of the sea came a steady moan insinuating itself between a low sky and a flat landscape. The

expectations of those walking through a pale light were duly flattened". (p.407) The monotony had a sinister echo. "In one place she noticed an armoured car, dun figures of the military, concrete dragon's teeth and pillboxes, to remind that this low-keyed war was not a fantasy". (p.408) The gaudy sexuality, the baroque finery, the great houses have merged into the prevailing greyness of England at war. All deceptions are taken from them, except the last:

Her clothes were almost falling off her as she struggled through the soft sandy soil held together by stones and the sea-plants which struggle to maintain themselves between salt air and sand. Her ankles were swelling, she thought. She must struggle back to the lover she had failed, and would continue failing because of the importance his illusions had for both of them. (p.411)⁷⁷

Lying together in the "stifling" (p.412) house, Gravenor comes near to a truth which might release them both. "'You're what I've always wanted, Eadith. Not that I can explain exactly. Not that I'd want to. It might be embarrassing for both of us. Baby would be horrified'".(p.413) The ambiguity to be found here is lessened by the letter he sends after their parting. His understanding appears to extend beyond the sexual impasse in which Eadith finds herself, into a recognition of the possibilities of a relationship which seems likely to carry White's approbation:

I like to think those other automata you and I created for ourselves out of our inhibitions were human beings underneath, and that we might have loved each other, completely and humanly, if we had found the courage. Men and women are not the sole members of the human hierarchy to which you and I also belong. (p.426)

Although it is immediately after she has read this that Eadith re-assumes the clothes of Eddie Twyborn, it is not to Gravenor that she goes. It is not a solution that either White or his protagonist seem able to accept. She needs, as her flight from Don Prowse makes clear, to be loved as a woman. "She tried to resent being called his [Gravenor's] darling like some whore-bride who had acquired the label along with an expensive

⁷⁷ The moment recalls Ellen's trek along the shore.

diamond ring; yet she knew it was what she would have chosen". (p.406)
 In White, potentially and actually, fulfilling relationships exist,⁷⁸
 but the usual limitation is to moments of heightened awareness.

Eadith's birth into the wrong body has shut her away from the fecund life-force that fills her dreams. The child Eddie Twyborn shared with Marcia was inevitably doomed. The children clamouring within Eadith Trist, as she sleeps uneasily beneath Gravenor's roof, are held and trapped by a life-denying fantasy:

She too had begun screaming as she tore free from the hospital sheets pinning her down. 'Can't I make you realise?' She lunged among the milling children, trying to gather them into her arms as though they had been flowers. 'Safe - as you'll never be outside'. (p.414)

The fantasy world she has created fails to sustain. The sexual role she has imposed on herself subjugates her potential children to a cosy unreality. "The safe, windowless room", (p.414) to which they have been relegated, keeps them from pain but denies them life:

To express his disgust, the pink stubbled boy bit into one of the blind nipples, then reeled back pointing, as did all the children, laughing vindictively as their adult counterparts might have, at the blood flowing from the wound opened in the source of their deception, down over belly and thighs, gathering at the crotch in such quantities that it overflowed and hid the penis. (p.414)

⁷⁸ See, for example, the Custances in Patrick White's "A Cheery Soul", The Burnt Ones (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964).

X

As on other painfully personal occasions the past began reaching out to Eadith through the shuddering of water which memory becomes visually, till out of time's wake, and this bloated body straining at the seams of its expensive black, surfaced Joannie Sewell Golson.

(p.365)

The re-appearance of Joannie, half-blind eyes staring from an "unresponsive pavement", (p.364)⁷⁹ announces the re-entry of Eadith's Australian past. "The ex-lovers, the ex-husbands, the ex-lives were all weighing on Eadith Trist". (p.392) The "E" of the diaries and the memories, for so long seeming to indicate the influence of the father, is in these final chapters to be replaced by the mother. Helpless Eadie Twyborn may have been to help her son solve his unresolvable dilemma, but here there is little hint of the blame that would earlier have been given. Mrs Justice Twyborn is not a dazzling socialite, neither is she a possessive and annihilating earth-mother. She is her son's alter-ego, condemned to pass her days in lesbian frolics or hunting her matted terriers for fleas. Mother and son have taken different paths from the tennis-court, but both end in war-drenched London, alienated from their homeland. Independently neither can return. The distortion of sexual identity has led to a distortion in growth from the roots. Both have in common the need to escape from the monotony of a contained and predictable world:

