

DISSOCIATION AND WHOLENESS IN PATRICK WHITE'S FICTION

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## ABSTRACT

Patrick White is a man divided: one part of him strives for permanence, surety, the ideal, while knowing the contingent, temporal realm he inhabits must inevitably undermine such striving. The desire, and the knowledge of its futility, leads him into a misanthropic devaluation of human creative possibility and, complementarily, into the arbitrary use of imposed symbolic resolutions directed to an elect who can "see". It has been this part of White, largely, that criticism has been industrious in explicating, if not in quite the terms I have used above. But there is another part of White which strains away from the former dualism of idealism and despair, significance and banality, towards a vital wholeness to be apprehended in human relationships. It is this aspect of White which embodies his genuine novelistic power and which, consequently, helps us to understand and "place" the former "cerebral" response to the complexity of finding meaning in the twentieth-century.

The present study deals with four novels in four

chapters, and briefly discusses a fifth in an epilogue. It opens with an introduction in which I link the division found in White to T.S. Eliot's theory of the "dissociation of sensibility", and so to the major modernists, Eliot, Yeats, and Lawrence. I then devote a chapter to each of The Aunt's Story (1948), Riders in the Chariot (1961), The Vivisector (1970), and A Fringe of Leaves (1976). The main thrust of these chapters is to demonstrate how White's development as a writer moves from ambivalence toward his vision, through a compensatory rigid dualism, to an increasing awareness and acknowledgement of the reality that creative relationship offers. The epilogue comments briefly on White's most recent novel, The Twyborn Affair (1979), in which he indulges many of the predilections he had sufficiently "placed" through the writing of A Fringe of Leaves. Evidence that White has not forgotten the discoveries of Fringe is present, but in a tenuous form. Though White's creativity is of major status, the divisions that tend to undermine it still have a powerful hold on him.

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## A NOTE ON EDITIONS AND REFERENCES

The editions of White's work used in this study are as follows (listed chronologically):

Happy Valley. London: Harrap, 1939.

The Living and the Dead (1941). London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962.

The Aunt's Story. New York: Viking, 1948.

The Tree of Man. New York: Viking, 1955.

Voss. New York: Viking, 1957.

Riders in the Chariot. New York: Viking, 1961.

The Burnt Ones. New York: Viking, 1964.

The Solid Mandala. New York: Viking, 1966.

The Vivisector. New York: Viking, 1970.

The Eye of the Storm. New York: Viking, 1973.

The Cockatoos. New York: Viking, 1974.

A Fringe of Leaves. New York: Viking, 1976.

The Twyborn Affair. New York: Viking, 1979.

Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait. London: Jonathan Cape, 1981.

All references to these works are incorporated into the

text through bracketed page numbers following the quotation.

I have occasionally used the abbreviation FG to designate

Flaws in the Glass.



## INTRODUCTION

In 1963 Margaret Walters established the terms for a solid, balanced response to White's work:

The grandeur of White's aspirations, and his often compelling brilliance, are undoubted. In fact it is because of this "grandeur" that we need so urgently to discriminate in his work between the false rhetoric and the truly exploratory use of language; between the passages which are pretentious and mystifying, and those which reveal new depths of experience. The central question raised by his works is whether he establishes significance in dramatic terms--or whether in the last count his attempt to work through myth and symbol is an evasion of the complexities of actual life, and of artistic creation as well.<sup>1</sup>

My purpose in this study is to demonstrate that while White often establishes significance in dramatic terms--and with a compelling force that warrants the term "major"--at the same time he strains away from the significance so evoked in an attempt to place the centre of novelistic interest and human value solely within the character who has a direct link to a transcendent realm of wholeness. The result of his wanting to locate wholeness beyond the world we live in is an overt devaluing of human life. White forces a split between the transcendent realm

of significance to which his visionaries gain occasional access, and the banal, quotidian actuality in which we live our alienated lives. This "gap"<sup>2</sup> leads to the dualisms which are everywhere apparent in White; of mind/body, spirit/flesh, individual/society, permanence/flux, abstract/concrete, deformed/healthy, and so on.

The dualisms are only a symptom of a deeper problem, however. For Patrick White is a man dissociated, a man who strives for surety, permanence, and the ideal, while knowing all too well the empirical reality, the contingent, temporal world which undermines schemes of permanence. The dissociation urges him into a restless experimenting. He seeks surety by imposing mental constructs on the novels; symbolic patterning overshadows the life that arises in the interaction of characters. Rather than a complex of thought, emotion, and intuition entering into a creative relationship with the material, the cerebral aspect of White's sensibility assumes dominance. What follows, as I said, is a devaluing of human life and the wholeness that can be found in relationship. Intent on surety, White misses, largely, the fulfilment, though not permanence, human life can offer, and which his novelistic art, through dramatic realization, can direct him to.<sup>3</sup> He

clings to extrinsic systems while knowing they are stop-gap measures and don't answer the issue.

This tension forces complex human issues into the fore-front of his fiction--primarily the issue of how meaning and value are found and maintained in human life. In the large part of his canon, the desire for surety results in an "evasion of the complexities of actual life" through the suggestion of a transcendent realm glimpsed by the elect in epiphany and only reached in madness or death. The suggestion is the combined effect of the overarching symbolic designs<sup>4</sup> which make the novelistic experience point one way, and the "oracular statements"<sup>5</sup> which reinforce the dualistic split between significance and banality. But this evasion, through symbolism and assertion, accompanies a sincere, if wrongheaded, response to the complexity of the situation. If misanthropy and solipsism attend the sincerity they do not cancel it. White is consistently concerned with discovering meaning and value in a world he feels is devoid of them. The sincerity is witnessed to in the sheer technical skill and imaginative energy he displays in his continued wrestlings with the task he has set himself: to help "people a barely inhab-

ited country with a race possessed of understanding."<sup>6</sup>

It is witnessed to, as well, in the genuine life that does get into the novels. White's spiritual and ethical concerns--being real concerns, and those of a novelist--necessarily involve him in close exploration of characters' lives. The result of this detailed treatment, of course, is that the characters so invested with life by him threaten to escape his confining grasp--that part of White that wants to impose a symbolic pattern of significance. He responds by thwarting the growth, truncating the development before it escapes from his control completely. He may, consequently, as John Colmer says, often only be presenting a "symbolist form . . . as a solution to a humanist dilemma",<sup>7</sup> but in hitting on this solution he joins the prestigious company of the high modernists. White's major status for us lies in the fact that the sincerity of his concern, his continual wrestling with the issue, finally forces him out of the cul de sac his desire for surety had forced him into. He recognizes that the symbolist route is no solution unless the symbolism is firmly rooted in human experience. The terms of this recognition are what White explores so fruitfully in A Fringe of Leaves.

Though Fringe may be his most unequivocal success, there is a substantial part of White's corpus that manifests the powers of an assuredly major figure. The portions which genuinely "reveal new depths of experience", however, are seldom separate from problematic contexts. Within parts of works, within certain relationships, when the material grips him firmly, we see White's real novelistic genius. In Theodora Goodman's childhood, and later relationship with Huntly Clarkson in The Aunt's Story, in Himmelfarb's relationships with his wife Reha and with Mary Hare in Riders in the Chariot, in Hurtle Duffield's relationship with Nance Lightfoot in The Vivisector, there is much to show us what being fully human means, before the authorial impositions stifle the creativity. An important challenge for the critic, then, is to develop an ability to see, within the restrictive compass White's symbolic designs impose on the novels, the "new shoots",<sup>8</sup> as Lawrence would have it, which indicate new life, new creativity, and point toward a wholeness which human beings can embrace as their own.

As well as not seeing adequately the genuine life in White's canon, criticism has not recognized how White's

development over the years shows an increasing awareness and acknowledgement of this life, of the reality that can close the gap in his fiction by pulling together the extremes of idealism and empiricism.<sup>9</sup> My argument maintains that the elements of this reality were there all along, but demanded a genuinely engaged and courageous criticism which could evoke their power and so provide the limiting and placing judgement of the dualist mode. The only person who has made the sufficient criticism is White himself. The development from the straitjacket of Riders to the wholeness of Fringe is ample proof of this. If The Twyborn Affair swings indulgently the other way again, this does not mean that the knowledge of Fringe has been lost, as I show in the epilogue; it means that White is a human being living in a dissociated century, and that--like the rest of us who are familiar with the "suffocatingly cozy", self-centred, corner of life that our modern culture tells us is all of life--he is susceptible to the same message coming from the larger part of his canon. Real courage is necessary even to attempt to come out of the corner to the "new world outside".<sup>10</sup> The work of our major authors, White included, is a record of such attempts.

Consequently criticism--evaluation and judgment--

is essential if White's importance as a twentieth century writer is not to be blurred. As late as 1980 we were getting general introductions to his work. Brian Kiernan's book is only the most recent of a long line of introductory studies which includes those of Geoffrey Dutton, R.F. Brissenden, Barry Argyle, and Ingmar Björkstén.<sup>11</sup> If Kiernan makes some accurate critical observations, they are interspersed with page after page of material we all are aware of. His time would have been far better spent had he focused on a smaller number of works and done a thorough job. Thoroughness, or at least a movement in that direction, would involve an acceptance of the challenge to criticism that White, as a "modern" writer, to broaden the perspective somewhat, presents to us. For modern literature, as Lionel Trilling says,

. . . is directed toward moral and spiritual renovation; its subject is damnation and salvation. It is a literature of doctrine which, although often concealed, is very aggressive. The occasions are few when criticism has met this doctrine on its own fierce terms. Of modern criticism it can be said that it has instructed us in an intelligent passivity before the beneficent aggression of literature. Attributing to literature virtually angelic powers, it has passed the word to the readers of literature that the one thing you do not when you meet an angel is wrestle with him.<sup>12</sup>

The refusal of criticism to wrestle with the literature is not without consequences. Trilling quotes Saul Bellow's indictment of modern criticism for its culpability in engendering, with modern literature, a doctrine of alienation which concludes that "modern society is frightful, brutal, hostile to whatever is pure in the human spirit, a waste land and a horror"<sup>13</sup>:

The critics must share the blame. . . They too have failed to describe the situation. Literature has for several generations been its own source, its own province, has lived upon its own traditions, and accepted a romantic separation or estrangement from the common world.<sup>14</sup>

The challenge to criticism, as I see it, is twofold: first, to oppose the doctrine of alienation from a firmly rooted perspective in "the common world". And second, because opposition does not necessarily mean rejection, to register the authentically new life, outlined above, that is in modern writing, that extends and reinvigorates the common world. For it is this life that has given the authors who embody it major status.

I am concerned in this dissertation to show that the dualism encountered in White's work is not the settled state of humanity, that wholeness does not entail a transcendent realm which arbitrarily harmonizes earthly



conflict. This does not mean that I see White's work expressing secular humanism, as Leonie Kramer does.<sup>15</sup> To do so would simply be advocating the other side of the dualist position. Rather, I see White's work gradually overcoming the split between significance and banality, transcendent reality and human nullity, as it expresses his understanding of the wholeness that creative relationship can bestow. The spiritual dimension in White is transformed gradually from an arbitrary and unconvincing imposition into a moving reality which gains in authenticity by being the natural outcome of, and on a continuum with, human relationships. The features of this transformation are explored most clearly in the novelistically enacted "debate" between the Lord God of Hosts and the God of Love in A Fringe of Leaves.

White's dualism, and recourse to extrinsic symbolic systems, before Fringe, is a symptom of the "dissociation of sensibility" that Eliot and other modern writers have recognized as a challenge to themselves as literary artists. The recognition was elicited by their inheriting the no-longer-solid world picture bequeathed them by the nineteenth century:

The nineteenth century, shortly characterized, can be seen as a time of shattered structures, of centrifugal forces, of sharp contrasts in immediate juxtaposition. The various parts of mental and spiritual life that had, until the nineteenth century, been united in one, even if weakening tradition, now began to diverge, to become independent of one another ... [The] expansion [of scientific habits of thought] was peculiarly glorious in that possibilities seemed infinite ... and peculiarly formidable because bridges had to be burnt, the human personality in its ancient harmonious conception to be discarded ...

The loss of the conception of personality as the centre of the universal forces from which the universe itself was governed presents the psychological aspect of the loss of the traditional world picture .... Because of this loss, the new pictures were coloured with an extreme pessimism ... and often these views were held simultaneously, for extremes are mysteriously linked and tend to swing from one to the other with no diminution of their contrasts.

From the middle of the century, the materialistic-positivistic trend, which derived mind from matter and hence led in the direction of a levelling under-estimation of the mind, increasingly prevailed. Followed to its logical conclusion, this total denial of human self-determination led to a weakening of volitional life and into pessimism .... Specialization supervened as a means of self-preservation.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting that both Yeats and Lawrence, as well as Eliot, saw the problem they were confronted with arising in an even earlier dissociation of thought and feeling, intelligence and sensibility, than that recorded here by van Heerikhuizen. Eliot's formulation is, of course, the most well known:

The difference is not a simple difference of degree between poets. It is something which had happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord

Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning; it is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet.... In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered ... while the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude. [emphasis mine]<sup>17</sup>

Here is Yeats:

... Cervantes and Boccaccio, the Greek plays ... these men, divided from one another by so many hundreds of years, had the same mind. It is we who are different .... (Yeats, "First Principles") [emphasis mine]

[Spenser] was the first of many Englishmen to see but what he desired to see ... There are moments when one can read neither Milton nor Spenser, moments when one recollects nothing but that their flesh had been partly changed to stone.... (Yeats, "Edmund Spenser")<sup>18</sup>

And here is Lawrence:

With the Elizabethans the grand rupture had started in the human consciousness, the mental consciousness recoiling away from the physical ... an old fear seemed to dig into the English soul at the time of the Renaissance. Nothing could be more lovely and fearless than Chaucer. But already Shakespeare is morbid with fear, fear of consequences. (Lawrence, "Introduction to His Paintings")

From this [new] belief the world began gradually to form a new State ... in which the Self should be removed ... Hamlet ... is his prototype, a mental creature, anti-physical, anti-sensual. The whole drama is the tragedy of the convulsed reaction of the mind from the flesh, of the spirit from the self .... (Lawrence, "Twilight in Italy")<sup>19</sup>

L.C. Knights shows this dissociation of thought from sensibility, this split, finally, between the

individual ego and the world it inhabits--where thought uses everything else as fodder to feed its conception--, coming about in Bacon's prose:

Bacon's figures of speech are forensic, intended to convince or confound. Some are used simply as apt illustrations of particular points; some serve to impose on the reader the required feeling or attitude. In neither kind is there any vivid feeling for both sides of the analogy such as we find in more representative Elizabethans.... in Bacon the analogues only have value for the support they offer to his demonstration. I think it is true to say that Shakespeare's metaphorical complexity, by means of which a new meaning emerges from many tensions, is the development of modes of perception pervasive in the prose of the time and directly derived from the normal processes of living. But the characteristically Shakespearean manner, depending as it does on the maximum range of sensitive awareness, is diametrically opposed to the Baconian manner, which represents a development of assertive will and practical reason at the expense of the more delicately perceptive elements of the sensibility. You see this especially in Bacon's images taken from Nature. In my own reading of Bacon I have found only one passage that indicates any sense of the creative life behind the natural phenomena that he observes.... Almost as much as his explicit philosophy, Bacon's prose style is an index of the emergence of the modern world.<sup>20</sup>

An irony of the modern period is that while reacting against the Baconian mechanization of life and mind, its writers often reintroduce that mechanization in the very solutions they offer. White, of course, is ostensibly on Knights's side against Bacon, defending the "more delicately perceptive elements of the sensibility" against "practical

reason". He says, in fact, "I don't reject [reason] but I think intuition is more important . . ." <sup>21</sup> Yet his cerebral systems of symbols manifest a lack of regard for the life they are imposed on that is similar to the disregard Knights sees in Bacon. We have the grand designs, the "oracular statements", the dominating conceptions, thwarting the new life which "emerges from many tensions". Examples are the sacrifice of Huntly Clarkson to Theodora Goodman's author-endorsed quest for transcendence in The Aunt's Story, of Harry Rosetree to the extrinsic symbolic system that White imposes on Riders in the Chariot, and of Hurtle Duffield's victims to his "divinely inspired" vision in The Vivisector. As White comes to understand this process more clearly, however, and to see its destructive implications, he calls it "vivisection"--a word with enough scientific overtones to indicate White's awareness of the direction his dissociation is taking him.

As I have shown, White's awareness of his dissociation is shared by the major modernists ("it is we who are different", Yeats; "from which we have never recovered", Eliot). These authors are major because they find it impossible "to see but what they desire to see"; they diagnose

the problem while living within it; in them literature is Arnold's "criticism of life". The problem, however, is fraught with difficulties and the creative/critical solutions proffered are often, as with White, "evasion[s] of the complexities of actual life".

Yeats, for example, first escapes to the sentimental wholeness of the Celtic twilight. Upon recognizing his indulgence he rebounds in an opposed direction, into the esoteric, private order of A Vision. Though Yeats apparently needed these systems as impetus for his poetry, we recognize that it is the poetry itself which pulls Yeats together, that shows us where the truth is.<sup>22</sup> We don't need to know the "vision's" meaning of the "gyre" to understand "The Second Coming" (though the knowledge won't hurt us). Similarly, John Colmer says, "it should be possible to examine the ideas of duality and unity in White without continuous recourse to either Jungian or theological terms. After all, he is a writer of fiction not of technical psychology or Christian apologetics, an explorer of reality, not a psychologist or priest."<sup>23</sup>

Eliot also escapes: first to aestheticism--his "theory" of impersonality; and finally, after acknowledging the persistent efforts of his personality to have a say in

his poetry,<sup>24</sup> to Anglicanism. Though this latter is not private, it is orthodox, and as such provides a system which arbitrarily solves the problems. But, again, the poetry itself is where the life is--not beyond, but here. Since Eliot's situation is analogous to White's, F.R. Leavis's exhaustive examination, in The Living Principle, of Eliot's paradoxical greatness is a central influence on this study.

Lawrence also manifests problems of dissociation but shows, I believe, clues to a way back to wholeness. This is so because, despite the fact that the nineteenth-century loss of faith in the social contract is reflected in his work, Lawrence continues to deal with human relationships. Where Joyce and Woolf gradually rejected the social matrix for a meaning to be found in form, Lawrence realized that the life of the novel was in the relationships between people or nowhere. Trying to revamp the social matrix led him into his own evasions in, first, the middle "leadership" period of will and power, and finally, as a response to the former aberration, in the "mythic" period of "tenderness", a lyrical or pastoral mode--away from the problems.

However, the focus on human relationships did

result occasionally in work which enacts a wholeness in human life which overcomes dissociation and "places" it with an awareness whose power can only have a salutary influence on a tradition languishing in the morass of twentieth-century scepticism. In The Rainbow, Women in Love and, to be selective, short pieces such as "The Thimble", "Odour of Chrysanthemums", "Daughters of the Vicar", and, in a more allegorical vein, "The Man Who Loved Islands", Lawrence bodies forth, and does not betray, the truth that human wholeness is to be found in a human world, that without the matrix of relationships in which we live we have no chance of becoming fully ourselves:

The fact remains that when you cut off a man and isolate him in his own pure and wonderful individuality, you haven't got the man at all. You've only got the dreary fag-end of him ... We have our very individuality in relationship. Let us swallow this important and prickly fact. Apart from our connections with other people, we are barely individuals; we amount, all of us, to next to nothing. It is in the living touch between us and other people, other lives, other phenomena that we move and have our being. Strip us of our human contacts and of our contact with the living earth and the sun, and we are almost bladders of emptiness.<sup>25</sup>

Lawrence's recognition of the central importance of relationships to human wholeness is continuous with what he understands as the significance of the novel: "The novel



is the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered."<sup>26</sup> The novel shows us what human wholeness is, not in any theoretical way, but because it enacts both the relationships which allow life, and those which stifle it. We can see a novel go dead when the author's intellectual, emotional, moral or whatever predilection begins to dominate the movement of the relationships.

The understanding of human wholeness which informs this study, then, is taken over from the literary critical use of the term to describe a successful piece of literature. Brian Lee elucidates the connection:

Literary criticism has always had such a 'concept' of wholeness--and has not generally had to discover a scientific terminology for it. It has had more power perhaps for being understood without being expressed. We assume that the play, poem or novel is a whole if it is a success, that it will 'stand up to' analysis: we will not 'murder to dissect'. If a poem does not survive the attention of analysis it can be anything from somewhat wanting to being no poem at all. And criticism generally stops with the particular text--it does not cure anything except perhaps the corruption of literary taste; and it has defended this instinct against most psycho-analytical literary criticism which has dishonoured the traditional sense of wholeness in its demand for explanatory 'causes'. Criticism, where it is benevolent, wishes to honour the living whole that can even be made out of disordered life, or a disordered life. Perhaps, ideally, for criticism, people are like poems; as, for Milton, one should try to become 'the true poem'.<sup>27</sup>

Wanting to give a sense of the life on which my argument depends, I have quoted liberally; too much is better than too little when what is at issue is a reader's desire for a context in which to place the commentator's observation. And, finally, the critic is not attempting to replace the text but to elucidate and evaluate it. Wherever I can I let White's words supply the necessary judgement.

This is, in turn, the reason behind the choice of only four novels for study. The argument demands a detailed engagement with the novels in order to overcome the charges of ill-will that have bedevilled adverse White criticism.<sup>28</sup> I have tried to choose those novels which best exemplify the dissociation in its various manifestations. The Aunt's Story (1948) presents Theodora Goodman's solipsistic quest for wholeness through madness as an alternative to the intractable banality of the world she inhabits. This is the solution White had found to Joe Barnett's question in The Living and the Dead: "I love Eden, he said, but what can this do for the world, the sick, stinking world that sits in the stomach like a conscience? He was helpless" (p. 262). In both Happy

Valley (1939) and The Living and the Dead (1941) White tries to deal with a social world from the outside and finds that he can't do it. Theodora's option is the result, though White is clearly not wholly convinced by it. The Tree of Man (1955) and Voss (1957) both extend White's exploration of the possibility of illumination and transcendent wholeness. But both, as articles by Margaret Walters and others suggest,<sup>29</sup> fail to engage the problems an exploration in this direction entails. Riders in the Chariot (1961) embodies these problems clearly in their most extreme manifestation. The Solid Mandala (1966) is a lesser work in the same vein as Riders, and though it does begin to question some of the premises of the earlier novel, the real questioning appears in The Vivisector (1970). White isn't able, finally, to extend the novelistic condemnation of Hurtle Duffield's vivisectory mode of living to the point that it becomes a sustained criticism of the solipsistic quest for significance; but he is certainly aware of the "new world outside" and only lacks the courage to climb through the break his own creativity has made in the wall. In The Eye of the Storm (1973) he stands on the threshold, so to speak. The possibility of illumination exists side by side with the

wholeness to be found in relationship. This dual tension would be remarkable if we could say it was wholly a study of Elizabeth Hunter. We can't however; White is still entangled with his protagonist. In A Fringe of Leaves (1976) he achieves the necessary distance and presents a study of human wholeness emerging from dissociation.

## NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Margaret Walters, "Patrick White", New Left Review, No. 18 (1963), p. 39

<sup>2</sup>The "gap" has not gone unnoticed. The word comes from Alan Lawson, who in his "Review Essay on Problems in White Criticism", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, XXI, 2, (Summer, 1979), 280-295, quotes the following passage from William Walsh as usefully drawing attention to "the most difficult of all problems facing White studies":

It is somewhere between imaginative power, and authenticity and crispness of detail that Patrick White's work is imperfect, in the area where architectural capacity and taste are required. The failure is not in the generating concept nor in the worked-out detail--neither in the idea nor in the vocabulary, that is--but somewhere between in what one might call the syntactical structure. (Patrick White's Fiction [Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977], pp. 62-63.)

Though Walsh has "never gone on to analyze the problem he describes in such an intriguing way" (Lawson, p. 285), Lawson documents numerous studies that recognize the gap between the "grand conceptions" and the "multiplicity of observed detail" (ibid.). The formulations range from Dorothy Green seeing "a constant war between White's gift for analysis and his dramatic gift" (ibid.; paraphrased from Green's article "Voss: Stubborn Music" in The Australian Experience: Critical Essays on Australian Novels, ed. W.S. Ramson [Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974], p. 309), to Margaret Walters's view that there is in White's work "a general failure to distinguish between his intention and achievement" (ibid.; quoted from Walters, p. 37). However, despite his awareness that "At the very core of the experience of reading White's work is a puzzlement, an uncertainty which results not only from the continually wry interplay of irony but from something which derives perhaps from what Walsh calls the 'syntactical structure'" (Lawson, p. 286);

and despite his consequent strictures against one of the "main flaws" in White studies: "an excessive (and misguided) interpretive reliance on the oracular statements with which White so liberally endows each of his novels" (Lawson, p. 280), Lawson still cannot resist the temptation to close the issue in the fashion of the critical orthodoxy he is ostensibly dissatisfied with: "[White] is concerned with resolving the dualities of life into harmonies. His vision, as I hope to show elsewhere, is fundamentally comic" (Lawson, p. 291). The hint of Frye here (see his Anatomy of Criticism [Princeton: Princeton University Press 1957], pp. 43-49), suggests the approach Lawson will take. The comic mode resolves tensions, dualities, conflicts into higher harmonies. White's work expresses a "desire to bring together, to combine the opposites, to transcend the distinctions" (Lawson, p. 291). But, of course, this just begs the question of the "gap" in White's fiction again. Is the transcending of the distinctions seen in Holstius's statement that "there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality" (The Aunt's Story, p. 272), a resolution of the complexities of life or an evasion of them? The direction Lawson proposes to go would appear to lead right back to the work Patricia Morley (The Mystery of Unity [Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972]) and Peter Beatson (The Eye in the Mandala [London: Paul Elek, 1976]) have done in their book length studies of White. Of these books Lawson only says that "because [they] bring[] a series of extrinsic systems to bear on the work [they] are . . . curiously wooden and unengaged discussion[s]" (Lawson, p. 292). One wonders if he realizes how like the orthodoxy his desire to find harmonies makes him. On pages 20 and 21 of her book, for example, Morley uses Frye's system to show that White's work falls into the comic mode. Key words are "integration", "incorporation", "inclusive", "conversion", etc. It would certainly be required reading for Lawson.

<sup>3</sup>"But in the novel you can see, plainly, when the man goes dead, the woman goes inert. You can develop an instinct for life, if you will, instead of a theory of right and wrong, good and bad. . . . Right and wrong is an instinct: but an instinct of the whole consciousness in a man, bodily, mentally, spiritual at once. And only in the novel are all things given full play, or at least, they may

be given full play, when we realize that life itself, and not inert safety, is the reason for living. For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is anything, the wholeness of a man, the wholeness of a woman, man alive, and live woman." (D.H. Lawrence, "Why the Novel Matters" in Phoenix, edited and with an introduction by E.D. McDonald [New York: The Viking Press, 1936], p. 538.)

<sup>4</sup>One thinks of F.R. Leavis's criticism of the overarching rainbow employed in the conclusion of Lawrence's novel of the same name.

<sup>5</sup>See note #2.

<sup>6</sup>Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son", Australian Letters, I, 3 (April 1958), 40.

<sup>7</sup>John Colmer, "Duality in Patrick White", in Ron Shepherd and Kirpal Singh eds., Patrick White: A Critical Symposium (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literature in English [hereafter cited as CRNLE], 1978), p. 136.

<sup>8</sup>". . . one can do nothing but fight tooth and nail to defend the new shoots of life from being crushed out, and let them grow. We can't make life. We can but fight for the life that grows in us." (D.H. Lawrence, "Note to 'The Crown'", Phoenix II, edited with an introduction by Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore [New York: The Viking Press, 1970], p. 364.)

<sup>9</sup>John Colmer manifests this problem in his article on duality in White's fiction (see note #7). Initially he says:

The most damaging criticism that can be made of Patrick White's fiction is that in its symbolic configurations and apocalyptic climaxes its design is too palpable. Moreover, it is often at odds with the authentically complex rendering of reality in the main body of the work, a rendering that forbids any final resolution of the duality that exists everywhere in the smallest detail of the fiction. (pp. 70-71)

This is a solidly helpful generalization in that it points

us to the life that the dominating designs tend to thwart. However, his alternative to the arbitrary, inauthentic resolutions offered by the overarching conceptions is a dualism that can't, finally, be resolved. Consequently, though there is a wealth of qualification in his use of "final", it does seem to be something of a volte face when Colmer says, in concluding the paper with a statement on A Fringe of Leaves: "For the first time in White's fiction there is a wholly authentic and deeply moving resolution of the dualities that lie at the heart of our existence, as solitaries and social animals" (p. 75). What, we ask, makes resolution possible now, if it wasn't before? What is the nature of Ellen Roxburgh's new "reality"? Isn't Colmer's statement that "she achieves her insight, into the unity of man" (p. 75) a surreptitious reappearance of the "grand design" in a new form? I agree with Colmer about the moving authenticity of Fringe but feel that a closer look at the issues involved would have caused him to recognize how that authenticity is a gradually evolving element in White's fiction, how White wrestles more and more directly with his own "doctrine of alienation" (see note #13)-- which comes increasingly to look like self-indulgent escapism--until he triumphs with the wholeness of A Fringe of Leaves. Colmer, without taking this closer look, implies that Fringe comes out of nowhere when he says, "The appearance of A Fringe of Leaves invites us to see the whole of White's fiction in a fresh perspective." Brian Kiernan recognizes something of this: "critics who were not content to praise the novels as hermetic, self-contained aesthetic entities but wanted to consider their implications for the world outside them . . . possibly overlooked . . . that through successive novels White can be seen not only as repeating the pattern of withdrawal from society but also as exploring the different ways of engaging with the world, of attempting to bridge the gulf between individual consciousness and the reality of the world beyond." ("Patrick White: The Novelist in the Modern World", in Don Anderson and Stephen Knight, eds., Cunning Exiles [Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974], p. 97.)

<sup>10</sup>The phrases are from D.H. Lawrence, "Surgery for the Novel--Or a Bomb", in Phoenix, p. 520. The context is worth quoting in full:

The novel has a future. It's got to have the courage



to tackle new propositions without using abstractions; it's got to present us with new, really new feelings, a whole line of new emotion, which will get us out of the emotional rut. Instead of snivelling about what is and has been, or inventing new sensations in the old line, it's got to break a way through, like a hole in the wall. And the public will scream and say it is a sacrilege: because, of course, when you've been jammed for a long time in a tight corner, and you get really used to its stuffiness and its tightness, till you find it suffocatingly cozy; then, of course, you're horrified when you see a new glaring hole in what was your cozy wall. You're horrified. You back away from the cold stream of fresh air as if it were killing you. But gradually, first one and then another of the sheep filters through the gap, and finds a new world outside.

<sup>11</sup>Brian Kiernan, Patrick White, Macmillan Commonwealth Writers Series (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980); Geoffrey Dutton, Patrick White, Australian Writers and Their Work Series (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 4th edition, 1971); R.F. Brissenden, Patrick White, Writers and Their Work Series, (London: Longmans, revised edition, 1969); Barry Argyle, Patrick White, Writers and Critics Series (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967); Ingmar Björksten, Patrick White: A General Introduction, translated from the Swedish by Stanley Gerson (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976).

<sup>12</sup>Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965 [uniform edition 1978]), p. 200. Trilling is being somewhat coy here; he has dared to wrestle, though here he seems prepared to give up the fight. And what of Winters, or Leavis and Scrutiny, who never did give it up? A good account of the problems in Trilling's stance is given by S.L. Goldberg in "The Education of Norman Podhoretz: or I Was a Teenage Intellectual", The Critical Review (Melbourne), 12 (1969), 83-106; see especially Part III.

<sup>13</sup>Saul Bellow, quoted in Trilling, p. 199.

<sup>14</sup>Saul Bellow, quoted in Trilling, p. 200.

<sup>15</sup>See Chapter Two, note #11, pp. 135-6 below.

<sup>16</sup>F.W. Heerikhuizen, Rainer Maria Rilke: His Life and Work, tr. Fernand Renier and Anne Cliff (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), pp. 13-14; quoted in Brian Lee, Theory and Personality: The Significance of T.S. Eliot's Criticism (London: Athlone Press, 1979), pp. 107-8.

<sup>17</sup>T.S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets", in Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp. 287-288.

<sup>18</sup>I am indebted to Brian Lee's Poetry and the System (Retford, Notts.: The Brynmill Press Ltd., 1983), pp. 28 and 31, where I found these quotations.

<sup>19</sup>Again I am indebted to Lee's Poetry and the System pp. 30 and 31, for these quotations.

<sup>20</sup>L.C. Knights, "Bacon and the Seventeenth-Century Dissociation of Sensibility", in his Explorations (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), pp. 101-102. In this connection see also Ian Robinson's "Prose and the Dissociation of Sensibility", in Boris Ford ed. From Donne to Marvell, Volume 3 of The New Pelican Guide to English Literature (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 260-272.

<sup>21</sup>Patrick White; in Thelma Herring and G.A. Wilkes, "A Conversation with Patrick White", Southerly, XXXIII (1973), 139.

<sup>22</sup>"Any creative act occupies the whole consciousness of a man. This is true of the great discoveries of science as well as of art. The truly great discoveries of science and real works of art are made by the whole consciousness of man working together in unison and oneness: instinct, intuition, mind, intellect all fused into one complete consciousness, and grasping what we may call a complete truth, or a complete vision, a complete revelation in sound." (D.H. Lawrence, "Introduction to His Paintings", in his Selected Essays [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950], pp. 333-334.)

<sup>23</sup>Colmer, "Duality in Patrick White", p. 70.

<sup>24</sup>Brian Lee's book (see note #16 above) is a good account of the shifts Eliot's criticism undergoes as he tries firstly to evade and then to accommodate the existence

of his personality.

<sup>25</sup>D.H. Lawrence, "We Need One Another", in Phoenix, p. 190; quoted in William Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup>D.H. Lawrence, "Morality and the Novel", in Phoenix, p. 528.

<sup>27</sup>Brian Lee, Theory and Personality, pp. 44-45.

<sup>28</sup>"It was noticeable in the Seminar that as soon as anyone questioned the effectiveness of a particular symbol or passage he was promptly accused of being unsympathetic to White's spiritual aims or of being obtuse in his reading of the text." (John Colmer, in one of "Two Critical Positions" appended to Ron Shepherd and Kirpal Singh, eds., Patrick White: A Critical Symposium, p. 136.) The following passage from Veronica Brady is an extension of the attitude Colmer describes: "the novels of Patrick White . . . have been consistently misunderstood and devalued by critics applying to them criteria appropriate to the novels of the Great Tradition, novels which are based on premises White sets out to question." ("Why Myth Matters", Westerly, 2 (1973), p. 63). In opposition to the Great Tradition Brady links White to Hawthorne and Melville, seemingly forgetting the work of Lawrence, Leavis, and Marius Bewley, work which shows Hawthorne and Melville as precursors of James--a member of the Great Tradition. The issue is far more complex than the opposing of symbolist and allegorical and "poetic" novels to social realist novels. For a recognition of the complexity of the issue, in relation to Melville, see Brian Lee's "Billy Budd: The American Hard Times", English, XXXII, 142 (Spring 1983), 35-54.

<sup>29</sup>For Margaret Walters's article see note #1, and pp. 92-3 below. <sup>See also</sup> Peter Wood's "Moral Complexity in Patrick White's Novels", Meanjin, XXI (1962), 21-28; and Rodney Mather's "Voss", Melbourne Critical Review, 6 (1963), 93-101: "Indeed, so convincingly does White establish the disproof of Voss from without--i.e. from society, and from 'the country'--together with Voss's sense of alienation and futility, that his attempt to transcend external reality in the end boomerangs. When he tries to urge solemnly on

us that Voss's spirit has become part of the country and will never die, it is White who seems to be looking for a loophole. We simply don't believe him. It is not so much that 'society' has triumphed despite White's overt intention as that the novel has, except for some brilliant but isolable patches, come to be split in two. . . . the dissociation I have pointed to undermines both [the spiritual and the material] worlds" (p. 99-100).

I

THE AUNT'S STORY

The Aunt's Story is generally considered to be Patrick White's first major novel, and has occasionally been called his most complete success. While the former valuation may be allowed, the latter can only be sustained if we blinker ourselves to the novel's reality; for two stories share an uncomfortable existence between its covers. Douglas Loney gives us the necessary signposts to the orthodox version:

The Aunt's Story is an account of the odyssey of a woman's spirit; the story of Theodora Goodman's quest after true knowledge of her self and her world. She establishes on her journey a doctrine of spiritual acceptance by which ultimately she attains the prize of her soul's integrity and peace.<sup>1</sup>

The heterodox position is represented by John and Rose Marie Beston, who see Theodora--White's "most repressed" character --"as a woman of deep emotional disturbance, torn by conflicts born at Meroë and sustained throughout her adult relationships, until in Part Three she opts for total emotional retreat into schizophrenia."<sup>2</sup>

Neither reading critically acknowledges the other. The Bestons' article gives no indication that there is an orthodox view with which they are differing in almost every respect. They are concerned to show that Theodora's retreat into fantasy and madness is a result of her inability to love stemming from her relationship with her parents. Beyond this they seldom stray; the spiritual dimension of the novel is virtually ignored. The orthodox reading does not address the issues the Bestons' stance represents, but simply focuses on their conclusion that Theodora goes mad and uncritically dismisses that stance as naive or absurd. J.F. Burrows, for example, gives a one paragraph gesture in the direction of the heterodox reading, from which I quote the following:

In the novel itself, Theodora is called mad only by such monsters of normality as Mrs. Goodman, Fanny, and the ignorant strangers of Part Three, all of them glad to evade the problems posed by Theodora's disturbing behaviour. It is not that Theodora is "normal" but that White persistently undermines conventional antitheses between normality and madness, as between good and evil and between actuality and dream.<sup>3</sup>

By implication, the heterodox critic becomes a monster of normality evading disturbing problems. Implication is exchanged for direct frontal, and personal, attack by David Tacey, the most extreme of the orthodox critics:

The idea, still promulgated by critics, that she [Theodora] has retreated into a private world of madness, tells us more about the critic than it does about the novel. True, she does go off to an asylum, but this is White's irony: wholeness of the individual is madness to a diseased soul-denying society. The critical opinion that maintains that Theodora "is clearly schizophrenic at the end of the story" [John and Rose Marie Beston] is itself an expression of that very diseased attitude that White is trying to root out.<sup>4</sup>

The extremity of this response is due, in some measure, to the "resistance within Australia itself to psychological interpretations".<sup>5</sup> And on this count there is some justification--the Beston interpretation manifests many of the faults of the strict psychological approach: the reductiveness, the imposed meaning, the stretching of the boundaries of interpretive possibility, the blatant misreading. However, this resistance does not seem to account for the entire breadth of Tacey's dismissive contempt. His stridency seems unintentionally to acknowledge a grain of truth in the Beston reading, a truth which orthodoxy admits at its peril.