They [Eadith and Gravenor] drove through the grey fringes of London, a reality which did not cancel out the more brilliant frivolous world of Gravenor and Ursula and their friends, or the half-world of Beckwith Street. Eadith herself might have claimed that Maisie, the bronchial septuagenarian prostitute, had for her a reality which the

79 Her actual blindness recalls her earlier inability to see and understand.

Pierce states a common case when he finds the re-entry of Mrs Golson one of many strained coincidences: "In another of the rampant and unapologetic coincidences of the novel, Eadith is literally called upon to pick Joannie out of the gutter where she has fallen . . . These incidents together with the sovereign carelessness with which White shifts the locations of the novel, remind us that the mode of The Twyborn Affair is romance". Pierce. p.262.

housewives of Lambeth and Southwark would never convey. Whatever compassion she had in her was roused by overtones of purple, not by grey surfaces. No doubt the grey world would condemn her for coldness and 'perversion'.

(p.369)

Eadie's "corked on moustache" (p.60) and her flirtation with Joannie are steps along the same path which leads Eddie to attempt to carve a new and more acceptable self from the sleazier side of fantasy. Mother and child are each groping after an act of creation, an art form which again verges into fictionality. The fictive Eddie and Eadie attempt to create new and fitting fictional characters; characters which better express the self which is trapped out of sight of the mirror. "She began to wonder if her life was a collage of fantasies: her profitable whore-house, her love for Gravenor, the romantic dresses, the elaborate jewels". (p.392)

Eadith's bizarre and highly coloured world, because it contains a recognition both of the unreality itself, and of the human desires which lie beneath, sometimes expertly disguised, surfaces, comes nearer to fulfilling her needs than the "grey fringes" to which so much of the life described is limited:

Not that she aspired to heights. Experience in her several lives had left her with few illusions. She was sceptical of history, except at a ground floor level. She could not believe in heroes, or legendary actors, or brilliant courtesans, or flawless beauties, for being herself a muddled human being astray in the general confusion of life. (If she had been born all of a piece, she might have become a suburban housewife or, without those brakes which impede a woman's progress or downfall, a small-time down-to-earth whore).

(p.403)

Throughout the changing facets of her life-style Eadith has retained the ability to observe her own posturing. It is this which separates her, as it does her mother, from those who inhabit the "world of make-believe. At a church the curtain was going up on a fashionable wedding: at a house the guests, both invited and parasitic, were boring into a reception for a Balkan princess". (p.363) Mother and daughter's careers are paralleled not only through an heightened awareness and sexual insecurity, but

through a linking of the nun and the bawd. "The nun inside her [Eadith] would not allow evasion, any more than Gravenor's 'nymphomaniac' could resist the perversions of her own brothel and Maisie's pavement life". (p.364)

Eadie's time of sexual curiosity and social incongruity has passed. The "lip-stuck mouth", (p.404) "the matted coat and skirt", (p.377) have vanished, together with the judge, into a Sydney past. It is amongst London's churches that Eadith searches for and finds her mother. "She was dressed in the same black she had been wearing on recent occasions, her face as drained of human passion, the prayer-book held in black-gloved hands". (p.420) Their first conversation suggests that Eadie has found a spiritual answer which releases her from her earlier suffering. "'No, dogs were my best relationship - until the last one of all, which I shan't attempt to explain. You might find my naked spirit as embarrassing as my shrivelled body'". (p.424) Earlier Eadith had glimpsed her mother as they passed within touching distance on the escalator in the London underground. The imagery suggests that Eadie has found a completion for which her daughter still searches.⁸⁰ "As she [Eadie] was carried higher, she was staring straight ahead, her abstracted face drained of any human expression . . . Mrs Trist was received into the lower depths and the desirable anonymity of all those who sojourn there". (pp.404-5) The last pages of the work will suggest that in finding her mother Eadith will reach the only completion within her grasp. "Eadie said I must not fail Eadith now that I have found her Eadith Eddie no matter which this fragment of myself which I lost is now returned where it belongs". (pp.431-2)

⁸⁰ Her position seems close to Patrick White's own. "My own clumsy wrestling with what I see as a religious faith". Flaws in the Glass. pp.187-188.

But it is not as Eadith that we finally part with Eddie Twyborn, although he has claimed and has been given his mother's acceptance of an assumed sex. It is with shaven head and a "cheap suit bought in a hurry" (p.427) that Eddie goes to his death. The two forms of annihilation, war and the fragmentation of self, which have been interacting and interrelating for so long, finally fuse as the work ends. It is just before the moment when she is at last blest by the sight of her mother that Eadith decides to leave Beckwith Street and with it her fantasy-self:

As she sat in the pigeon-coloured light she knew she had begun to renounce what Ada was better able to cope with: a world of fragmentation and despair in which even the perversities of vice can offer regeneration of a kind.
(p.420)

The moment is important. It is one of decision and as such is contrasted with the earlier occasion in the underground. "Once more her will had faltered, the moment had eluded her. She would never find out. The answers were not for her". (p.405) Decision brings with it commitment and it is to a world at war. It is in the role of his earlier war-time self "despair running in the right direction" (p.427) that Eddie finally leaves the brothel. "I've decided to make the break tonight". (p.427) His decision is taken on the day that ends the false calm and brings bombs and disintegration to London's streets. "It was happening in the city its inhabitants' thought belonged to them". (p.429) The parallel is clear, for the twice-born Twyborn, the end is also to be found in a moment of useless destruction, but the choice has been made, the flight from the tennis-court has ended in acceptance. Sharing a last joke with Ada, the now clearly homo-sexual Eddie sets out on the road to commitment. "My frivolous self will now go in search of some occupation in keeping with the times". (p.427)

The search brings, ironically, fragmentation and a final shattering of the flawed mirror. No other end was possible for "the eyes of

fragmented blue"; (p.422) they could never gaze with completed vision. Eddie's death is linked with the destruction of a London which is also never to return. But White chooses not to leave us there, as the blood runs onto an alien pavement. Rather, he has Eddie's life end where it began, with Eadie as she dreams a last fantasy, one that contains in the symbol of the bulbul the regenerative vision of the poet:⁸¹

Sitting in the garden drying our hair together amongst
the bulbuls and the drizzle of taps we shall experience
harmony at last.

She loved the birds. As she dried her hair and
waited, a bulbul was perched on the rim of the stone bird-
bath, dipping his beak. Ruffling his feathers, he cocked
his head at her, shook his little velvet jester's⁸² cap,
and raised his beak towards the sun. (p.432)

81 Hena Maes-Jelinek points out that Eddie: "does have visions of death and possible re-birth, particularly his own. (p.376) The two happen together at the very end when in death Eddie 'flow[s] onward' (p.430) and re-enters his mother's womb". (p.432) Talking of the sunset she goes on, "that it should take place in the east may suggest a possibility of re-birth conveyed in her [Eadie's] final vision of the garden when the bulbul raises his beak towards the sun". "Altering Boundaries: The Art of Translation in The Angel at the Gate and The Twyborn Affair." WLWE Winter (1984). pp.171-72.

82 Ambiguity of intent is kept to the end. The bulbul is not only the poet, he is also the jester and as such he reminds us that these are the closing words of a tale.

XI

It is here that we complete the puzzle with which we began. In the sense in which we have found it in other novels there is no lasting moment of regenerative vision. Eddie Twyborn the man-child born to Eadie and Edward is not to be part of a renewing life-cycle. There is no affirmation at the end of this novel in the linear sense that has been given to Stan Parker, or the individual completion found by Elizabeth Hunter. Eddie Twyborn is one of God's "mistakes",⁸³ and as such must be removed from the tree of man, it is this sense of nihilism, of fatalism, of loss of affirmation, that makes for the discomfort experienced in reading The Twyborn Affair.⁸⁴ It is telling us something we would rather not know.

On a personal level Eddie lives on through the mind and memories of his mother back in the suburban garden where the roots of his childhood were planted. Universally his creation, with the power that it brings for empathy and a widening of vision, has led to the exploration set before us by the artist. In the end protagonist and writer are linked into perpetuity through the enhanced understanding, compassion and humour aroused by their experience.