What I want to demonstrate in this chapter is that the novel contains evidence for both readings; that White knows this; that he endorses the orthodox reading by evading the implications and hints of the heterodox view; and, finally, that he forces the reader, and himself, into a false

fool-saint dichotomy which offers no place for genuine human creativity of the kind which creates and maintains the human world we live in and which produces major works of art, such as I consider White's novels, with reservations, to be. We have no choice but to accept Theodora's journey as the avenue to spiritual wholeness. If we are disturbed at the solipsistic direction Theodora takes and reject her route, we find ourselves lumped into the same category as the "monsters of normality" (wonderfully contradictory phrase, that). Within the novel these extremes are the only options offered; there is no middle ground, no vantage point from which we can put both Theodora, and the earthbound characters, into a proper perspective. Whenever there are hints that such a vantage point is going to manifest itself (as in Theodora's relationship with Huntly Clarkson) White denies the possibility, usually through the use of trenchant social satire. His evasion of the implications of his vision means we are given the situation as White wants it to be, rather than as it is. Rather than subject Theodora to the full play of a rigorous creative context and run the risk that the significance he sees in her will change as situations develop, White insulates her from real human contact by either satirically undercutting those who come close enough



to offer adverse judgements, or, as in Part Two, by obliquely suggesting that her gestures at relationship are illusory. Though her situation is often treated ironically, the validity of Theodora's raison d'être, the spiritual odyssey, is never questioned. As White says, in responding to the suggestion that he presents his visionaries ironically, "As visionaries they are not treated ironically. But as human beings, in the details of their daily lives, it is impossible to avoid irony."<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter I want to question the validity of the spiritual quest as represented in this novel, and of Theodora as questor. I share White's desire for authentic life as over against the Fanny Goodman banalities, but I know I cannot follow Theodora's direction; it is destructive of everything that makes for reality in human life. There is an authentic and creative human reality which is largely excluded from The Aunt's Story, though it enters White's world gradually in later books, and it is in relation to, and in defence of, this reality that I take my critical bearings.

White believes "The Aunt's Story is a work which celebrates the human spirit".<sup>7</sup> The tone and phrasing here invite us to accept Theodora Goodman as representative of

humanity. But Theodora Goodman, and I must say this emphatically, is not representative.<sup>8</sup> Though she is intuitive, intelligent, empathetic (at least in relationship to non-human things) and highly imaginative, Theodora is also a social cripple. We cannot evade this issue, though this is what White does, by saying that because her society is false it should be rejected.

I want to begin by commenting closely on a number of scenes, from Theodora's childhood at Meroë, which clearly establish the direction of Theodora's life. It is of paramount importance to our understanding of the contradictory readings given the novel that we recognize the early influences on her and register the full implications of her reactions to them. The first scene for discussion occurs in the rose garden:

"Theodora, I forbid you to touch the roses," said Mrs. Goodman.

"I'm not," cried Theodora. "Or only a little. Some of them are bad."

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

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

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

Altogether this was an epoch of roselight. (p. 14)

The obvious analogue to this passage is Blake's "The Sick Rose" from Songs of Experience. Theodora and Fanny inhabit a world of innocence--"an epoch of roselight"--but on qualitatively different planes of emotional and intellectual response. Fanny's cliché reaction--"Horrid, beastly grub"--combined with White's banal description of her--"as pretty and pink as roses"--indicates that she is someone who will never do more than scratch the surface of life. In contrast, Theodora's inability to "condemn her pale and touching grub", to "subtract it from the sum total of the garden", conveys a quality of response that we are eager to endorse. The subtle ambiguity in "She could not look too long at the grub-thing", with its simultaneous fascination and repulsion, is a measure of the complexity of Theodora's vision even at this early stage, as opposed to Fanny's single-mindedness; it is also a measure of the complexity of White's language, and of the care we must take in reading him.

Though Theodora, in her childhood innocence, can accept the contraries of the natural world, the world of human relationships promises to be problematic. Mrs. Goodman's demand that Theodora not touch the roses (which Theodora evades, significantly)--the first thing we hear her

say in the novel--captures the essence of the woman: she thwarts true relationship. George Goodman, in his own way, produces a similar result:

He was serious. He sighed a lot, and looked at you as if he were about to let you into a secret, only not now, the next time. Instead, and perhaps as compensation for the secret that had been postponed, he took you by the hand, about to lead you somewhere, only in the end you could feel, inside the hand, that you were guiding Father. (p. 14)

That last touch is really fine; George Goodman's limitations are forcefully presented to us, the force being an effect of the perception coming to us from a totally non-judgemental perspective. Theodora is in a world of innocent acceptance, a world in which "Morning was bigger than the afternoon, and round, and veined like the skin inside an unhatched egg, in which she curled safe still" (p. 14). That "still", however, reminds us of the inevitable descent into experience that comes with age and knowledge.

Theodora gets her first intimations of the world of experience in conversation with her father:

"There is another Meroë," said her Father, "a dead place, in the black country of Ethiopia." . . .

"I shall go outside now," Theodora said.

"Because she wanted to escape from this dead place with the suffocating cinder breath. She looked with caution at the yellow face of the house, at the white shells in its placid, pocked stone. Even in sunlight the hills surrounding Meroë were black. Her own shadow was rather a suspicious rag. So that from what she saw

and sensed, the legendary landscape became a fact, and she could not break loose from an expanding terror.  
(pp. 15-16)

The shell is beginning to crack and Theodora's response is to "go outside", to "escape from this dead place". Given the direction her later life takes it is worthwhile noting her movement here: she leaves her father and the knowledge he brings. She is moving away from confrontation with the world of human beings, a world apparently empty of the values she cherishes:

in time the second Meroë became a dim and accepted apprehension lying quietly at the back of the mind. She was free to love the first. It was something to touch. She rubbed her cheek against the golden stone, pricked by the familiar fans and spirals of the embedded shells. It was Our Place. Possession was a peaceful mystery. (p. 16)

The first Meroë, the world of innocence, offers love, touch, and the peace that comes with possession; it nurtures the primal security associated with the word "home".

But a "home", as distinct from "the place where one lives", is such only because of the matrix of human relationships which cohere in a meaningfully secure way; as, on the larger scale, the "community" is distinct from the "collectivity". In their innocence, children can turn the most devastating family situations into "homes"--obviously delinquent parents are infallible, and less than inspiring sur-

roundings paradisaal. This is what Theodora does with her weak-willed father: "Really Father was not unlike a tree, thick and greyish-black, which you sat beside, and which was there and not" (p. 15). She turns George Goodman into something he is not, in order to satisfy her primal human needs. And she has transformed Meroë in the same way.

The necessary relationship between the human inhabitants and the physical place in our determination of "home" is brought out perceptively by White in the scene where Theodora consciously recognizes George's limitations for the first time:

Things were always tumbling down [around the farm]. Some things were done up again with wire. But mostly they just lay.

And in this connexion Theodora Goodman discovered that Our Place was not beginning and end. She met for the first time the detached eye.

"Meroë?" said Mr. Parrott. "Rack-an'-Ruin Hollow."

.....  
 "All this gadding off to foreign places," said Mr. Parrott. "Sellin' off a paddock here and a paddock there. George Goodman has no sense of responsibility to his own land."

This was awful. It made your stomach sick, to hear of Father, this, that you could not quite understand, but it was bad enough. . . . Her stomach was sick with the sense of responsibility that Father, they said, did not have. . . . Theodora Goodman was thin and yellow with shame. . . . She was oppressed by a weight of sadness, that nobody would lift, because nobody would know she was shouldering it. Least of all Father, who was thick and mysterious as a tree, but also hollow, by the judgement of the men beneath the balcony. (pp. 17-18)

Theodora's recognition that her father lacks responsibility coincides with her awareness that Meroë is "not beginning and end". She has moved out of her shell into the world of the "detached eye". Unity is fragmented; the circular, or eternal quality of innocence becomes the linear and temporal life of experience. While Theodora can, for a while, sustain her innocent world and satisfy her childhood emotional needs through sympathetic identification with her surroundings, inevitably she has to acknowledge the human base on which her eternal Meroë lies. And when she does she finds it lacking.

Now, if we take as a general distinction between innocence and experience the recognition of our parents' fallibility, Theodora's entrance into experience corresponds to this generality; we can say she is travelling a representative human path. Her case becomes peculiar, however, when we acknowledge that George and Julia Goodman's fallibility lies in an area extremely crucial to healthy human development. As I said earlier, both of them thwart true relationship. And relationship, as the child grows older, is essential in forming the web of connections binding the individual to the human world. Without true relationship--creative collaboration--a person is thrown back upon himself and is unable to determine his identity or the nature of his world.

To take an example from Marjorie Grene:

Mother and child . . . already form a society. The child's discovery, and construction, of the world already takes place with and through others, through question and answer, through social play, through the older child's or the adult's interpretation of pictures, the teaching of language and writing--all the way to the research student's training in the school of a master. All the way we are shaping ourselves on the model of or in criticism of others, and of the standards embodied in the lives of others.<sup>9</sup>

We develop our sense of ourselves and our world in relation to others. The relationship can be healthy, creative and life-affirming--what I have called "true"--or it can be unhealthy, destructive and life-denying.

A novelistic example of true creative relationship occupying the centre of a growing child's life is seen in the following:

Anna's soul was put at peace between them. She looked from one to the other, and saw them established to her safety, and she was free. She played between the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud in confidence, having the assurance on her right hand and the assurance on her left. She was no longer called upon to uphold with her childish might the broken end of the arch. Her father and mother now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between.<sup>10</sup>

That, of course, is Lawrence. The security that Anna feels in her family relationship is missing in Theodora's; beyond her father's hollowness, stands the willfully soul-destroying presence of her mother:



Once there were the new dresses that were put on for Mother's sake.

"Oh," she cried, "Fanny, my roses, my roses, you are very pretty."

Because Fanny was as pink and white as roses in the new dress.

"And Theo," she said, "all dressed up. Well, well. But I don't think we'll let you wear yellow again, because it doesn't suit, even in a sash. It turns you sallow," Mother said. (p. 19)

White is quite aware of the inhibiting influence Julia casts on Theodora. The "So" that begins the paragraph following directly on what I have just quoted indicates the logic inherent in the situation:

So that the mirrors began to throw up the sallow Theodora Goodman, which meant who was too yellow. Like her own sash. She went and stood in the mirror at the end of the passage, near the sewing room which was full of threads, and the old mirror was like a green sea in which she swam, patched and spotted with gold light. Light and the ghostly water in the old glass dissolved her bones. The big straw hat with the little yellow buds and the trailing ribbons floated. But the face was the long thin yellow face of Theodora Goodman, who they said was sallow. She turned and destroyed the reflection, more especially the reflection of the eyes, by walking away. They sank into the green water and were lost. (pp. 19-20)

Julia's inability to accept Theodora as she is denies the girl's identity a chance to establish itself solidly. This places Theodora in a psychological impasse; she hates the reflection the mirror gives back, but, without a creative relationship with those around her she has no chance to

develop an image of herself more congenial to everyone. The eventual result of this situation can only be self-immolation, as White's imagery indicates: "She turned and destroyed the reflection . . . [Her reflected eyes] sank into the green water and were lost" [my emphasis].

Certainly we cannot be wrong to see in these images a foreshadowing of Theodora's desire to destroy "the great monster Self" (p. 122). But there is a significant problem here. By the time we reach this passage Theodora's desire has become a conscious, and spiritual, quest for "that desirable state . . . which resembles, one would imagine, nothing more than air or water." In contrast, the childhood attempt to destroy a hated self, in the scene we have just looked at, is felt as a distinctly regrettable occurrence. I believe we can find a clue to the nature of the problem in the sentence which begins the paragraph following directly on the scene with the mirror: "There were many bitter days at Meroë when the roselight hardened and blackened" (p. 20). White's deliberate recalling of the earlier use of roselight --"Altogether this was an epoch of roselight"--directs us to see Theodora's episode with the mirror as primarily a representative response to life in the world of experience, and only secondarily as the regrettable result of an unhealthy

family relationship.

This is the central dichotomy in The Aunt's Story. White is unusually conscious of the limitations of Theodora's emotional environment, and although he is also aware that Theodora's response to this environment is problematic, he seems unable to find an alternative to that response. Given that her surroundings thwart true relationship, she must go elsewhere to find significance; increasingly in the novel, the "elsewhere" is beyond human society altogether. White indulges a misanthropic tendency in himself by making the cruel banality of the particular Goodman situation extend to include virtually all human society.<sup>11</sup> And played against this banality and cruelty Theodora's solipsistic quest for significance becomes the "type" of the intelligent and sensitive person's response to the world. The problems we see in Theodora pale in significance when juxtaposed to the mundane life around her. We endorse her, as White does, because we have no choice; we make a virtue of necessity.

We have an example of this process in the following scene:

Mother's voice crackled at the fire. She warmed her rings. Her small head was as bright and as hard as a garnet beside the fire.

"No, no, Theodora," crackled Mother. "Not that way. Where is your feeling? Here, give it to me."

As if it were a thing. But Mother sat down. She played the music as it should have been played. She took possession of the piano, she possessed Chopin, they were hers while she wanted them, until she was ready to put them down. Only, watching the hands of Mother, which always did what they wanted to, Theodora was not moved. The music had lost its meaning, even the meaning that lay in the stiff up and down, the agonizing angularity that Chopin had never meant to be, but which was part of some inner intention of her own.

"The piano is not for Theodora," Mother sighed. "Fanny is the musical one."

Fanny could play a piece, and it was a whole bright tight bunch of artificial flowers surrounded by a paper frill. Fanny played her piece. And when she had played it, it was finished. She jumped up, and laughed, and was content.

Outside though, beyond the fire and the carpets and the last notes of Fanny's completed piece, there was the long black bitter sweep of the hills. Theodora walked in the garden of dead roses. One of the hills, they said, which was now dead, had once run with fire, its black cone streaming, but now it brooded black against the white sky. Only if you walked on one side of the hill there was a flicker of gold from the wattles, of which the bark oozed a deeper golden gum, so that the rock gave up some of its blackness, the hill melted and flamed still. (p. 20)

In this scene our sympathy for Theodora comes readily. Mrs. Goodman's possession of Chopin is a direct contrast to Theodora's earlier innocent possession of Meroë. Where Theodora's possession included her total environment in meaningful relationship, Julia's possession excludes relationship by turning the music into an object, a thing without intrinsic meaning, which she can dominate. Fanny capitulates utterly to her mother and allows herself to be

dominated and shaped. Consequently Fanny's music as well is artificial and meaningless, however much it duplicates what "should" be played. In contrast to these technically proficient, yet superficial renderings, Theodora's angular music, though purely personal (and partly because of its personal element), has meaning.

Fanny's unreality is brought out further through White's juxtaposing her to the "long black bitter sweep of the hills" outside the house. The packaged, emasculated Chopin has no connection with the harsh realities of the landscape. Theodora's private creativity, on the other hand, which issues in her angular music, is more appropriate in this environment and with her imagination Theodora brings fire back to the dead hills. In the context of the scene her creativity appears vital and authentic; we clearly endorse her movement out of the moribund surface life.

There is a problem here, however, that White briefly acknowledges but seems not to have registered the full implications of. Though Theodora's angular music is meaningful in a way her mother's isn't, the meaning is totally private, expressing nothing of Chopin's intention. And though this is largely a result of her mother's lack of concern for her daughter's development, Theodora is, nevertheless, not colla-

borating, not contributing to the creative construction of a human world. Her imaginative reconstruction of a vital landscape in the dead hills of Meroë, though it may give her solace and spiritual sustenance, cannot become a real creative possibility for us unless she can communicate it--something she cannot do, though White can. And his being able to do so is evidence of his collaboration with the human world, as represented by his readers.

To qualify as intelligent novel readers we have to recognize that our response is not purely personal, like Theodora's angular music; nor is it purely public, a finished object to be possessed, as Julia possesses Chopin. The reality of the novel, and therefore its meaning, resides in the creative collaboration--the relationship--between author and reader, and between reader and reader. The very act of novelistic communication is an implicit example of a creative human reality of which there are few explicit examples in The Aunt's Story.

Though he manifests--in the act of writing with the intention and expectation of being seriously read--the kind of creative collaboration that can vitalize our human world, and though he recognizes that Julia's refusal to collaborate with Theodora stymies the girl's creativity, White seems not

to have fully registered the profundity and pervasiveness of collaboration as a human truth. He persists in having Theodora sense real significance beyond the boundaries of human society. While we can heartily accept that her particular family situation has to be escaped, we do not see that this escape need necessarily entail a rejection of human society altogether. Yet this is what White implies in the following:

Once when the Syrian left, Theodora went with him some of the way. In the white-lit winter evening her legs grew longer with the strides she took. Her hair flew. She had increased. She walked outside a distinct world, on which the grass quivered with a clear moisture, and the earth rang. In this state, in which rocks might at any moment open, or words convey meaning, she stood and watched the Syrian go. His silence slipped past. The hills settled into shapelessness. She was left with the trembling of her knees.

Afterwards, trailing through the shrunk yard, there was no external evidence that the Syrian had been. The meatsafe still creaked on its wire hook, and the kitchen window's yellow square denied the immensity of shapelessness. (p. 22)

In this passage indistinctness and shapelessness are characteristics of a world in which meaning is immanent. In contrast the distinct world of the "window's yellow square" is seen as denying the possibility of meaning. White certainly wants us to associate the denial of meaning here with Julia's stripping of meaning from the Chopin nocturne by turning it into a "thing", something distinct. But the association is not

valid. White is arbitrarily equating Julia's destructive tendencies with humanity's need for ordered society, as symbolized by the "window's yellow square".

The ordered world of human society is bounded, of necessity, by time. Theodora's desire for shapelessness is a desire to transcend this order, to return to the state in which Meroë was "beginning and end" and meaningful relationship with her environment was possible. In the following scene the world of time is denigrated through association with Fanny:

[Fanny] stitched a man in a cocked hat, and a train with smoke in its funnel, and a border of morning glories. And in the middle of it all she stitched:

FANNY GOODMAN  
1899

"There, Theodora. Look at your sister," said Mother.  
"Oh, leave me alone," Theodora cried. "I am all right."

Because she felt her own awkwardness. After she had hidden in the garden, she looked at her hands, that were never moved to do the things that Fanny did. But her hands touched, her hands became the shape of rose, she knew it in its utmost intimacy. Or she played the nocturne, as it was never meant, expressing some angular agony that she knew. She knew the extinct hills and the life they had once lived. (pp. 22-23)

Fanny, following her mother's lead, is making herself the centre of the universe. Her blatant fixing of herself in time guarantees her a place in history but separates her



from real relationship with her world. She will always impose herself on her world rather than enter into a relationship with it. Theodora, who can't satisfy her mother's wishes and is therefore ostracized and alienated, can enter into meaningful relationship. She empathizes with the roses and the hills, touching and knowing their intrinsic being. The values we saw associated with her innocent Meroë appear again here. The implication offered by the scene is that the plane of Theodora's relationships transcends the purely temporal world of Fanny and Julia. While granting that Fanny's world needs to be transcended, we must recognize that Theodora's world is, again, beyond society. By reminding us of the Chopin nocturne, played "as it was never meant", White is linking the music she plays to the transcendent realm where meaning, for Theodora, resides. But, as I argued earlier, Theodora is still not collaborating. Music is a human creation, in this case the result of collaboration between Chopin and whoever plays his piece; Theodora's inability to respond to the piece indicates her inability to collaborate with, to know (as she knows the roses) another human being on a plane that is meaningful for us as readers (and appreciators of music) living within a society.

Though White can see the problems inherent in narrow-

ing the plane of significant relationship so drastically, the surface world of Fanny and Julia is the only alternative he offers; as in earlier scenes, there is no real choice for the reader.

These problems--the lack of real alternatives, the equivocal transcendence, the lack of creative collaboration--present themselves clearly in the scene in which Theodora goes shooting with her father:

Anyway, carrying the rifle, she was free . . . Father did not speak. He respected silence, and besides, whether it was summer or winter, the landscape was more communicative than people talking . . .

From the rise above the swamp Father would aim at a rabbit scut. Theodora aimed too. She was everything in imitation, and because of this the importance of what she did was intense.

. . . . .  
The killing did not move her after a time, as it did at first, the blood beating in her own heart. In time, behind the rifle, she became as clear and white as air, exalted for an act of fate and beauty that would soon take place, of which her finger had very little control, it was an instrument.

Then Father's voice bore in. "A pretty kind of idiocy," it said. "A man goes walking with his gun, and presents his vanity with the dead body of a rabbit."

After the moment of exaltation, and the warm, shining fur, she was puzzled, and it hurt. (pp. 24-25)

Though George speaks very little his taking Theodora shooting is, in itself, at least a gesture of collaboration and the girl responds hungrily: "She was everything in imitation, and because of this the importance of what she did

was intense." She takes her lead from her father and begins to develop a surety of identity through his acceptance of her in their shared experience. George, however, thwarts the relationship with his cynicism--"A pretty kind of idiocy". This is his typical procedure--unconsciously giving with one hand and taking away with the other. We remember his taking Theodora for a walk which ends with her guiding him. George seems solid but is actually hollow; in the shooting episode he appears to offer real collaboration, but lacking the "assurance" of his own life his offer is superficial.

Until he makes the cynical comments, however, Theodora feels united with George in this act that Julia hates. Momentarily, such is the intensity of her emotional need, she connects with the transcendent plane of being. She breaks the shell of ego, bounded by time, and is "exalted for an act of fate and beauty that would soon take place, of which her finger had very little control, it was an instrument."

In contrast to Theodora's epiphany, George Goodman's cynicism seems trivial and quibbling. Through it White reveals how out of connection, how surface, George's concerns are, compared to hers. Yet, even while we endorse the sincerity of Theodora's spiritual moment over George's cynicism, we register, at the same time, a certain truth in what he

says. For him the shooting is an act of vanity (it isn't, after all, necessary to survival); for Theodora, however, it is an act of, paradoxically, humility--she transcends the self and becomes the instrument of a power that flows through her. But this power, and this is the crux that renders the transcendence so equivocal, is purely destructive, travelling, as it does, down the barrel of a rifle.<sup>12</sup> George, for all his hollowness, has no illusions about what he does with the gun. His comment is reminiscent of Lawrence's at the end of his poem "Snake": "And I have something to expiate:/A pettiness." The difference, of course, is that expiation is not a serious consideration for George Goodman; despite his awareness he will shoot again. Theodora, through what she has mistaken for real collaboration, has come to accept killing as an authentic experience which she can share with her father. Though at first she doesn't like killing because she recognizes a kinship with the rabbits ("the blood beating in her own heart"), this dislike is overcome as she relies on her father's assurance. When, with his cynical comment, that assurance evaporates, she is understandably "puzzled" and "hurt". What she had thought was a shared experience turns out to be private.

Though White recognizes the destructive issue of

Theodora's transcendent moment, he seems willing to accept the experience as valid. Indeed, by implying that George's lack of true concern is responsible for her direction--insofar as her belief in him caused her to overcome her revulsion for killing--he absolves her of complicity. The act of fate and beauty which she becomes the instrument of, though destructive, assumes a highly positive value, especially when the alternative offered is George's arid cynicism. The truly destructive aspect of this situation, however, is its privacy: "Theodora Goodman's face often burned with what could not be expressed. She felt the sweat on the palms of her hands" (p. 26). Her inability to communicate means she will not be able to establish the relationships necessary to creative growth in the human world, necessary, in fact, to human reality. For, as F.R. Leavis says, "Human reality, the human condition to which art belongs, is inescapably a matter of individual human beings in their relations with one another, the only conceivable way in which Man could be 'there'."<sup>13</sup>

The mention of Theodora's burning face and sweating palms reminds us that one of the most central human relationships is the sexual. Given her inability to collaborate in any meaningful way with other human beings it is unlikely

that a fulfilling sexual relationship will be part of her life. She has intimations of this herself after she and Fanny discover Tom and Pearl engaged in sex play behind the bails. Fanny teases Pearl,

But Theodora did not wish to pursue this theme. She walked away. She would not think, or only a little. For the group behind the cow bails had a great spreading shadow, which grew and grew, it was difficult to ignore. On the lustier, gustier days, cloud and hill and the sinuous movement of the creek reminded. Tom and Pearl were astride the world. (p. 30)

Tom and Pearl's sexuality unites them with the natural world in a physical, if not spiritual, way. Though Theodora has a vital spiritual life, it cannot manifest itself, become whole and complete, without the physical complement. Her walking away from the scene, her wish not to "think" about its implications, expresses her intuited sense that sexuality is not for her. This comes out more clearly in the following scene:

She took off her clothes. She would lie in the water. And soon her thin brown body was the shallow, browner water. She would not think. She would drift. As still as a stick. And as thin. But on the water circles widen and cut. If Pearl Brawne took off her clothes, Theodora said, and lay in the water, the hills would move, she is fine as a big white rose, and I am a stick. If it is good to be a stick, said Theodora, it is better to be a big white rose. (p. 30)

Pearl's voluptuous physicality is something Theodora admires but knows she will never have. What she does have

is the ability to enter into a spiritual empathetic relationship with the natural world--"soon her thin brown body was the shallow browner water". But, without the necessary physical complement, human sexuality will remain problematic.

When, for example, Pearl is dismissed because of her pregnancy Theodora doesn't understand: "There was always a great deal that never got explained" (p. 33). Her response to this lack of clarity is revealing:

"I would like to know," said Theodora, "I would like to know everything." . . .

"But when I am old," Theodora said. "Everything, and everything." . . .

To wrap it up and put it in a box. This is the property of Theodora Goodman. But until this time, things floated out of reach. She put out her hand, they bobbed and were gone. She listened to the voices that murmured the other side of the wall. Or she followed the Syrian as darkness fell, and the Syrian's brown silence did not break, the sky just failed to flow through. (p. 32)

Theodora's desire to know "everything", to "wrap it up and put it in a box", to make it her "property", is, in its imagery, very like Fanny's and Julia's handling of Chopin. Theodora wants to possess everything. But, as we learned earlier, this possession kills meaning and denies relationship. Theodora, who wants meaning, will never find it in this way. In fact, given her desire to know "everything", and the intense seriousness of her nature, any boundary will be seen to limit meaning. Consequently meaning will continually

seem to reside just beyond what she can grasp; it will only be encountered beyond the rational.

Here again we see the dualistic nature of White's vision. There are only two alternatives: either the wilful ego-tyranny of a Julia, which gains permanence at the expense of significance; or the dissolution of rational ego-boundaries, which allows transcendent truth to be apprehended. Theodora's desire to "know everything" is a result of her feeling a lack of wholeness, yet the only possible routes to wholeness that she has any experience of are her mother's false and superficial domination, and her own spiritual empathetic identification. The route she needs, and which her family circumstances deny her, is that of a healthy human relationship which carries the possibility of physical as well as spiritual experience. The need, as I have been arguing throughout, is for human collaboration.

White appears to recognize this need when he introduces The Man who was Given his Dinner, someone who inhabits the same plane as Theodora and shares her fundamental opposition to the mundane world of Fanny and Julia. Asked why he prospects for gold the man replies:

"Because . . . it is as good a way of passing your life as any other."

This sounded funny. It made the walls dissolve, the



stone walls of Meroë, as flat as water, so that the people sitting inside were now exposed, treading a sewing machine, baking a loaf, or adding up accounts. But the man walked on the dissolved walls, and his beard blew . . . Altogether he was unlike the other people who came to the house, or anyone in the house, except a little like Father . . .

Behind them they could hear the safe sounds of the house. (pp. 33-34)

Again we get the value-laden distinction between dissolution and permanence: the first is a vital contact with reality-- "the man walked on the dissolved walls, and his beard blew"; the second is enclosed, limited, "safe"--by implication a somewhat cowardly refusal to face life. And as in the scene with the Syrian, White is arbitrarily equating this refusal with settled society in general:

"Yes," said the man, "it's as good a way of passing your life. So long as it passes. Put it in a house and it stops, it stands still. That's why some take to the mountains, and the others say they're crazy." (p. 37)

What choice has the reader got? This prospector-cum-Old Testament prophet--with his flowing beard and thunderclap entrance--is obviously the voice of truth. Theodora makes the natural response, given an environment that includes Fanny:

"I would come if I could," said Theodora.  
 "Yes," said the man. "You would."  
 "Don't be silly," said Fanny. "You're a girl."  
 "I would come," said Theodora.  
 Her voice was so heavy she could hardly lift it,

Her voice tolled like a leaden bell.

"You'll see a lot of funny things, Theodora Goodman. You'll see them because you've eyes to see. And they'll break you. But perhaps you'll survive. No girl that was thrown down by lightning on her twelfth birthday, and then got up again, is going to be swallowed by rivers of fire."

And now Theodora began to think that perhaps the man was a little bit mad, but she loved him for his madness even, for it made her warm. (p. 37)

This is a firm endorsement of the solipsistic direction Theodora's life will take in the rest of the novel. There is even allowance made for the seeing her as mad, since a significant madness is preferable to a banal sanity. At the same time White further endorses the relationship with The Man who was Given his Dinner by mentioning her desire to go with him and the warmth he makes her feel. These hints of relationship combine with an earlier passage to point toward a sexual potential unlike anything in Theodora's arid surroundings: "But inside the man's silence, Theodora could feel his closeness. The sleeve of his coat touched her cheek. The sleeve of his coat smelt of dust, and mutton fat, and sweat, but it stroked her, and she bit her tongue" (p. 36).

The problem is that White will allow none of this potential to be realized. The most obvious reason, of course, is Theodora's youth, but there is a wider meaning

here. The Man's rejection of society means his relationships can only be momentary. To sustain them, to have them grow into something approaching permanence, would be to submit to the boundaries of society, to settle down. A significant relationship for the Man who was Given his Dinner is the one he had with Theodora's father:

"You're more like your father," the man said to her. "More like your father used to be. We was mates. We went prospecting down Kiandra way. I remember once we got lost, one Easter, in the mountains, when the snow came. There was the ghost of a man in the mountains, they said, who got lost in a snowdrift driving his sheep. We sat all night, your father and I, under the shelter of a big dead tree, listening to the dingoes howl, waiting for the ghost. Cripes, it was cold up there. We had a fire each side. But it was cold. We sat with our arms around each other and then your father fell asleep." (pp. 35-36)<sup>14</sup>

Here we have two people depending on each other for warmth and human contact in the face of a harsh and terrifying environment. What White does not seem to realize is that these elemental needs form the bases of the relationships which constitute the human world. Human reality is relationship and relationship means society. Certainly the elemental nature of our need can get covered by superficiality and other impediments to open communication--this is the example of Julia and Fanny--but to deny society because of this is to deny one's own foundation.

White appears to feel that significance only exists outside society, and that what makes life in society bearable are the momentary glimpses of truth which shimmer through the miasma. While Theodora's momentary relationship with the Man who was Given his Dinner becomes a sustaining force in her life, she simultaneously knows it can never be realized except in her imagination:

When he had gone Theodora realized that he had not looked at her again, but somehow this did not seem to matter. They sat beneath the shaggy tree in the night of snow, and the snow as it fell melted, on entering the circle of their warmth. She rose and fell on the breathing of the tree.

"What did he mean," said Fanny, "by August seventeenth next year? Do you suppose he will come again?"

"That is what he said," said Theodora.

But she already knew that he would not come. In all that she did not know there was this certainty. She began to feel that knowing this might be the answer to many of the mysteries. And she felt afraid for what was prepared. The magpies sang cold in the warm air of Meroë. (p. 38)

The suggestion here, and thus far in the novel as a whole, is that significant relationship, truly creative collaboration, is something which inhabits a transcendent plane. Brief glimpses of this plane are all that oppose the banality of soulless human existence. Theodora's realization of this certainty causes her to be afraid, and in response she cultivates, through her imagination, the vital relationship she needs. As the novel proceeds Theodora's

imaginative life plays a larger role, until in Part Two the distinctions between reality and illusion are blurred. In Part Three Theodora finally enters a world of total significance and complete illusion. Here she partakes of a complete human relationship--with a figment of her own making.

The argument that keeps presenting itself in reaction to these suggestions is that human life is not soulless; that significance can and must be found in a human world; and that the human world, as opposed to Julia's or Fanny's, is one which we create through conscious, concerned collaboration. As F.R. Leavis says (speaking of Eliot): "to recognize with full implicit belief, as should surely be natural above all to a major poet [or novelist], the fact of human creativity is to know that the nightmare of hopeless self-enclosure is a nightmare, and, if irresistible and lasting, an insanity."<sup>15</sup> White sees no way for Theodora to escape her self-enclosure because he arbitrarily denies creative relationship in human society. His alternative, which I earlier said was making a virtue of necessity, is to posit--creatively, in a novel (he doesn't recognize the contradiction this manifests)--a transcendent realm embodying the needed values. I expect White would agree with William Walsh's formulation that The Aunt's Story "renders with

painful immediacy the process of mental dissolution. It is also the examination of a route to reality which is not cerebral, or traditional, or conventional, or even sane."<sup>16</sup> But can we take this seriously? Can madness be said to embody reality? Our answer must be an unqualified no.

Up to this point we have seen Theodora accepting, usually passively, her lack of real relationship. What we find in the relationships she enters into in the rest of Part One is Theodora's conscious terminating of relationships which do not meet her standards. Coupled with this is the equivocal sense that Theodora is one of an elect, that she is embarked on a journey which coarser natures deny to most of the other characters. At the same time though, White castigates these characters for not embarking. What this contradiction reveals, on closer examination, is White's determination to protect his view that, in the words of David Myers, "the only true meaning of life is to be found in isolated, brief moments of ecstatic epiphany that are given only to the courageous few who search in isolation and torment for the deeper springs of being within themselves or in contemplation of the otherness of nature's infinity."<sup>17</sup> Other characters must be made to appear limited, if not

vapid, in order to reinforce the significance of Theodora's route to reality. What this amounts to is that both Theodora and Patrick White treat the other characters as objects, take the appearance for the reality. The individual being of the other person is glossed over in the hurry to castigate a faulty surface.

In Theodora's relationships with Violet Adams at Spofforth's school, with Frank Parrott after she returns from school to Meroë, and with Huntly Clarkson after she and her mother have moved to Sydney, White ostensibly reveals the banality Theodora is subjected to, and enlists the reader's support of Theodora's private questing. Trusting the tale, however, we recognize that what is actually going on is an arbitrary thwarting of the potential for a creative relationship. As we witness these encounters we realize that Theodora's social environment is no longer completely sterile. There appear to be alternatives to her solipsism. But White will not admit that the alternatives are valid; he has by this time too large a commitment to Theodora's isolation to allow that there may be another way.<sup>18</sup> Though her lack of relationship will destroy her, it is presented as her only avenue to truth.

Just as Violet begins to emerge as a person, for

example, she is stigmatized as sentimental, and, therefore, unable to "endure the bones and stones" (p. 53) through which truth is revealed to Theodora. Similarly, from the moment Theodora shoots the small hawk she had empathized with earlier, and so puts to death "a potential element of her own life, the 'normal' and acceptable path of courtship, marriage and eventual motherhood"<sup>19</sup>, we know there is no chance for a growing relationship with Frank Parrott. White goes on after this point to indulge a perverse enjoyment in the creating of the grotesque, bestial Frank, a pastime which quite undermines the authentic gestures Frank does make toward Theodora.

To give these assertions more weight I will look closely at Theodora's relationship with Huntly Clarkson, in which the same symbolism, and the same arbitrary thwarting of potential through unfair satirizing and caricaturing is carried on most clearly. Huntly Clarkson's world is ostensibly the superficial context in opposition to which the authenticity of the sequences with the artist Moraitis is established. I say ostensibly, because even more so than with Violet Adams and Frank Parrott there is a potential for reality in Huntly which breaks through the banal aspects



of his life and demands to be acknowledged in terms qualitatively different from those White seems prepared to offer. To acknowledge this element in Huntly would entail a serious reconsideration of Theodora's quest. This is something White cannot finally bring himself to do. He toys with the implications, but that is all. Never does he seriously engage the problem. Consequently, the impression one gets from the Theodora-Huntly relationship is of creativity stifled. White imposes his single-minded understanding on the relationship and thus prevents the novelistic potential from being realized.

We can see this pattern working itself out through a number of scenes. Huntly's potential is registered, whether White consciously intends it or not, when he first meets Theodora and Julia Goodman at his office. He can "feel the tyranny of Mrs. Goodman" and notices that she is "a small, neat, hateful woman, with small, neat, buckled shoes, and many rings. She sat in the light and kept her ankles crossed. But her daughter sat in shadow, and drew with her parasol on the floor characters that he could not read" (p. 93). Although Huntly can't yet read Theodora, his ability to recognize the falsity of Julia moves him closer to Theo-

dora's plane. The subtlety of his perception is brought out in their first social encounter in Theodora's home. To his wish that she visit his home Theodora replies that she is not good company. "This question of company," Huntly responds, "is something for me to decide. The people who love us have a habit of sticking on labels that are never acceptable, and very seldom correct" (p. 93). This speech indicates that Huntly knows there is a reality in Theodora beneath the surface her mother and most others are content to see; he reaches out to her with a gesture of genuine kindness and concern.

The reader responds to this gesture as an authentic opportunity for Theodora to engage in creative collaboration, or, more correctly, would so respond if Huntly's authenticity had not been called into question by this from the previous page: "It would be very easy, she felt, to allow the kindness, the affluence, the smoky voice of Mr. Clarkson to engulf. But because of this she resisted" (pp. 92-93). The implication, of course, is that Huntly offers only the comfortable delusions of material ease. He is seen to pose, in Patricia Morley's words, a "subtle danger to Theodora's odyssey".<sup>20</sup> The comforts of his material world will compromise Theodora's spiritual integrity. We have just seen,

however, that Huntly offers more than material comfort; to equate him with his wealth is to "stick a label" on him, to pass judgement on a surface, after the fashion of Julia. One might argue that White is subtly undercutting Theodora by giving her such a one-dimensional perspective at this point. But this is not the case. What he is doing is establishing Huntly's limitations, implying that his gestures of kindness are part of a façade, the role of the benevolent rich man. The procedure is clear in the following:

Why had he asked Theodora Goodman to his house? If it was out of pity it was praiseworthy. He often did praiseworthy things. But he was tired of himself. He wanted to loll right back and listen to something extraordinary as he fell asleep.