In this novel as in all that have gone before, the battle to unite the needs of the instinct with that of the intellect in a common wholeness is at the heart of the meaning. Eddie has been a visionary since our first

⁸³ In the Making. pp.218-22.

⁸⁴ Some critics would argue that in this Eddie Twyborn follows on from Ellen Roxburgh. Karin Hansson states: "As the following discussion will show, I share his [Kirpal Singh's] opinion. Ellen Roxburgh's return to civilisation indicates defeat rather than triumph . . . she is not a successful mental explorer. The Ellen Roxburgh who returns to England . . . has proved unprepared for the supreme reality represented by the Australian Continent: her turning back indicates her voluntary abstention from the truth it conceals and which she has been granted to glimpse during a few precious moments". WLWE (1984). p.178. Manly Johnson would not agree: "But one should not forget the meticulously maintained balance between hope and despair in the extensive oxymorons that characterize his style. In The Twyborn Affair that balance persists to the very end. No work of White's has been honed to a finer concluding edge." Modern Fiction Studies. p.168.

encounter under the Provençal sun. Since the flight from the tennis court he has struggled to find a place for his intellectual self while allowing for the needs of the instinct, but his fight is too close to that of his maker for a final answer to be possible.⁸⁵ Like those that have gone before him, Eddie follows the downward spiral that accepts the needs of the flesh but the requirement of the artist to stay apart from his vision causes him to remain essentially an onlooker.⁸⁶ Only death can release the fragments of Eddie Twyborn and allow for the possibility of a new spiritual wholeness.

⁸⁵ The bond between writer and protagonist is made clear in Flaws in the Glass. "I was chosen as it were, and soon accepted the fact of my homosexuality. In spite of looking convincingly male I may have been too passive, or else I recognized the freedom being conferred on me to range through every variation of the human mind, to play so many roles in so many contradictory envelopes of flesh. I settled into the situation. I did not question the darkness in my dichotomy, though already I had begun the inevitably painful search for the twin who might bring a softer light to bear on my bleakly illuminated darkness". Flaws in the Glass. p.35.

⁸⁶ Pierce sees this rather differently: "Eddie Twyborn's life is not a drama of self-discovery . . . but an anguished, protracted effort to enact and accommodate what he long ago discovered about his essential nature". Pierce. p.262.

Conclusion

It has not been a part of my concern to trace the development of Patrick White's literary career. In concentrating on only four of the novels all of which fall into the late period, such a concern has been outside my brief, but in the bringing to a conclusion of this study a word on their place in his oeuvre seems appropriate.

The Vivisector and The Eye of the Storm have as their central issue the growth towards self-discovery of seekers who are apart not through madness, deformity or eccentricity but through their giftedness. Hurtle is the artist, separated from his fellows by a skill that amounts to genius; and more than that a sought-out member of society marked from childhood not only by his gifts but by his beauty. Beauty spills over into the next novel a continuity of theme, as has been remarked before, which is frequent in White. This time it is onto the fabled person of Elizabeth Hunter, in her beauty forms an outer shell which separates and sets her above her fellows and is accompanied by a more than usually generous share of worldly goods.

Both Hurtle and Elizabeth have to confront and come to understand, though not necessarily to change, the hard glitter that is a reflection of their gifts and that can distort and damage as much as it can comfort and illuminate. Elizabeth's beauty no less than the eye of the vivisector, is a two-edged weapon which isolates the owner and creates a particular form of the elect. Both of these works are fundamentally concerned with the role of the gifted outsider and in neither case is society allowed to govern their individuality. Each follows a route, at times through pain, to self-discovery that is not primarily concerned with the imposition of society's needs but which allows for an essentially isolated moment of illumination. Hurtle's struggle is with the pain and the effort to find an absolute of truth in the clarity of vision offered by his art;

Elizabeth's is with a confrontation in her eye of the storm with commitment, not to the adorned and social self, but to the integrity of the inner voice she has already experienced at her husband's death bed. Both learn to see with sharpened and honest vision. Hurtle finds the I in God, Elizabeth comes to accept that she is both the black swan and the common noddy. Elizabeth's experience will lead on to Ellen Roxburgh's, but for the moment I want to turn back to earlier work. Patrick White's early novels also concern the need for the elect to come to terms not so much with society as with their own inner needs. They are seekers but the final form of what they seek seems not always to be clear either to character or to author. Oliver Halliday shares a common predicament when at the close of Happy Valley he is left pondering an only half understood mystery:

Oliver saw the road move, heard Hilda say the things that she always said, because this was Hilda, also a voice speaking in the dark, Oliver, I understand. Hilda has found something that I have yet to find, though perhaps I am closer, moving along this line of wires, you can hear their hum, the almost disclosed secret of telephone wires, the rock with its meaning hidden, the harsh contour of the hills.¹

From The Aunt's Story on the role of "the burnt ones" within society becomes of increasing importance, but in the middle period novels, those from The Tree of Man to The Solid Mandala it is within a society which is a part of a re-enactment on Australian soil of the great European myths. The Solid Mandala marks a water-shed, it appears to bring to a head the theme found throughout White's novels, one with which I have been much concerned, that of the living and the dead combined in the plurality of existence. Arthur and Waldo Brown exemplify the two halves of the mandala, they are instinct and intellect personified (though each retains a measure of the other) but they are an end rather than a beginning. With the publication of The Vivisector comes a change, not so much of topic but of

¹ Happy Valley (London: Harrap, 1939), p.327.

emphasis. the concerns which have dominated the earlier writing are still of central importance, but the works become somehow nearer the bone. Although Patrick White has said of Waldo Brown "[he] is myself at my coldest and worst,"² he does not in common with earlier seekers appear to have a direct access to the authorial voice. Hurtle's dilemma as artist is clearly White's own and the socialite world of Elizabeth Hunter is painfully close to both his and his mother's, but it is not so much the autobiographical element in the sense of shared experience, as something harder to define which separates, at least these novels, from their predecessors. It is as if White has taken the vulnerable segments of his inner self and exposed them to the harsh light of experience; from these segments he has built the completed whole out of which he creates his earlier protagonists. In these last works he starts from the whole, the whole of self, and moves inwards. To do so he uses the same tools, paradoxically particularly that of the divided-self, but he no longer uses fragments of his own psyche to move outward into extended awareness, rather he moves inward to the confines of his own identity. Hurtle and Elizabeth are his alter egos, both set apart not by pain and humiliation but by gifts beyond the ordinary. Their struggle to self-discovery is the struggle to truth hampered by the demands of an ego shared with their author's, not that they are even in this merely autobiographical constructs but it is a vital element in their creation.

Many commentators have remarked on a greater social awareness in these novels. It is my feeling that it is not so much a greater awareness that sets them apart as a closer integration with "felt" experience. The Sydney of The Vivisectors and The Eye of the Storm is sharply focused and delineated because it is integrated into a world which is socially as well

² Flaws in the Glass. p.146.

as geographically White's own.³ The setting of, for example, The Tree of Man is also a part of Patrick White's lived experience, it has about it much evidence of his Castle Hill years, but the Parkers are observed rather than known in the intense sense in which Hurtle and Elizabeth are known. This movement inward into a private grappling with the struggle to self-discovery is marked by a cessation of much of the literary embroidery which had characterised earlier works, particularly Riders in the Chariot, a greater certainty has led to a quieter voice less concerned with the strained symbolism which so often jarred.

This last characteristic is also to be found in A Fringe of Leaves and The Twyborn Affair. Karin Hansson remarks this greater simplicity and goes on to suggest that A Fringe of Leaves marks "a new phase of development in White's fiction and a change of direction and concern." She continues:

On the whole commentators seem to agree that we find new features of diction and a different geographical span, but it is even more important to draw attention to the considerable shifts of emphasis and spiritual commitment introduced by this novel, especially since these are partly suggested by imagery and structure well integrated into the flow of the narration itself.

. . . In addition to this new "tragic" aspect, which is related to the individuation process rather than to the quest for mystical unity which was the central theme of the preceding books, a number of other features indicate a change of direction and scope. We no longer find the same foregrounding effects brought about by stylistic idiosyncracies, the characteristic image clusters are missing, and only a couple of the former central symbols remain. The narrative, dramatic and factual elements have become more dominant, and the cumulative effect implying that components of symbolic significance are carried over from one novel to another is no longer evident. . . . The impression of such a change is also fortified by The Twyborn Affair. Religious issues, such as the symbolic "crucifixions" and the notion of identity between man and God, are toned down in favour of the social and psychological ones, and the novel does not to the same extent as the others allow of allegorical readings.⁴

³ This argument also holds for The Twyborn Affair although not for A Fringe of Leaves, the latter is a part of the same creative impulse and shares some, though not all, of their characteristics. It is much concerned with social roles not only in the characterisation of Ellen but also in an interaction between the various societies portrayed, and with comparisons between them.