"Have you ever seen a volcano?" she asked. "I would like to sail past in a ship, preferably at night."

He opened his eyes.

"Why, yes," he said. "I have seen Vesuvius and Etna. And Stromboli. That was from a ship. They were not so very extraordinary. None of them," he said.

The green blaze of laurels crackled. Now she knew that she would go. It was easier to escape than she expected, from where she had never belonged. (p. 97)

In this scene White deliberately sets Huntly up to be shot down. Huntly wants to hear something extraordinary and when Theodora makes the offer he responds incorrectly, thus revealing that, finally, he is not tired of himself. The entire scene is devoted to displaying Huntly's super-

ficiality and thereby justifying Theodora's escape from relationship with him. The problem lies in the lack of a middle ground where communication can occur. Theodora simply dismisses him, implying that he will forever ride the surface of life while she plunges into the depths. And her dismissal, given the presentation of the scene, is fully endorsed by White.

For the sake of Theodora's quest White cannot concede authenticity to Huntly. Consequently he satirizes him. Yet at places in the Huntly sequence we see evidence that White has misgivings about the vision, has problems accepting its solipsistic implications. The following passage, couched carefully in satire, is one such place: "If Huntly Clarkson invited Theodora again, and often he said he would not, that it gave no return, he invited her because of some indefinable uneasiness and discontent, a sense of something he had not achieved" (p. 98). The phrase "that it gave no return" is a derogatory lowering of Huntly's relationship with Theodora to the level of an unwise financial investment. Yet beneath the denigration there lies a real truth. Without the "return" there is no relationship, no human reality. That it is reality that Huntly desires is apparent in the "uneasiness" he occasionally feels with the status quo. In the

next line White again makes a phrase do double service. The sense "of something he had not achieved" can refer simply to Huntly's passion for collecting unusual objects, and his inability to collect Theodora. It can refer also to his sense that Huntly is grappling with a spiritual need which cannot be made a reality unless Theodora recognizes his advances as more than conventional social gestures and returns them in kind. This would require genuine giving on her part and would, consequently, mean diversion from her solipsistic path.

Here is where White balks; he is unable to allow the misgivings he feels to establish themselves as a sustained criticism of solipsism because he finally cannot believe that a creative alternative can be found in human society. Though Huntly appears, at points, to have a potential that White is interested in, when the bottom line is reached, White always consigns him to a superficial world. Witness the following:

The whole of Huntly Clarkson's life lay there on the table, crystallized, in front of Theodora Goodman, and she knew at such moments that there was nothing more to know.

Theodora, felt Huntly Clarkson, is an upright chair, a Spanish leather, in which an Inquisitor has sat, a shabby rag of skin passing judgement on souls. For a few moments he hated Theodora. The way you can hate something that is untouchable. (p. 101)

Huntly's criticism of Theodora is apt. She reduces him to

the status of an object which she can dismiss as she would one of the crystallized fruits on his table. She makes him one with his possessions, no more. Yet, though White appears to sympathize with Huntly's response to Theodora's brutal judgement, the context he places Clarkson in--conspicuous wealth, vapid society women, culture as a consumer item--suggests that Theodora's judgement is justified and called for. That Huntly's response serves to lift him out of his milieu and entitle him to a different reaction from Theodora is never given serious consideration. Huntly's banal, materialistic milieu is pulled into play whenever his observations of Theodora come too close to compromising her quest. Notice the derogatory jab in the last line of the following:

Huntly knew<sup>then</sup> that the door had closed. This, perhaps, was the extent of his relationship with Theodora Goodman. She closed doors, and he was left standing in his handsome mahogany interior, which was external, fatally external, outside Theodora Goodman's closed door. Huntly Clarkson stood and wanted to overcome his humiliation, which he could not pay anyone to take. (p. 102)

The reference to payment catches our attention and lessens the impact of Huntly's observation. In fact, it has the effect of turning the responsibility for the closed door back on him, in that anyone who thinks in monetary terms, implies White, disqualifies himself from true reality. It is impor-

tant that we recognize the sleight of hand involved here. The quality of Huntly's response to Theodora is far subtler than anything in the social world he inhabits, but it is from just this surface world that White draws the tag that judges Huntly adversely.

In the scene surrounding Huntly's proposal of marriage the same type of unfair shift is used again. We are first shown Huntly groping for a reality that transcends his usual sphere:

These are the moments, he felt, when the tongue can take command, without the assistance of drink, when the body is no longer ridiculous, when it is possible to talk of poetry, and God, and love, without belittling or destroying. He wanted to speak to Theodora. He wanted to admit his inadequacy, which, for once, had become almost a virtue, like a thick hawser trailing in a white wake. (p. 109)

The potential for authentic life hinted at here, however, is undercut by Theodora's response when Huntly does "speak" to her about marriage: she rejects him, and is "grateful" that "The farce had not screamed" (p. 110). But surely we must protest that this moment indicates that Huntly has risen above the farce of his socialite life and is haltingly requesting Theodora to join him in creating a significant reality. Our protest is short-circuited by White's deliberate reduction of Huntly to crass materialism: "Huntly

Clarkson did not altogether believe that Theodora Goodman would reject the yellow façade and the laurel blaze of his great stone house" (p. 111).

In a scene echoing her shooting of the hawk, Theodora symbolically terminates her relationship with Huntly by shooting the heads off a series of little clay ducks at the fair. The aftermath of this act presents Huntly in his worst light so far:

Huntly, who walked almost beside her, had become big and soft, with a band of sweat beginning to show through the broad band round his smart grey hat. An abject and sorry deference had begun to make Huntly soft. He was all acceptance, like a big grey emasculated cat, waiting to accept the saucer of milk that would or would not be given. Only Huntly had begun to know that it would not. In the circumstances, or any way at the moment, you could not say that he was sad, because it had to be like this, from the beginning. Behind them others walked, half knowing, in their silence, ever since Theodora had shot the clay heads off the ducks, that she was separated from them forever by something that their smooth minds would not grope towards, preferring sofas to a hard bench. (p. 114)

This transformation of Huntly into an "emasculated cat" is a denial of the reality we have seen in him. He has "groped towards" Theodora and has been shut out, if not repelled, at every attempt to collaborate with her. White's observation that "it had to be like this, from the beginning" is an example of his imposing his dualistic vision to justify the thwarting of human relationship. Theodora is fated to



search for transcendence, while Huntly is locked into a meaningless existence; the gap cannot be bridged.

Once she has assured the continuance of her quest by shooting the ducks (and, metaphorically, Huntly), Theodora can indulge in regret that collaboration was not possible: "She looked at him and regretted his smile. It was like the last smile of someone on a railway platform, to whom one should have spoken while there was still time" (p. 114). Theodora's gesture here is purely sentimental, its depth of seriousness negligible. A more credible summary of the situation is given by White himself: "When we have drained the last emotional drops from a relationship, we contemplate the cup, which is all that is left, and the shape of that is dubious. So neither Mrs. Goodman nor Huntly Clarkson had survived in more than shape" (p. 117). In these terms a relationship is something consumed, not something contributed to. It appears static, rather than dynamic, and, far from being a collaborative enterprise, the other person is turned into an object. Theodora, following this pattern, never allows herself seriously to attempt a real relationship with Huntly; from the beginning she judges him to be no more than the sum of his material possessions. She uses him to gratify vicariously an impulse toward voluptuousness in

herself:

I suppose, said Theodora, if I responded to clothes it would be something the same. All the rich and sinuous sensations of silk and sables would not have been unlike the hours spent with Huntly Clarkson, which smelled of cigars, and brilliantine, and leather. The sensations that Huntly Clarkson gave were no less voluptuous for being masculine. (p. 98)

Though, as we have seen, White appears to have qualms about this account of Huntly, finally it is this superficial reading he endorses, and so justifies Theodora's dismissal of Clarkson. The impression we are left with is that the striving for a significant relationship is virtually pointless given the context of limited human existence in which it takes place. Meaningful existence is again forced beyond the boundaries of human life into a transcendent sphere.

Yet this static vision is given the lie by the very activity we are engaged in while intelligently reading the novel. An intelligent reading, of course, is one that is concerned to discover the reality of the work. This involves respect, care, and a holding in check of our natural propensity to impose our interpretation and so gratify ourselves. George Whalley, discussing the teaching of poetry, states what he feels to be one of the advantages of discouraging students from interpreting with a view to

finding a specific "meaning":

The student becomes increasingly aware of a changing quality of relation between himself and the poem; his presumption that he is a knowing subject and the poem a knowable object has changed into a cognitive relation, dominantly perceptual, in which the initiative begins to shift from himself as knower to the poem as capable of directing the process of getting-to-know--a process . . . that is very much like getting to know a person.<sup>21</sup>

Reading, then, as an heuristic process of "getting-to-know", replaces the subject-object dualism with creative relationship, just as getting to know a person, by removing him from the status of object, breaches the wall behind which we fancy ourselves to be inviolate subjects.

This similarity, however, between the processes of intelligent reading and genuine human collaboration, is not reflected in White. On the one hand he is extremely concerned about receiving an intelligent response to his work.

This is evident in the opening gesture and overall tone of the following passage from his self-portrait, Flaws in the Glass:

My work as a writer has always been what I understood as an offering in the absence of other gifts. The Aunt's Story, my first published work after settling at Castle Hill, was considered freakish, unintelligible--a nothing. You only had to pick up a library copy to see where the honest Australian reader had given it up as a bad job. I brooded after that. I considered giving up writing altogether . . . (pp. 143-144)

Here, through his novel, White offers to take the initiative

in "directing the process of getting-to-know", and he is understandably hurt when the book is labelled freakish.

On the other hand, the static dualistic vision he imposes on the novel prevents the process of getting-to-know that his characters engage in from progressing beyond a certain point. He is, at one and the same time, writing a novel that demands a serious engagement of intelligence and sympathy from his readers, and saying, within the work, that this engagement is not possible on any plane that could be meaningful to those readers.

This contradiction in White--implicit recognition of creative collaboration witnessed to in the fact of his being a novelist, conflicting with an explicit denial of creative human collaboration within the novel--reveals his debility in dealing with humanity. Diagnosing the strangely analogous case of T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis makes observations which are pertinent here:

his inner conflict, with the accompanying insecurity, entails an uncertainty, a limitedness and a lack of imaginative penetration in his awareness of other people. It is an aspect of the limitedness of his sense of the human world.<sup>22</sup>

These elements--uncertainty, lack of imaginative penetration, etc.--are apparent in White's treatment of those people who appear to offer alternatives to Theodora's solipsism. As we

have seen in the presentation of Huntly Clarkson, White undercuts his genuine human potential by dwelling on his shortcomings. The implications of real relationship are not faced up to. And, just as "Eliot's recoil from human responsibility restricts in a paralysing way his power to conceive significance-giving ends and spiritual values"<sup>23</sup>, so White's recoil acts in a similar manner. Increasingly what is offered as spiritual value assumes the characteristics of a mirage. As Theodora retreats further into her private world the vital relationships she imagines for herself are given an authorial endorsement which the reader concerned with the collaborative maintaining of a human world cannot accept as valid.

Theodora's brief relationship with the 'cellist Moraïtis is offered as an authentic contrast to the usual banality she finds herself immersed in. The use, again, of the recognizably significant roses and associations with Meroë signals the importance of their meeting:

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

Except once when his voice swam up, as if remembering, and said, "The roses . . ." turning to her to offer

his discovery.

"We lived once in an old yellowstone house," she said. "Old for here, that is. And one side was a thicket of roses. A tangle. I tell myself I can remember roses reflected on the ceiling, in the early morning, when I was a child. Do you think this can be a fact, or just absurd?"

"Yes?" he said doubtfully.

But although he did not understand, she knew that there was much that he would. In the eyes of Moraïtis there were many familiar objects. He held things with humility, his glass, or knife. Altogether there was little correspondence between Moraïtis and what was going on around Huntly Clarkson's table. He stood in the reflected roselight. (pp. 100-101)

In their reciprocal sensitivity Theodora and Moraïtis have re-entered the shell of innocence; the significance of their communion transcends the coarse world of experience inhabited by Huntly and his circle. The transcendent moment renders the mundane sphere of experience irrelevant. As Moraïtis tells Theodora, "It is not necessary to see things . . . If you know" (p. 102). What this means, of course, is that even the tentative relationship between Theodora and Moraïtis is, finally, irrelevant. Theodora recognizes this and the part of her that is desirous of human touch laments the fact:

It is not necessary to see things, said Moraïtis, if you know. It is like this, she said. And yet, for the pure abstract pleasure of knowing, there was a price paid. She remembered the Man who was Given his Dinner, the moment on the bridge, which was the same pure abstraction of knowing. But the exaltation was cold without the touch of hands, the breathing and stirring and waking of the tree in the snow. (p. 103)

To satisfy her need for touch, her human need to balance the cold purity of spirituality with the physical, Theodora turns inward. Just as the potential of her momentary relationship with the Man who was Given his Dinner could only be realized in her imagination, so with Moraïtis Theodora embellishes imaginatively on the sparsest of physical encounters. Listening to the preliminary music at the Moraïtis concert Theodora indulges in an imaginative flight which allows her visionary access to his backstage room:

Through the rain of distant music, in a comb of corridors, Moraïtis stood in the perspective of the brown room, which tried to contain him, but which failed, defeating its own purpose in reflections of reflections, endlessly. Just as Moraïtis himself defeated his own inadequate face, overflowing through the cavities, or thought eludes the skeleton of words. Theodora saw the reflection of Moraïtis suddenly pick up a tumbler of water from a tin tray, and all the reflections swallowed. . . . Moraïtis was protected by some detachment of unconcern. He accepted the isolation. He retied his bow. The eyelids were contemptuous on the eyes.

At that moment people had begun to clap, and she knew that he had come. (p. 104)

This is the mode of imaginative experience that becomes prevalent in Part Two of the novel. There Theodora confers significance on her welter of confusing memories by imaginatively entering scenes from the lives of whomever she is speaking to and reshaping them to answer her own inner needs. We can see this happening in the powerful sequence

at the concert in which she imaginatively makes Moraïtis's experience of the music give shape to her own life. The first movement parallels Theodora's spiritual development in childhood and youth:

Then the silence crackled. The concerto had begun. The violins made a suave forest through which Moraïtis stepped. The passage of the 'cello was diffident at first, struggling to achieve its own existence in spite of the pressure of the blander violins. Moraïtis sat upright. He was prim. He was pure. I am a peasant, he said. And he saw with the purity of primitive vision, whether the bones of the hills or the shape of a cup. Now the music that he played was full of touching, simple shapes, but because of their simplicity and their purity they bordered on the dark and tragic, and were threatened with destruction by the violins. But Moraïtis closed his eyes as if he did not see, as if his faith would not allow. He believed in the integrity of his first tentative, now more constant, theme. And Theodora, inside her, was torn by his threatened innocence, by all she knew there was to come. She watched him take the 'cello between his knees and wring from its body a more apparent, a passionate music, which had been thrust upon him by the violins. (p. 105)

The second movement captures Theodora's adulthood; her passionate life hidden under the sterile surface of spinster adulthood and a one-dimensional social environment:

The 'cello rocked, she saw. She could read the music underneath his flesh. She was close. He could breathe into her mouth. He filled her mouth with long aching silences, between the deeper notes that reached down deep into her body. She felt the heavy eyelids on her eyes. The bones of her hands, folded like discreet fans on her dress, were no indication of exaltation or despair, as the music fought and struggled under a low roof, the air thick with cold ash, and sleep and desolation. (p. 105)



The last movement projects spiritual significance into the future, promising transcendence and therefore escape from an increasingly hostile world, from the pull of the flesh, and foreshadowing Theodora's final departure from human society:

But in the last movement Moraitis rose again above the flesh. You were not untouched. There were moments of laceration, which made you dig your nails in your hands. The 'cello's voice was one long barely subjugated cry under the savage lashes of the violins. But Moraitis walked slowly into the open. He wore the expression of sleep and solitary mirrors. The sun was in his eyes, the sky had passed between his bones. (p. 105)

This sequence, the power of which is immediately obvious, embodies a Whitean contradiction that we are recognizing to be basic at this stage of his career: creative genius is dedicated, finally, to transcending the very soil in which creativity grows--human life. White must bring all the powers at his command into play in illustrating his belief that significant life is only found through spiritual transcendence ("Moraitis rose again above the flesh"; my emphasis), yet, ironically, his doing so only convinces us of the creativity, the importance, and the absolute necessity of collaborative human relationships. This comes out clearly in the following passage:

Many mornings trumpeted across the bay their strong hibiscus notes. The mornings smelled of nasturtium, crushed by the bodies of lovers on a piece of wasteland at night. Theodora sat sometimes to remember the music

she had heard. At these times she sat and looked at the piece of wasteland which was between their thin house and the bay. And the music which Moraïtis had played was more tactile than the hot words of lovers spoken on a wild nasturtium bed, the violins had arms. This thing which had happened between Moraïtis and herself she held close, like a woman holding her belly. She smiled. If I were an artist, she said, I would create something that would answer him. Or if I were meant to be a mother, it would soon smile in my face. But although she was neither of these, her contentment filled the morning, the heavy, round, golden morning, sounding its red hibiscus note. She had waited sometimes for something to happen. Now existence justified itself. (p. 106)

A passage such as this justifies our calling White a major writer. The sensuality is tangible; appeals to sight, sound, smell and touch demand a completeness of response from the reader that is lacking in lesser figures. Comparisons to Lawrence are inevitable. However, it is the way this passage differs from Lawrence that is enlightening.<sup>24</sup> In Lawrence's best work the sensuality is fully rooted in life, and the thought that arises out of the sensual soil maintains the living connection. In White, as this passage demonstrates, the imaginative thought is cut off from its fertile ground. White appropriates the sensual imagery to flesh out Theodora's solipsistic imaginative flight. In her memory Moraïtis's music becomes "more real" than the words of lovers at the height of their passion. Certainly we cannot deny that there is spiritual significance here for

Theodora, but to endorse the memory (which is all the experience is, finally) as more real than the physicality of lovers is to posit a spiritual-physical split which is a false dichotomy. Physicality is a necessary complement of spiritual development--it has to be; without our physical natures, our spiritual life is non-existent. As F.R. Leavis rightly says, "How could 'spiritual reality' . . . be a reality for us, or anything but a conventionally empty phrase, unless apprehended out of life, in which we are, and in terms of our human livingness?"<sup>25</sup> And "human livingness" entails creative collaboration in the most profound sense. In the following passage Leavis indicates how inescapable this collaboration is to the creative artist:

Blake's testimony is profoundly true: he lays such emphasis on art and the artist because the artist's developed creativity is the supreme manifestation of the creativity inherent in and inseparable from life--strictly inseparable, so that without it there is no perception. Except in the individual there is no creativity. . . . But the potentially individual such as an artist is discovers, as he explores his most intimate experience, how inescapably social he is in his very individuality. The poet, for instance, didn't create the language without which he couldn't have begun to be a poet, and a language is more than an instrument of expression. He is--let the fusion of metaphors pass--a focal conduit of the life that is one, though it manifests itself only in the myriad individual beings, and his unique identity is not the less a unique identity because the discovery of what it is and means entails a profoundly inward participation in a cultural continuity--a continuous creative collaboration, some-

thing that must surely be called "social".<sup>26</sup>

White, as a major writer, cannot escape this truth --his writing is evidence of his collaboration. The contradiction in him reveals itself in his inability either to let Theodora collaborate, or to distance himself far enough from her that he could judge her more unequivocally for this disability. The relationship necessary to reality demands reciprocation, but Theodora is neither artist nor mother, her response remains locked within her, the reality she perceives is totally solipsistic. The problem here, one that paralyses creative potential in the novel, is White's single-minded imposition of his belief that Theodora has no alternative. He evades the implications of his own collaborative activity by suggesting, through juxtaposition of scenes, that life outside the transcendent moment, though at times tempting, is, finally, meaningless and banal.

This conclusion is borne out in what is, finally, Theodora's most important relationship--that with her niece, Lou Parrott. In the other relationships White attributes the loss of connection, however unfairly, to Violet's sentimentality, Frank's grossness, or Huntly's materialism. Lou Parrott, however, has none of these failings; she seems

destined to become another Theodora. Lou's importance to Theodora is stressed in the following passage:

But it was not so much the boys she loved. They were round and hard and fierce as furry animals. It was Lou, whose eyes could read a silence, and whose thin yellow face was sometimes quick as conscience, and as clear as mirrors. Theodora loved Lou. My niece. It was too intimate, physical, to express. Lou had no obvious connexion either with Frank or Fanny. She was like some dark and secret place in one's own body. (p. 5)

Unlike Theodora's ephemeral relationships with the Man who was Given his Dinner and Moraitis--the persisting potency of which lies totally in her imagination--her relationship with Lou offers the possibility of creative engagement in the actual world. This offer, though, entails a demand: that Theodora be willing to commit herself to human reality, to the complexities and consequent responsibilities that true relationship brings with it. This White will not allow her to do. The limitations she sees in herself as a human being invalidate the potential creativity of her relationship with Lou at the outset:

"Did Grannie Goodman want to die?" asked Lou.

And again Theodora could feel the thin bone of an arm pressed against her waist.

"I expect she felt it was time," she said. "There was nothing left to do."

"I don't want to die," said Lou.

"There is no reason why you shall."

But Theodora, talking of reason, drew in her mouth for her own oracular glibness, suddenly taking it upon herself to dispose of life and death, as if they were

presents wrapped in tissue paper. She looked at the child's face. How far it was deceived she could not discover. It was a still, dark pool that for the moment did not reflect. (p. 11)

In Theodora's self-castigation White quickly qualifies any notion we might have had that her response to Lou--in its being the reassurance of a sincerely concerned adult for an uneasy child--forms the foundation necessary for significant relationship. Her gesture is seen, finally, as "oracular glibness", as deception.

This application of the rigid honesty-deception polarity reduces a complex moral situation to the level of black-white thinking. It allows White to evade the responsibilities he feels toward the human world. Because relationship cannot be conducted with complete honesty he feels justified in terminating it. In chapter six, the conclusion of Part One, in which White resumes the Theodora-Lou relationship after the intervening Meroë chapters, Lou again voices her disquiet and Theodora sadly muses on the impossibility of relationship:

The child shivered for the forgotten box, which she had not seen, but knew.

"If I do not die," she said.

Theodora looked down through the distances that separate, even in love. If I could put out my hand, she said, but I cannot. And already the moment, the moments, the disappearing afternoon, had increased the distance that separates. There is no lifeline to other lives. I

shall go, said Theodora, I have already gone. (p. 125)

We have seen Theodora's inability to put out her hand previously with Violet Adams, Frank Parrott, and Huntly Clarkson. There, however, White could deflect the implications of her action by accusing the others of insurmountable limitations. With Lou the deflective tactics are abandoned and we see the implications clearly. White's inability to believe, finally, in the possibility of creative human relationship is the result of an idealism unrealistic in the extreme. Mankind's failure to embody this ideal provokes White to misanthropy and solipsism. We see this at work in these passages from Flaws in the Glass:

As I could not come to terms with the inhabitants, either then [after private school], or again on returning to Australia after World War II [simultaneous with the writing of The Aunt's Story], I found consolation in the landscape. The ideal Australia I visualized during any exile and which drew me back, was always, I realize, a landscape without figures. (p. 49)

I can remember being scornful on catching sight of a flea from one of the dogs hopping out through an embroidered eyelet in her [his sister Sue's] dress as we sat side by side on the sofa. My desire for the ideal, the statues embodying perfection, was such that a miserable flea could threaten a human relationship. (p. 48)

As a consequence of the unsatisfactory nature of human life around him, White turned to his imagination:

I grew conscious of wanting to be a writer on leaving

my hated English school and returning to the Australia I had longed for. No, it wasn't so much a case of growing consciousness as a matter of necessity. Surrounded by a vacuum, I needed a world in which to live with the degree of intensity my temperament demanded. (p. 46)

This, of course, is Theodora's procedure. Surrounded by a similar vacuum in her family she turns inward out of necessity. Her desire, like White's is for a world in which significant relationship is possible, and this world is found to exist in her imagination.

As she grows, however, White transforms the significance she finds in her imaginative world into a transcendent realm which she can occasionally glimpse. Having once ascribed reality to a transcendent realm White is forced by his vision into believing that significant relationship is not possible, finally, in human life. The evidence of Theodora's relationships with Violet, Frank, Huntly, and, most importantly, Lou, indicates that White to some extent recognizes creative potential in relationship but can't escape the tyranny of a vision that renders futile any attempt to manifest that potential. At the end of Part One, then, Theodora is left concluding, regretfully, that "There is no lifeline to other lives." She says she shall go, that she has "already gone", and certainly in enacting the dictates of White's vision she has, in effect, "already gone".



She has chosen an existence which no authentic human touch can violate.

Part Two of The Aunt's Story presents difficulties in maintaining coherence with what precedes and follows it. At the end of Part One Theodora concludes that she cannot put out her hands, that "There is no lifeline to other lives." At the beginning of Part Three we see Theodora, on her train journey through the American mid-west, totally unable to communicate with a fellow passenger: "She tried to remember some unusual game that is played after adolescence. Because it was time, she saw, that she contributed to ease the expression on the man's face, that was an expression of expectation, and sympathy, and pain. But she could not" (p. 250). There is a consistency between these situations in more ways than one. Both show Theodora unable to enter meaningful human relationship; both also tend to justify her by pointing to the limitations of those whom she encounters. The only exception to this rule is Theodora's relationship with Lou Parrott. There, it is clearly Theodora who can't make the necessary gesture, because to do so, in her eyes, would be deceptive.

In Part Two, however, something very different happens. During her stay at the Hôtel du Midi, with its

seemingly ubiquitous Jardin Exotique, Theodora reveals a totally uncharacteristic ability to establish relationships. In her dealings with General Sokolnikov, Mrs. Rapallo and Katina Pavlou (to mention only the most important relations) she commits herself to the complexities, joys and sorrows of human life. Though she is as aware as she ever was of her own inadequacy she persists in offering a concerned hand. Certainly some of this unexpected human contact can be attributed to the empathetic flights of imagination which punctuate the first half of Part Two. For the most part, however, what she is doing in these flights "is facing her own problems in the subtly altered perspectives that these other lives afford."<sup>27</sup> The real encounter comes in the second half of Part Two, after the flights have ceased. As J.R. Burrows says, "This fugal period ["fugue" is Burrows's term for Theodora's flights of imagination] <sup>must --and does --end when</sup> Theodora's increasing knowledge of the 'actual' Katina Pavlou, the 'actual' Sokolnikov, necessitates an admission, so to speak, of their right to an independent existence."<sup>28</sup>

Though this reading can accommodate most of Part Two, it cannot, without strain, account for what would have to be termed Theodora's acute regression at the beginning of Part Three. John and Rose Marie Beston's reading can account for

this regression. For them, "The figures and events of the 'Jardin Exotique' section take place . . . entirely within Theodora's mind."<sup>29</sup> A major justification for their view is that "it is difficult to imagine Theodora, a restrained conversationalist at the end of Part One and a non-conversationalist at the beginning of Part Three, engaged in meaningful conversation with any of the guests in Part Two."<sup>30</sup> The problem with this reading, and also its main attraction, is the ease with which it dispenses with the conversations--and so the relationships--that Theodora so uncharacteristically engages in. If Theodora's interaction with Katina is simply fantasy, then its complex implications for human reality need not be taken seriously. And yet, to give the Beston reading its due, there is a strain of evidence running through Parts Two and Three suggesting that Theodora's human contacts at the Hôtel du Midi are purely fantasy creations. Peter Beatson, in a dextrous display of bet-hedging, sums up the problem we face:

On a common sense reading, we find Theodora arriving at a hotel in the south of France and participating in the lives of the other lodgers through a mixture of imagination, intuition, telepathy and, perhaps, a little lunacy. She has already shown her powers of empathy in Part One, when she participates in other lives, like those of the little hawk or Moraïtis, and what happens in Part Two is a simple, if startling, extension of this capacity. But there is another current of evidence in the book that

suggests that the unreality of events in Part Two is not limited to Theodora's vicarious experiences of the lives of others but extends to all of this section of the novel; it is possible that all the incidents, characters and even the Hôtel du Midi itself are no more than the creations of Theodora's ebullient but untrustworthy mind. This latter interpretation raises a vexing question: if the hotel and its inhabitants do not exist, then where exactly is the corporeal Theodora while they are being dreamed? The arguments for and against these two possible readings cannot be entered into here. But one can say that neither is true, neither is false, and that they are mutually incompatible. For that reason we must accept.<sup>31</sup>

Beatson's acceptance is an exasperating refusal to confront the problem. His "vexing question" about where Theodora is situated while she dreams Part Two (if that is what she is doing), is a straw man directing our attention away from the real question: what does this interpretive obscurity--for it is that, and not ambiguity--reveal about White's vision in this novel? I believe White was very much interested in, and attracted to, the life he could see emerging from Theodora's relationships in Part Two. I also believe his dissociation prevented him from committing himself to a full depiction of those relationships. He protects himself from complete involvement by introducing the possibility of total fantasy, which acts as a false trail leading us away from the real issue. Consequently, I feel Beatson's "common sense" approach--Theodora's

time at the Hôtel du Midi consists of reality plus imaginative flights--is the most profitable critical vantage. Adopting this approach will allow me--in the remainder of this chapter--to undertake a three-fold answer to the question posed above. First, I will examine how Theodora uses her flights of imagination to encounter her past. Second, I will show how insight gained in these flights enables her to enter into meaningful, if complex, relationships with General Sokolnikov, Mrs. Rapallo, and, most importantly, with Katina Pavlou; and, further, how these relationships lay a tentative foundation for the collaborative construction of a human world. Third, I will demonstrate how White's dualistic vision--in evidence in places throughout Part Two--causes him to undermine Theodora's gestures toward creative relationship by suggesting that they take place only in her mind. This arbitrary consigning of creativity, and therefore the potential for wholeness, to the realm of illusion, as happens most completely in Part Three with the introduction of Holstius, is evidence of a radical dissociation of thought and feeling on White's part. He imposes a mental resolution on the novel rather than risk his vision in the free play of novelistic creativity.

Theodora's fantasy life in Part Two occurs within

twenty-four hours of her arrival at the Hôtel du Midi. Employing her gift for empathy and her fertile imagination Theodora recreates episodes from the past lives of the other guests, episodes which have a bearing on her own history. In some cases the relevance to her own life is not immediately obvious to her and the significance emerges gradually. In others, especially with Katina Pavlou, Theodora's motives are primarily self-indulgent. Through all these flights, however, runs one central concern: each person longs for a life of significance, love, beauty and innocence to replace the inadequacies, failures, and meaninglessness of their present lives. Ironically, Theodora's recognition, by way of Mrs. Rapallo's and General Sokolnikov's past experience, that her parents shared these basic desires, however outwardly different they appeared, forces her to make a more just appreciation of them as people, rather than viewing her mother as simply a monster, or her father as a flawed paragon. This in turn forces her to acknowledge the priority of reality over illusion and so calls to account the motives behind the majority of her relationship with Katina Pavlou.

These motives are, as I said above, self-indulgent. Theodora's first flight in the Jardin Exotique has her

sheltering Katina through an earthquake and assuaging her fear of death:

"Miss Theodora, what is it? Is it necessary for us to die?"

"No," said Theodora. "But there is a serious earthquake. They are telling us to leave the houses. We shall lie on the beach."

In her arms the child's body, still limp with sleep, was like her own nakedness . . .

Theodora held the body of the child. She felt the moment of death and life. Across the water a black island moved, quite distinctly, under a chalky puff of cloud. . . .

When the earth had once more tightened its wire, and it was no longer a matter of life and death, it was difficult to say where one began and the other ended. We like to imagine doors that we can shut, because we are afraid of space, decided Theodora, who lay with her arm protecting the child, with whom she had just experienced the moment of death. (pp. 138-139)

In this episode Theodora allows herself to protect Katina from death in a way she knew she could not protect Lou Parrott. Through Katina, Theodora is able to carry on an idealistic relationship with Lou, a relationship that hints of passion, luxury and a love that will not fail:

"I would like you," said Katina, "to be a kind of aunt. Then we would still come to the islands, but without books. We would sit without our dresses, and eat pistaches, and do nothing, and talk. And I would kiss you, like this, in the particular way I have for aunts."

"Go, Katina! It is far too hot."

"It is never too hot for kissing. And your skin smells nice."

In the sun, Katina herself was a round white flint. That I could pick up and fling, wrapped in my love, Theodora felt, into the deathless, breathless sea. (p. 137)

But just as Theodora had felt deceptive when comforting the "actual" Lou in her fear of death, so here too she is aware that the ideal relationship is illusory:

"Sometimes, my dear, you say odd things. At least for a little girl."

"Why odd?" Katina said. "And why am I always a little girl?"

Exactly, Theodora supposed. She knew they were both of them undeceived. Their shadows mingled in the sand and stones, held hands, waiting for some cataclysm of earth and sea. (p. 137)

The cataclysm here, ostensibly the earthquake, has symbolic reverberations which include the fall from sexual innocence into experience, from the ideal into the real, and, finally, from life into death. Within the security her imagination provides, Theodora can experience this cataclysm--the moment of death--and still "protect" Katina. By wrapping the shell of illusion around herself she can maintain meaning in what seems like a meaningless world. But Katina also exists outside the flights and so is ultimately not subject to Theodora's ordering illusion. The personal cataclysm (Theodora's word) of sexual initiation awaits Katina and Theodora is powerless to protect her from it.

Long before she is forced into a personal recognition of this, she has been able to recognize the inevitable decay of illusion in Mrs. Rapallo and General Sokolnikov. In the



scene of the breaking of the nautilus shell Theodora experiences human frailty and need to a degree she won't feel again until her personal nautilus--Katina-Lou--is shattered. For both Rapallo and Sokolnikov the nautilus symbolizes cherished ideals. They have each nurtured illusions in which these ideals approach reality for both of them. Like Theodora, inside their illusions they have a certain power; once stripped of fantasy, however, they appear pathetic and pitiable. Seeing Rapallo and Sokolnikov in this state, Theodora feels genuinely concerned for and allied with each of them in their need. This involved and sympathetic attitude, this compassion, is the result of her coming to terms with her parents in a number of flights where they appear in the guise of Rapallo and Sokolnikov.

With the help of her imagination, and Elsie Rapallo, Theodora is able to perceive that both Julia Goodman's obsessive need to dominate others, which has such devastating consequences for her human relationships, and her crassly materialistic desires, which lead her to judge people by their surface worth only, are perverted aspects of a genuine human need for wholeness in life, for coherence, value, and love. These last qualities are symbolized by the nautilus Mrs. Rapallo is carrying on her arm when she first

appears: ". . . And I bought it, yes, Alyosha Sergei, I bought my nautilus. Of course I bought it. There it was. In full sail. I knew I had never seen perfection, never before, not even as a girl. And now it is mine. My beauty. I have waited all my life" (p. 150). The consequences for human relationship of Mrs. Rapallo's belief that she can buy perfection are brought out forcefully when Sokolnikov accosts her:

"You are a thief," he said. "It is immensely obvious. If there were any delicacy left in your American hand-bag, you would not have stolen what it is not possible to buy. Because it is not possible to buy, Mrs. Ra-pall-o, what is already mine. It is mine from staring at, for many years. It responded through the glass. A tender, a subtle relationship has existed, which now in an instant you destroy. Oh, what an arrogant woman! What a terrible state of affairs! What assassination of the feelings! I do not hesitate to accuse. You are more than a cheeky thief. You are a murderess. You have killed a relationship," the General cried. (pp. 150-151)

Remembering that "the great tragedy of Mrs. Goodman's life [was] that she had never done a murder" (p. 89), we see how Mrs. Rapallo embodies much of Theodora's past for her. But whereas Sokolnikov detests Mrs. Rapallo because "'She is an imposter'" (p. 148), Theodora, "Enchanted by the gouty golden music, Theodora forgave" (p. 148). Theodora recognizes, as Burrows says, that "For all her vulgarity, the ostentation of a Mrs. Rapallo can spring from a real need."<sup>32</sup>

In her forgiving of Mrs. Rapallo, then, she has also begun, possibly unconsciously, to lay the ghost of her mother to rest.

This process is advanced substantially in Theodora's second major flight with Mrs. Rapallo, in which they observe a ceremonious procession and hope to see Rapallo's daughter Gloria, Principessa dell' Isola Grande, who fails to appear:

"But where is Gloria?" asked Theodora, shocking the silence in a hush of flutes.

"You may well ask," whispered Mrs. Rapallo out of the sticks of her fan. "Gloria is in audience with a most important personage, behind the Canova group, in the gallery on the right. Her opinion is frequently sought, my dear, sub rosa of course, on matters of state. Gloria has intellect. She could have been a man."

But Canova just failed to disclose the body of Gloria. Her mind remained obscure, together with the problem of her thighs, though her shadow fell velvety across the marble floor.

"My enchanting child was always generous," Mrs. Rapallo said. "Always give, give, that was my Gloria. Up to a point of exhaustion." (pp. 179-180)

This, of course, parallels the situation of Julia and Fanny Goodman. Julia developed an illusion of what she wanted her daughter to be: someone of wealth, beauty, intellect and power who would place herself at her mother's disposal. The actual Fanny, who could not do more than make a mockery of these expectations, gradually disappeared, and only the illusion remained.

Theodora does not make this connection consciously;

it is only after the flight is over that the associations gradually begin to emerge. Approaching the hotel after their walk Theodora hears someone at the piano:

She heard with some sadness the gavotte, which had, she thought, the tight, frilled appearance of the music that Fanny used to toss into a room. Whether Fanny survived in more than a phrase or two of a bright, tight, mechanical gavotte, Theodora was inclined to doubt.

Mrs. Rapallo's crimson cape trailed violet on the frayed stairs.

"A penny for them, dear," she said.

"I have a sister," said Theodora.

"What is she like?" Mrs. Rapallo asked.

"She is a wife and a mother. She puts down eggs in water-glass. And twice she has had the Governor to lunch."

"It all fortifies," Mrs. Rapallo said. (p. 181)

In a similar manner, General Sokolnikov is the means by which Theodora comes to a more just understanding of her father. From the outset she associates the Sokolnikov-Ludmilla relationship with that her father and she shared:

"Even my sister, a reasonable soul, and a spinster, whom I respected, God knows," sighed the General, "even my sister Ludmilla was not a lady. She took snuff, and spat in the corner, and wore boots like a Cossack under her long skirts."