⁴ Karin Hansson, The Warped Universe. pp.247-8.

At the time of the publication of A Fringe of Leaves it seemed to be a natural progression from earlier work, a movement into a greater simplicity, lucidity and social awareness which is not an uncommon process on the part of a mature writer. The publication of The Twyborn Affair conversely seemed to be a sport, an outrageous, humorous and pain-filled joke at the expense of writer and reader and, perhaps particularly, of critics. Reaching the end of this study I realise I no longer feel this, rather it now seems to be A Fringe of Leaves which is a step aside, an hesitation, and The Twyborn Affair which feels a natural successor to earlier work.⁵ Not that in so defining it I wish to set it at the peak of his achievement, indeed there is a fragmentary quality, particularly in the last section, which although it accords with the thematic intentions of the work seems to be shared with Flaws in the Glass⁶ and to suggest too close an alliance with autobiographical material. To find a resolution for Eddie Twyborn may well be an impossibility when to do so would mean the need to find a resolution for a life still in the process of being lived.

In spite of the close bond with his creator Eddie is not, anymore than Ellen Roxburgh, set apart by the same pattern of giftedness which has distinguished Hurtle Duffield and Elizabeth Hunter, (both of whom are elect not only in the spiritual sense but in ways which have more than a dash of the worldly). What separates these last two seekers and what differentiates them from earlier illuminates is their mutual insecurity of

⁵ Patrick White seems to think so "In my own opinion my three best novels are The Solid Mandala, The Aunt's Story and The Twyborn Affair . . . After years two of them were accepted; it remains to be seen what will become of The Twyborn Affair". Flaws in the Glass. p.145.

⁶ Flaws in the Glass while providing useful insights into the mind of the writer and moments of humour and vigour, lacks the structure, the controlled coherence and strength apparent in almost all his work.

role. An insecurity which Flaws in the Glass makes clear they share with their author. Both are essentially pliable, both have about them a plasticine quality which allows, or demands, the continual forming of new roles and patterns of behaviour. Both have to search beneath the layers of imposed identity for a secure and honest inner core. Both have moments of harmony with the natural world and moments of communion shared with others, in neither is it possible to be certain of a final and lasting regenerative vision. Both are barren, denied even the procreation given to Hurtle through his art. Both have to engage with the need to find paths to commitment against the power of an intense inner urge to stand apart.

The quiet voice and gentle authority of A Fringe of Leaves gives it lasting appeal, but its historical content sets it apart from the main run of White's work not so much because to use a clear source is a rarity for him, but because it enforces a distancing from the protagonist not so much for reader as for writer. The core of Ellen's identity stems from her originator, as must by definition all fictive creations, but in spite of bonds which unite her with the Eddie to come the germ of her creation is external to White, and as such she remains. Much of the lucidity which characterises A Fringe of Leaves together with the relaxed tone stems from the distance which time has lent Eliza Fraser trudging along the shores of her island of possibility. White sees her from the outside in. He empathises with her predicament gives it vigour and uses it to explore concerns which are central to this last fiction but it is not burnt out of him in the pain of creation as Eddie is to be.

She is nevertheless a natural part of the structure of these last four works in which the central dilemma of the protagonists reflects a vision which White has turned in upon himself. The role playing of The Twyborn Affair and A Fringe of Leaves is shared with their author; as is the sense of being one of an elect which characterises Hurtle and

Elizabeth. All four are a part of the search for self-discovery which continuous throughout his work is refined to a painful and cutting edge in these last works. To make such a quest the centre of his vision is inevitably to commit to a battle which is reflected in the words with which I shall conclude:

What do I believe? I am accused of not making it explicit. How to be explicit about a grandeur too overwhelming to express, a daily wrestling with an opponent whose limbs never become material, a struggle from which the sweat and blood are scattered on the pages of anything the serious writer writes? A belief contained less in what is said than in the silences. In pattern on water. A gust of wind. A flower opening. I hesitate to add a child because a child can grow into a monster, a destroyer. Am I a destroyer? this face in the glass which has spent a lifetime searching for what it believes, but can never prove to be the truth. A face consumed by wondering whether truth can be the worst destroyer of all.⁷

⁷ Flaws in the Glass. p.70.

Conclusion

II

Finally a brief attempt to clarify what I have been trying to do on the preceding pages. I am not intending to make a claim for this thesis larger than it should bear when I say that in writing it paramount to my mind has been a conviction shared with my author that of the primacy of the need for integrity and truth. The methodology that I have chosen, relying as it does on a process of exegesis, seems to me to come as near as is possible to the furthering of these central criteria. Sensitive and thoughtful though many of Patrick White's commentators have been (and some have been neither) the overwhelming bulk of what they have written has placed an unacceptable emphasis on a selection of material chosen to bolster a particular approach of their own choosing and has largely failed to allow White's work to speak for itself. I am aware of the precariousness of this argument even as I make it. It can fairly be claimed that such an indictment of critical apparatus sweeping as it is, calls for a return to the text unhampered by evaluation on the one hand, and on the other ignores the processes of selection with which I have myself inevitably been engaged. My only answer can be that Patrick White is incontrovertably a difficult writer. His books do speak for themselves, but their density and ambiguity can come between him and the wider audience that he deserves and by whom he wishes his works to be read. In the sixties he claimed that his books remained unread, on the library shelves. Personal experience should support the suggestion that the case is not so very different today, in spite of the acclaim which appears to surround him. Further the contradictory quality of much of the criticism which his works have attracted suggests that there must still be considerable misunderstanding of what he has been saying, even by those who might be supposed to be best able to follow the complexities of his thought.

What I have been trying to do is in itself a difficult task, any one page of Patrick White's provides a multiplicity of possible interpretations, and as such each page is, both fruitful and dangerous; each can be expanded to encompass the whole of what appear to be the thematic intentions of the work and in so doing each can also distort. My task has been to try to extrapolate from the text the recurrent motifs, symbols and incidents which together make up the thematic core of the work. In so doing I have tried to remain open to what is being said moment by moment and to recognise the numerous ways in which the central meaning subtly shifts and changes. The heightened register of the visionary moments can overwhelm both the ironic, and often gently deflationary tone and the mass of significant detail with which they are surrounded. It is this process together with a tendency to continue to the point of stridency with a favourite device long after it has been milked dry of meaning that can irritate and obscure the intention of the work. I have tried, while not ignoring the inevitable effects of such tendencies, to follow the creative processes of the texts themselves. In each Patrick White has attempted to retain the values of instinctive life while engaging with a process which is by its nature inevitably intellectual. In each of the four novels with which I have been concerned it is the creative flux which is the dominant mode. Insofar as it is possible within the inflexible form of the printed page White has tried to create an ephemeral and shifting substance which shares the quality of life itself. He is not concerned with a final and essentially simplifying message. He is engrossed with flux and rhythm and any attempt at interpretation must take on board the seemingly obdurate and the contradictory and recognise that what is being offered is an attempt to sift a meaning from the recalcitrant and changing moments that are a part of the life process. Ellen Roxburgh alone and afraid in the transitory higger-mugger of the blacks camp tries to find a pattern to live by, her author tells her,

and us, that life, pulsing, finite and infinite, life resists such a pattern, as do his works.

Finally, I have not in the course of my study been much concerned, as I have said elsewhere, with evaluative judgements, but now I would like briefly, and at this last opportunity, to come down from the fence and defend my choice and my task. I believe Patrick White to be one of the most significant authors writing in English today. He is flawed, but so was Shakespeare, he is intensely irritating, but so was Lawrence. He is not, as Leonie Kramer has said, a writer of the intellectual power of a Dostoevsky, neither as she has also said,¹ do his words sparkle with the comedy and often bitter vitality of a Dickens, but neither are they lessened by such a judgement. No one major artist need stand comparison with another. His has been a massive contribution not only to Australian literature, and to Australia, but to the world.

¹ In an interview with Leonie Kramer in 1980 she stressed to me her belief that White ultimately fails by such comparisons.

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