Theodora smiled. Because the General was expecting it. And because her boots rang hollow in the cold yellow grass, and in her armpit she felt the firmness of her little rifle. (p. 143)

Sokolnikov's vicious attack on Mrs. Rapallo for her presumption in buying the nautilus aligns him clearly with George Goodman, who, if not so vocal, was quite as opposed to

Julia's wilfulness. And just as Theodora had once sought refuge from Julia in her father's company, so now she turns warmly to Sokolnikov. What she discovers in an imaginative flight with the General, however, is that if her judgement of Julia needs tempering, so, surely, does that concerning George.

In early childhood Theodora had seen her father as synonymous with Meroë, as "Beginning and end". As she grew, she gradually came to realize that he had flaws of weakness and indecision. In spite of this knowledge, however, George remained for her a kind of long-suffering emissary of light waging a battle against hopeless odds: "Then you knew that Mother had won, in spite of Father's breathing hard. It was terrible, the strength of Mother. All your own weakness came flowing back. Mother was more terrible than lightning that had struck the tree" (p. 35). In her last flight, as Ludmilla, Theodora is shot by Bolsheviki while attempting to escape from St. Petersburg with her brother Alyosha. When, after the flight, she asks Sokolnikov what happened to him, his answer helps her acknowledge that her father was of human, rather than mythic, stature: "'My end was far less apocalyptic,' he said. 'After a short pause to consider the ethics of it, naturally and regretably I ran.

In the course of this operation I received a slight wound in the left buttock. . . . But I continued to run'" (p. 203).

J.F. Burrows aptly brings out the significance of this for Theodora's understanding of George Goodman:

Less adequate than some of his fellows, he had nevertheless done what he could for her and, far more important, had attended to his own necessities. He had not been Father, but a human being. Theodora has long needed to be shown these things. They can be shown now only because she has at last discovered the compassion, even the good humour, that they deserve.<sup>33</sup>

Theodora's ability to see her parents in a clearer light, though gained in imaginative flights, spells an end to her fantasy life, at least in Part Two. She has come to see her parents as human beings rather than as parental surrogates. This is an acceptance of reality over illusion and carries with it complexities and responsibilities that an allegiance to illusion can evade. The scene of the breaking of the nautilus shell is a prime example:

"Somebody is a thief," Mrs. Rapallo said.

She stood in the passage without her hair. Her words were blunted by her gums.

"Sokolnikov we knew. But you, Theodora Goodman! And intoxicated too."

Her hands explored without design the tatters of an old lace gown. Out of magenta she was pale.

"Of course I am all that you say, Mrs. Rapallo," Theodora replied.

She could not explain. She could explain nothing, least of all her several lives. She could not explain that where there is more than one it is inevitable always to betray.

"Do not let her deny you, Ludmilla," the General

fumed. "It is not possible to steal what is not her own."

"But it is," Theodora said.

"It is mine," said Sokolnikov.

"I know," Theodora cried.

Silence fell solidier than wax.

"You are drunk, Ludmilla," said the General.

"I have never seen more clearly," said Theodora slowly. "But what I see remains involved." (pp. 207-208)

Seeing another person clearly involves relationship. Both Sokolnikov and Rapallo are involved with Theodora and both feel betrayed when she sees the rightness in the other's claim. Yet betrayal is always a possibility if relationship is not to be an empty gesture. Only by abstracting herself out of any real contact with either Sokolnikov or Rapallo could Theodora find a rubric under which their differences could be resolved. We see her do this, for example, in one of her transcendent moments on a walk with Sokolnikov:

Soon the sea would merge with the houses, and the almost empty asphalt promenade, and the dissolving lavender hills behind the town. So that there was no break in the continuity of being. The landscape was a state of interminable being, hope and despair devouring and disgorging endlessly, and the faces, whether Katina Pavlou, or Sokolnikov, or Mrs. Rapallo, or Wetherby, only slightly different aspects of the same state. (pp. 173-174)

Here the lack of discrimination between individuals is a lack of real concern. Though White offers this as a taste

of "reality", it is actually no different than the illusions the others nurture to ward off a difficult and demanding world. But despite her transcendent moments, Theodora does face this world; with Sokolnikov, Rapallo, and eventually with Katina Pavlou as well, she commits herself to "that complementary curse and blessing, a relationship" (p. 193).

It is to Theodora that General Sokolnikov chooses to reveal the truth about himself. Through their fantasy-life and the scenes with the nautilus they have seen beneath each other's surface and, consequently, when Sokolnikov feels "the final twinge" (p. 221) with Katina, when any illusions he had concerning himself as her lover have been burst, it is to Theodora he turns to begin the painful acknowledgement of reality:

"Oh, illusions are necessary. It is necessary to accept. I shall tell you a secret. Incidentally. I was a major once. Also a colonel. Perhaps."

"Then you have deceived us, Major?" Theodora said.

"Deceit, Ludmilla, is a wincing word. I was a general in spirit, always. If I was not in fact, it was due to misfortune, and the superior connexions of my subordinate officers. But how I have lived in spirit. Such bugles!" (pp. 230-231)

Though he extols illusion, the General has, in fact, taken a very difficult step toward reality. Before the potential for truly creative relationship can begin to be realized inhibitions and impediments--whether fantasies, rigid



systems of thought, or personal prejudices--must be cleared out of the way as far as possible. The importance of this is seen in Theodora's accusation of deception. Her rigid standard of morality threatens to throw the General's gesture of collaboration back in his face. The accusation, though, is made in fun and Sokolnikov is not intimidated. He tells her something she has been needing to hear for a long time, that in the circumstance in which she used it, "Deceit . . . is a wincing word." Through her relationship with Sokolnikov she is gaining a better perspective on human reality.

This perspective is ignored, however, when her personal crisis is approaching. In her dealings with Katina Pavlou it is Theodora who must "feel the final twinge". Just as Sokolnikov persisted in indulging himself by seeing Katina as his "bright Varvara", and would heed no warnings about the eventual outcome of his infatuation, so Theodora sees Katina as Lou Parrott and will not heed even her own observation that "It was necessary that Katina Pavlou should discover fire" (p. 221). Although ostensibly Theodora's attempt to rescue Katina from Wetherby is above suspicion, when we look more closely her motives become questionable. Sokolnikov's assessment of the situation

is closer to the mark: "'It does not matter whether it is he. Because she has chosen. She has chosen this as the moment of experience. And experience has a glaze. It has not yet cracked," the General almost shouted" (p. 231).

Given that Katina is directing her own life in her affair with Wetherby, it becomes difficult to see how Theodora would be protecting her. What Theodora is doing, rather, is attempting to safeguard her self-indulgent fantasy of protective aunt and innocent niece. Sokolnikov's words pull this truth toward the surface but she pushes it down again: "All that afternoon Theodora Goodman . . . heard the words of Sokolnikov. Like rubber they departed and returned. Now her motives were equally elastic, because Sokolnikov had made her doubt. So she could not take the direct road" (p. 231).

She arrives too late to prevent the inevitable.

Katina greets her coldly and Theodora is forced to recognize that the girl has consciously chosen to enter experience:

"Her head was turned, so that she was looking at the sea.

Her hair hung, in some fresh way it had been done, Theodora Goodman saw, for some purpose. The hair, the body of Katina Pavlou, were conscious and intent" (p. 233). Theodora also recognizes that Katina is having trouble adjusting to the

world of experience: "She walked quicker. She walked too quickly. Katina Pavlou was going over, Theodora saw, she was going over all the time on the new high heels that she had begun to wear" (p. 234). It is at this point, when Katina is freshly stripped of her innocence and Theodora of her illusions, that Theodora commits herself to the human world by reaching out her hand, by stringing a lifeline to another life:

"Katina dear," Theodora Goodman said.

She took the cold, dead hand, that she would begin to warm. Her face began to fumble with words, and a rather stupid kind of happiness, that was also painful.

"Yes, Katina," she said, "this is always a long and intolerable stretch of road, but it is not interminable."

I am quite, quite stupid, Theodora felt, I can feel it on my face. . . .

"Have you ever been inside the tower, Miss Goodman?" Katina Pavlou asked.

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

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

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

But no less painful in its emptiness, Theodora felt. (p. 234)

Despite her feelings of inadequacy and her personal fears of sexuality Theodora warms the dead hand and brings it back to life. Here is creativity in the midst of desolation; collaboration provides a ground for the construction of a human

world.

In Mrs. Rapallo's final crisis Theodora again acts, despite a feeling of futility. Concerned about Mrs. Rapallo's absence at supper one evening, Theodora goes to her room and finds that the older woman has apparently attempted suicide with her sleeping drugs:

Without looking on the commode en marbre, behind the silver bonbonniere, Theodora expected to hear the petit paquet rustle. Instinct suggested she should rescue, if the tulip-coloured stream had not already carried Mrs. Rapallo out of reach. So she stood straight, and wrenched from her head a platitude, once the property of Fanny Parrott.

"Oh, but Mrs. Rapallo, you have so much to look forward to," Theodora said. "And now that your daughter has arrived. Surely the Principessa will drive over one day soon in the blue Delage?"

Mrs. Rapallo composed her skin.

"It is time, Theodora Goodman, that you and I agreed that the Principessa does not exist." (p. 236)

Mrs. Rapallo's statement amounts to a death-bed confession, and proves that she knows and values reality, even though she cannot, finally, face it.

In these relationships Theodora is making a commitment to the human world unlike anything seen in Part One. While just as aware of her own limitations, and those of the people she encounters, she is willing nevertheless to make gestures of collaboration. These gestures indicate a mature concern for the kind of reality she inhabits, and

embody a human hope which does not depend on illusion.

Nothing could be further from this attitude than the solipsism of Theodora in Part Three of the novel. She has regressed so completely that there would be no loss in novelistic continuity if Part Two were omitted. Understandably, critics have been thrown into confusion by this volte face.<sup>34</sup> I believe the abrupt change of direction after Part Two can be accounted for by White's inability to make the same commitment to collaborative human reality that he allows Theodora to begin to make. He is certainly attracted to this kind of relationship--Theodora's experience is evidence of this--but the dissociation in his personality eventually frustrates any move he makes in this direction. On the one hand, as a major novelist he is drawn to human collaboration as the basis of his creativity; on the other hand, he cannot see this route as offering the potential for wholeness. The result of this dissociation is a dualistic vision which consigns wholeness and, therefore, meaning, to a transcendent realm alone.

In Theodora's earlier relationships White thwarted the proceedings by emphasizing the limitations of Violet or Frank or Huntly. In this way he guaranteed the integrity of Theodora's solipsistic route to reality. Similarly in

Part Two White needs some way to evade the implications of what his art is telling him. Unable to follow the lead Theodora's relationships hold out, he disqualifies those relationships from any significance other than private by suggesting that they are figments of her imagination. We are almost coaxed to take the burning of the hotel as a psychic destruction and Theodora's last judgement, as Peter Beatson does, though this contradicts Theodora's apparent mental and emotional state, which is one of concern and commitment for her new-found contacts. Here is a typical example:

"I doubt whether Wetherby and Lieselotte are alive," Theodora said.

Because fevers consume, or are consumed. Nor did she expect Monsieur Durand, le petit, or Henriette. They too must have destroyed each other. But Sokolnikov, she said, there are some lives.

"Yes, I am here, Ludmilla," said Sokolnikov, blowing like a spray of several hoses. "I have escaped." . . .

"It was no miracle, Alyosha Sergei," said Theodora, "that you failed to burn."

Her affection could not have allowed it. (pp. 243-244)

This passage is reinforced by two from Part Three. The first occurs soon after Holstius's initial appearance: "Death had taken George Goodman and put him under marble. Fact corrected expectation. Just as the mind used and disposed of the figments of Mrs. Rapallo, and Katina Pavlou,

and Sokolnikov. And now Holstius" (p. 271). This piece implies that Part Two is a twentieth-century psychomachia in which the characters are only pawns used by Theodora's mind to move her one step closer to psychic integration. The second passage occurs just prior to Holstius's final departure:

In the peace that Holstius spread throughout her body and the speckled shade of surrounding trees, there was no end to the lives of Theodora Goodman. These met and parted, met and parted, movingly. They entered into each other, so that the impulse for music in Katina Pavlou's hands, and the steamy exasperation of Sokolnikov, and Mrs. Rapallo's baroque and narcotized despair were the same and understandable. And in the same way that the created lives of Theodora Goodman were interchangeable, the lives into which she had entered, making them momentarily dependent for love or hate, owing her this portion of their fluctuating personalities, whether George or Julia Goodman, only apparently deceased, or Huntly Clarkson, or Moraïtis, or Lou, or Zack, these were the lives of Theodora Goodman, these too. (p. 278; my emphasis)

Here we are shown a Theodora who has found psychic integration through the peace that Holstius offers her. This integration is a state in which all the people Theodora has known or imagined are "the same and understandable". She has entered the transcendent world of meaning which she had only had sporadic glimpses of previously. But the meaning here, and we must stress this since so many critics lose their human perspective entirely at this point,<sup>35</sup> is entirely

solipsistic;<sup>36</sup> it cannot be shared. If this is White's conception of true reality, then it is a reality which is so inclusive it becomes meaningless.

But, given the dual pulls in the novel--the imposed dualistic vision versus the tendency toward creative relationship--we can't, finally, be sure that Theodora's place of arrival is completely White's conception of reality. Certainly it is the aspect of the novel that is most strenuously "endorsed"; but even in the late stages of Part Three there are places that breathe a vitality quite unlike Theodora's abstract "peace". This, for example:

"So this is where Kilvert lived," said the mild man, for something to say.

Mrs. Johnson, who had been having trouble with the door, her side of the car, now tore it open.

"That's it," said Mrs. Johnson. "And where this crazy Annie has chosen to live now."

Mrs. Johnson's words hurt her. Sometimes she had to make her own words hurt, until she felt the smarting in her eyes. Because Mrs. Johnson suffered, excessively, from an excess of tenderness. For this reason she was hard. (p. 280)

Here is real human suffering, the suffering that comes of knowing that though life must have its boundaries if it is to continue, those boundaries can cause pain. What Mrs. Johnson does is accept responsibility for Theodora Goodman, who has abrogated responsibility for herself. Though White seems to acknowledge this, he had, slightly earlier, forced



us to see Mrs. Johnson in a much worse light, as almost a re-creation of Julia Goodman:

"But you can't stay here!" said Mrs. Johnson. "Alone. In this darned old shack."

Theodora saw how Mrs. Johnson's soul would have winced and contracted in a similiar situation. This was why Mrs. Johnson had to protest, why she stood firm, with her bare, sandy legs slightly apart, and tried to wrench the soul of Theodora Goodman into her freckled hands.

"I can," Theodora said. "I can stay here perfectly well."

Because she firmly intended that this game for the soul of Theodora Goodman should be finally hers. (p. 275)

This ambivalence of vision, which we have seen throughout the novel, is evidence of a radical dissociation of thought and feeling in Patrick White. As a major novelist White can't help but be in touch with human creativity --it flows through him. What White as the major novelist shepherds into being, however, White as the romantic and misanthropic idealist recoils against. The Aunt's Story springs from and contributes to a cultural continuity; it is the proof of White's participation in "a continuous creative collaboration, something that must surely be called 'social'."<sup>37</sup> Yet White thwarts this very collaboration within the novel on the grounds that it is futile; and in doing so he denies the basis of his own creativity.

In the next phase of White's work, reaching its

climax in Riders in the Chariot, the dissociation remains but an overt religious dimension gives the dualistic vision a justification White could not gain for Theodora. This justification in turn gives White a greater confidence and consequently the ambivalence which coloured The Aunt's Story is much less in evidence. But what we gain in surety of vision, we lose in lack of vitality. For all its vaunted grandeur, Riders manifests a strangely wooden quality; the soul of the novel languishes within a schematic straight-jacket.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>Douglas Loney, "Theodora Goodman and the Minds of Mortals: Patrick White's The Aunt's Story", English Studies in Canada, VIII, 4, (December 1982), 483

<sup>2</sup>John and Rose Marie Beston, "The Several Lives of Theodora Goodman: The 'Jardin Exotique' Section of Patrick White's The Aunt's Story", Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 9 (1975), 12. See also their "The Black Volcanic Hills of Meroë: Fire Imagery in Patrick White's The Aunt's Story", Ariel, III, 4, (October 1972), 33-43; and also John B. Beston's "Love and Sex in a Staid Spinster: The Aunt's Story", Quadrant, XV, 5, (September-October 1971), 22-27.

<sup>3</sup>J.F. Burrows, "'Jardin Exotique': The Central Phase of The Aunt's Story", Southerly, XXVI, 3, (1966), 153.

<sup>4</sup>David Tacey, "'It's Happening Inside': The Individual and Changing Consciousness in White's Fiction" in Ron Shepherd and Kirpal Singh, eds., Patrick White: A Critical Symposium (Adelaide: CRNLE, 1978), p. 38.

<sup>5</sup>John and Rose Marie Beston, "The Several Lives of Theodora Goodman", p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>Thelma Herring and G.A. Wilkes, "A Conversation with Patrick White", Southerly, XXXIII, (1973), 138.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>8</sup>pace Douglas Loney's suggestion that we "consider the earliest part of Theodora's journey as if it were a medieval morality play, in which the Everyman (or 'Goodman'?) protagonist, Theodora, is suspended between the Virtue and Vice figures of George and Julia Goodman"; p. 484.

<sup>9</sup>Marjorie Grene, The Knower and the Known, (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 180.

<sup>10</sup>D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949), p. 97.

<sup>11</sup>cf. "Why should the fact that some people--the loitering heirs of city directors, typists, bank clerks, rich demi-mondaine ladies--are superficial in their sexual relations, even displaying the 'broken finger-nails of dirty hands', so disturb Eliot that he sees it as an index of the spiritual sterility of the whole civilization?" (David Holbrook, Lost Bearings in English Poetry [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1977], p. 96.)

<sup>12</sup>This is the seed of the destructiveness White will finally call vivisection and attempt to justify through Hurtle Duffield's inspirational link with the transcendent realm.

<sup>13</sup>F.R. Leavis, "Justifying One's Valuation of Blake", The Human World, 7 (May 1972), p. 61.

<sup>14</sup>The allusions to both the disciples in Gethsemane and the crucifixion itself--Easter; the "ghost" who was lost while "driving his sheep"; waiting under "a big dead tree" for the "ghost"; and George's "falling asleep"--add a weight of symbolic significance to the words of the Man who was Given his Dinner and make our questioning his status less likely.

<sup>15</sup>F.R. Leavis, The Living Principle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 186.

<sup>16</sup>William Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup>David Myers, The Peacocks and the Bourgeoisie (Adelaide: Adelaide University Union Press, 1978), p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>cf. Brian Kiernan: "The consequence of White's close identification with Theodora, and of his personal aesthetic preferences with her perceptions, is an inability to present the world outside Theodora except dismissively. Yet what is really wrong with Fanny, or with the man in the laundered shirt who quotes statistics to Theodora as she travels across America by train, remains 'unargued' dramatically, and as a consequence seems a

reflexive dismissal of those who accept the contemporary world." ("Patrick White: The Novelist and the Modern World", in Don Anderson and Stephen Knight, eds., Cunning Exiles [Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974], p. 87.) See also his Patrick White, p. 32: "We see through the eyes of a woman who is withdrawing into what the world sees as madness, but as we see the world through her eyes we cannot judge her vision; we can only accept it or reject the novel. If we see Theodora sympathetically (as we must) and perceive with her the inauthenticity of modern life, we should still want to ask, with Lionel Trilling, whether such transcendence amounts to any more than 'a great refusal of human connections'."

<sup>19</sup>Loney, p. 489.

<sup>20</sup>Patricia Morley, The Mystery of Unity, p. 74.

<sup>21</sup>George Whalley, "Teaching Poetry", The Compass, 5 (Winter 1979), p. 7. cf. also Martin Buber: "In order to help the realisation of the best potentialities in the pupil's life, the teacher must really mean him as the definite person he is in his potentiality and his actuality; more precisely, he must not know him as a mere sum of qualities, strivings and inhibitions, he must be aware of him as a whole being and affirm him in his wholeness." (I and Thou, tr. by Ronald Gregor Smith, [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958], p. 132).

<sup>22</sup>F.R. Leavis, The Living Principle, p. 205.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>24</sup>In this connection see Rodney Mather's article "Patrick White and Lawrence: A Contrast", Critical Review, (Melbourne), 13 (1970), 34-50.

<sup>25</sup>Leavis, The Living Principle, p. 181.

<sup>26</sup>F.R. Leavis, "Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope", The Human World, 2 (February 1971), p. 20.

<sup>27</sup>Burrows, p. 156.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>John and Rose Marie Beston, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>31</sup>Peter Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala, p. 99.

<sup>32</sup>Burrows, p. 162.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>34</sup>J.F. Burrows, for example, had argued persuasively for Theodora's growing ability to enter relationships. But he could see Part Three waiting for him, undermining his argument, and his insecurity is reflected in a tone that slightly mocks his own stance:

This mood of fulfilment may suggest that the middle-aged doubts and fears of Theodora and Alyosha Sergei are more or less ironically rendered and that the novel comes down at last on the side of life, testifying to such healthful aphorisms as "A connection a day keeps the death-wish at bay." And indeed such a thesis would not be without grounds. . . . Such a thesis, however, is too simple to meet the novel's persistent emphasis on circumstance. (pp. 169-170)

He tries to suggest that Theodora's inability to forgive herself for her limitations forces her to continue her assaults on "the great monster Self" in Part Three. The problem here is that his reading is hard to document from the close of Part Two. Theodora seems calm and concerned for the situation of others; she is certainly not berating herself for her shortcomings.

This may also answer Peter Beatson, who has Theodora destroying the hotel in anger over what she considers to be Lou Parrott's letter of betrayal:

Lou, who confers identity, who creates that institution --an Aunt--could never, ever have another friend like Sister Mary Perpetua. It is after this blow that Theodora 'destroys' the Hotel du Midi and begins her return journey to Australia which for her has now become Abyssinia, the land of the dead. (p. 107)

Apart from the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that Theodora sees Lou's letter as a betrayal, let alone a "blow", this reading simply ignores the relationships Theodora has entered into.

<sup>35</sup>See especially David Tacey, "The Secret of the Black Rose: Spiritual Alchemy in Patrick White's The Aunt's Story", Adelaide Australian Literary Studies Working Papers, II, 1, (1977). 36-78.

<sup>36</sup>"Accomplished as it is, and its disturbing implications are an essential part of its achievement, The Aunt's Story ends in solipsism." (Brian Kiernan, Patrick White, p. 32.)

<sup>37</sup>Leavis, "Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope", p. 20.

## II

### RIDERS IN THE CHARIOT

When asked the difference between The Aunt's Story and the later novels, White replied: "The Aunt's Story is a work which celebrates the human spirit, but I had not yet begun to accept (except perhaps unconsciously) that I believe in a God."<sup>1</sup> The conscious acceptance came, he says, "during a season of unending rain at Castle Hill when I fell flat on my back one day in the mud and started cursing a God I had convinced myself didn't exist. My personal scheme of things till then at once seemed too foolish to continue holding."<sup>2</sup> Certainly there is evidence of a concern with the transcendent realm in The Aunt's Story; yet White's inability to accept this consciously resulted in the ambivalent endorsement of Theodora we have witnessed. At times she is surely mad, at others she has the key to true sanity. At places White clearly wants to give her a fulfilling human relationship, at others his rigid idealism prevents the spiritual compromise he feels



this would entail.

This ambivalence faded as his religious faith took hold. The now conscious faith enabled White to justify the dualistic split between a transcendent realm of significance and mundane human reality. As he says, "From The Tree of Man onward (that started under the title A Life Sentence on Earth) I wanted to suggest my own faith in these superhuman realities. But of course it is very difficult to try to convey a religious faith through symbols and situations which can be accepted by people today."<sup>3</sup> The problem is not, any longer, whether the transcendent realm is there (whether Theodora found true reality or is mad), but how to convey it. The issue of human relationships, so problematic in The Aunt's Story, assumes less importance as the novelist's gaze turns elsewhere for significance. As a novelist, White can't escape depicting human relationships, but he can divert attention from this troublesome area by investing his characters with authority and authenticity to the degree that they respond openly to the larger dimension. This leads to problems of its own, however. For the larger dimension is not felt to grow naturally out of the human realm that is often so vividly depicted. The greater significance is asserted, or imposed. Margaret Walters

comments on this problem in The Tree of Man (1955). While praising "a conversation between Amy [Parker] and her neighbour, Mrs. O'Dowd, where the two women's voices are caught sharply and convincingly", she notes how "White suddenly tries to shift his tone to suggest the flow of life at a deeper level; instead, he falls into meretricious verbal gesturing, and the use of vaguely emotive words and hypnotic rhythms that fail to cover the weakness of the parallel".<sup>4</sup> Similarly, commenting on Stan Parker's vision--which concludes with his famous statement that "It was clear that One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums"--Walters says:

There is not enough substance, either here, or in Stan's previous experience, to sustain the curious weight the author places on Stan's "vision". For White seems to regard what Stan sees as some kind of cosmic "truth" over and above the artistic "truth" about his life which the novel presents: There is an ambivalence at the book's core, a tendency to confuse artistic and metaphysical vision. It is, perhaps, an early and more oblique tendency of that desire to speak as prophet and not merely as an artist, which flaws White's later novels even more seriously.<sup>5</sup>

This tendency to speak as a prophet, or to deal with imponderables, is central to Voss (1957). The larger dimension is clearly intimated in the parallels between Voss and Christ; again the significance of the substantial human world is largely ignored. Once more Margaret Walters

has the proper perspective:

White seems to suggest that, through his suffering, Voss comes to accept the fears that always underlay his arrogance. In the moment of failure and self-knowledge, he finally admits his weakness, and his need for other human beings. He is in fact greatest, most "god-like" at the moment of defeat. But the conversion takes place in some quasi-religious dimension which White intrudes into the narrative. . . . the juggling with theological concepts seems no more than an illegitimate device to give the story of the explorer a significance it doesn't deserve. White implicitly invokes a transcendent authority before which any reservations are expected to dissolve.<sup>6</sup>

Geoffrey Dutton sees no problem here. Although he recognizes that the stature White has given Voss suggests that the German could never settle down with the "missus and the kids", he firmly believes that Voss and Laura's "love is not a spiritual evasion of the realities of the flesh, but a preparation for those realities", and that "a beginning at least could be imagined if Voss had returned, humbled".<sup>7</sup> But Dutton is providing the novelistic completion that White couldn't provide. It is Dutton, not White, who feels the worth of a life with the "missus and the kids". Peter Wood, in fact, criticizes Voss on the grounds that White provides no "lived opposition" that "could have tested dramatically such prejudices as Laura and Voss have, through the novel."<sup>8</sup> Although White has argued himself, through

Voss's story, to a recognition of the importance of human relationships, the understanding does not absorb his whole sensibility. He can do little more than make intellectually motivated symbolic gestures in this direction: Laura and Voss's relationship is an abstraction which is given significance by being placed arbitrarily in a "quasi-religious" framework.

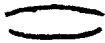
In Riders in the Chariot (1961) this reliance on an a priori framework is most pervasive.<sup>9</sup> Besides Judaism, Jewish Merkabah mysticism,<sup>10</sup> and Christianity, White draws heavily on Jungian mandala symbolism for the central configuration of the four riders in the chariot. As Edgar L. Chapman has amply shown, each of the four central characters "represents one of the four Jungian faculties of the mind in his visionary quest and apprehension of the numinous or transcendental world."<sup>11</sup> Miss Hare represents sensation, Himmelfarb intellect, Mrs. Godbold feeling, and Dubbo intuition or imagination. These are the four basic "functions" of the self according to Jung.<sup>12</sup> In his view the integrated self is often represented by this quaternity enfolded within a circle or mandala. In Riders the vision of the chariot shared by the four "illuminati" is the mandala of wholeness.

Though there is no need for us to question the sincerity of White's belief in superhuman realities we have to say that the wholeness manifested in Riders is arbitrary and imposed, reflecting White's fervent desire that the transcendent realm exist rather than any persuasive rendering of it. In Flaws in the Glass White acknowledges that Jung's work had a great influence on him, providing him with a kind of prop for his faith:

Jung's teaching also bolstered me up during a wavering of faith on realizing I could not accept the sterility, the vulgarity, in many cases the bigotry of the Christian churches in Australia. Manoly [Lascaris; White's life companion] seemed secure inside the structure of Eastern Orthodoxy. I had nothing from my upbringing in a kind of social C. of E. (a visiting card of the pew, clothes outgrown or no longer fashionable sent off to the jumble sale, a grateful rector and his wife calling to express gratitude for patronage). So I evolved what I think Manoly has always seen as my non-religious or mystic circus. (p. 146)

In this passage we recognize the opposition between White's faith and the surrounding superficiality to be the same tension encountered by Theodora. The security that Manoly finds in Orthodoxy White lacks, and clearly desires. To satisfy this desire he "evolves" a religion, so to speak, to house his faith and provide the refuge Theodora could not find so unequivocally. It does not seem surprising that Manoly is somewhat sceptical of the "circus" that re-

sults. Is this, we ask, how genuine religious feeling manifests itself?, in the language of expediency and use: "I had nothing from my upbringing . . . So I evolved . . ."?

Certainly White got little in the way of secure foundation from his upbringing, but more than the "social C. of E." was responsible for this. Like Eliot and like James, White is a man transplanted, despite his return to original soil. During his youth his roots were not allowed to sink  deep in an Australian community. He was sent to an English private school where "the jeers of the English school-boys for a Colonial in their midst" (FG, p. 46) prevented assimilation and made him long for home. But the "home" he longed for was now closed to him. He describes the "shock" of returning to Australia after school:

In the four years I spent away my imagination had created an ideal land from which my mother's ambitions had cast me out. However kind, generous, affectionate my family were on taking me back, they still did not understand the peculiar youth who had developed out of their difficult child. School-friends had dispersed and were working in different parts of the state. The few I met up with were daunted by my English inhibitions, which must have appeared as coldness, and of course there was the eternal barrier of speech. A film gathered on the eyes of those faced with my accent, whether pretentious hostesses who fancied themselves as sophisticates, or humble innocents like Harry England who trained my father's racehorses. (FG, p. 47)

As we saw earlier, White turned to his imagination

to provide the realm of significance he needed. In The Aunt's Story Theodora's alternative, of establishing human contact by genuinely reaching out, is not seen as visible. The human world appears much too intractable and superficial, too banal, and, finally, not worth the effort. For White the genuine problem of isolation resolves itself too easily into the opposing of significance and banality. Rather than attempt serious connection with the Australian Christians or pretentious hostesses, something which would demand true humility and real concern--qualities plausibly inspired by religious feeling--White categorizes these people as superficial and so justifies discarding them and going his own quasi-Jungian, quasi-mystical way toward spiritual wholeness.

Riders in the Chariot represents White's furthest progression along this route. As the reliance on extrinsic systems becomes more complete, the ambivalence of The Aunt's Story all but disappears. Though Miss Hare, in her confusion, hopes someone will show her "how to distinguish with certainty between good and evil" (p. 82), White is not labouring under the same confusion. Good and evil are very easily recognized in this novel--too easily. In The Aunt's

Story, Theodora's relationships with General Sokolnikov and Mrs. Rapallo dramatized the difficulties inherent in this problem. The complexity of human life confronted her with responsibilities that her author could not commit himself to. White ran into obscurity trying to extricate himself from where his novel had taken him. Though his obscurity represented a profound ambivalence in the novelist, it also signalled the presence of real creative life--life attempting to bridge White's false dualistic split between significance and banality.

In Riders White has resolved this issue arbitrarily. His illuminati are spiritually alive and good; the rest of the characters are either spiritually dead or actively evil. The visionary programme, coming to fruition, imposes a grid on the novel that effectively prevents the creative potential in human relationships from being realized. The disability is seen clearly in Miss Hare's resenting the human contact that must eventually disturb her concourse with nature (p. 8), in her "Naturally [finding it] impossible to like human beings" (p. 15). In a fight with Mrs. Jolley we find Mary wondering if "she, too, contained something evil which could take control at times? Some human element. Now she recalled, with nostalgia, occasions



when she had lost her identity in those of trees, bushes, inanimate objects, or entered into the minds of animals, of which the desires were unequivocal, or honest" (p. 83).

Of course we are not to mistake these sentiments for White's; comparison to both Mrs. Godbold's and Himmelfarb's lovingkindness ostensibly reveals that Mary Hare's misanthropy is a limited response to humanity. I say "ostensibly" because when we "trust the tale" rather than the author's imposed symbolism we find substantial evidence indicating that the lovingkindness practised by the illuminati is a programme which actually protects White from having to make authentic contact with human creativity. In this sense misanthropy is the right word to describe White's basic attitude in Riders.

I want to begin to substantiate this contention by looking at Mary Hare's relationship with Himmelfarb. For each of them the encounter is significant. Both have been alienated from "normal" society by their differences: Himmelfarb's Jewishness, Hare's "subnormality", both by their ugliness. Other than Mrs. Godbold, Himmelfarb is the first person to accord Mary the respect she deserves as a human being:

She realized that she was at her most hopelessly

inadequate. Her tongue was small, and round, and hard.  
The man nodded, however. She saw he would take her seriously. (p. 95)

Similarly, her lack of learning and cultural prejudice allows her to see him simply as a man with interests she shares, rather than as a "dirty Jew", "bloody reffo", or even the Messiah:

"I mean," he continued, "I am a Jew, and centuries of history have accustomed one to look inward instead of outward."

"Oh," said Miss Hare, "there are others who do that!"  
(p. 96)

In the relationship that follows we see Mary Hare begin to blossom as a human being. Previously starved for collaboration, she now finds herself facing a new world:

She had never spoken like this before to any human being. Unexpected seeds of thought were germinating in her mind, and she had the impression she might shortly grasp things which had remained, hitherto, the secrets of others. . . .

"So you will come here again, won't you?" Now she was pleading, only this time it could have been in her own interests. "I want you to tell me things. About your life. Won't you?" (p. 99)

The creative power of collaboration is seen clearly here.

Mary, from being a stunted plant in one of her father's wilfully planned gardens, is moving toward an individuality and human wholeness that are inseparable from healthy, active relationship.

We see just how much Mary has been brought back to

human life in the episode where she warns Himmelfarb of the danger to him she perceives in Mrs. Jolley and Mrs. Flack:

After she had looked round, Miss Hare managed, painfully, "I was afraid for you."

And did the most extraordinary thing.

She took the Jew's hand in her freckled, trembling ones. What she intended to do with it was not so apparent to either of them, for they were imprisoned in an attitude. She sat holding the hand as if it had been some thing of value found in the bush: a polished stone, of curious veins, or one of the hooded ground-orchids, or knot of wood, which time, weather and disease, it was suggested, had related to human disasters. Only the most exquisite sensation destroyed the detached devotion which Miss Hare would normally have experienced on being confronted with such rare matter. (p. 325)

What we are witnessing is the development of an individual personality. The concern that leads Mary to grasp Himmelfarb's hand, and to experience an "exquisite sensation" rather than her usual "detached devotion", is a personal concern of one individual for another. It is the result of the whole person being engaged in the relationship, rather than a specialist, philanthropic part. The "exquisite sensation" is Mary's first experience of womanly sensuality, and is totally appropriate given the degree of emotional involvement the incident has evoked in her.

It is at this point that the author's predilections take control. Thus far the relationship has been an example of White's novelistic genius. He allows Mary's impelling need for human collaboration to determine the direction the writing

will take. There is a life--a quickness--to the relationship which suggests creative powers unimpeded by secondary interests. But Patrick White is a man divided. As well as the genuine novelist's genius--which recognizes that its creative wellhead lies in the complex sinew of human relationships, far from any absolutes--White also manifests a misanthropic inability to acknowledge human creativity. When faced with Mary's highly personal concern for Himmelfarb, with its tinge of sensuality, White pulls back and proceeds to devalue the vitality felt here by making us visualize Mary's eroticism after reminding us, through Himmelfarb, that any expression of it must be ludicrous:

"Anybody's life is threatened with a certain amount of hazard," the Jew answered seriously, after he had recovered with an effort from hilarious surprise, and a thought so obscene he was humiliated for the capacity of his own mind. . . .

She herself could have dwindled into a marvellous silence, her body slipping from her, or elongated into such shapes of love and music as she had only noticed long ago in dances, swaying and looking, no more governed by precept or reason, but by some other lesson which the flesh might at any moment remember, at the touch of peacock feathers.

Miss Hare had to glance at her companion to see whether he could be aware that her limbs were, in fact, so long and lovely, and her conical white breasts not so cold as they had been taught to behave unless offered the excuse of music. (p. 325)

One would think that Miss Hare's awakening to herself as a woman for the first time would be something to rejoice

in, whether or not consummation is involved; it is a triumph of human wholeness. But wholeness, for White, is something beyond the human realm, and comes, finally, with self-annihilation. This belief results in the devaluing of the very sensuality and vital human physicality that his novelistic creativity produces, as we have just seen. Devaluing of this kind is quite common in White's work. In Riders other examples are Mrs. Spice, Mrs. Khalil's establishment, and, to be discussed later, Tom Godbold. In none of these instances is the vibrancy or vitality allowed to grow freely. By locking these characters into their morally suspect, if not corrupt, social roles White can play with life without having to commit himself to it. This problem becomes much more ambivalent, equivocal and serious in The Vivisector in the presentations of Nance Lightfoot and Rhoda Courtney.

White does not lock Miss Hare into the sensual role he has made ludicrous but has her respond to a slight personal gesture from Himmelfarb by retreating to the safety of an impersonal state: "'Oh,' she cried, her mouth full of tears and pebbles, 'I am not interested in you! Not what you are, think, feel. I am only concerned for your safety. I am responsible for you!' she gasped" (p. 326). This is a contradiction in terms. One cannot be responsible for someone

without an interest in their thoughts, feelings, and overall being. To say one can be is to remove responsibility from the human realm. This is what White is doing, though he continues to say he is working in human terms:

In her anxiety, her tormented skin began to chafe his hand. Whether she had suspected a moment before, probably for the first and only time, what it was to be a woman, her passion was more serious, touching, urgent now that she had been reduced to the status of a troubled human being. Although they continued to sit apart on the terribly formal furniture, it was this latest metamorphosis which brought the two closest together. (p. 326)

This passage contains a number of examples of sleight of hand. Why is being a "woman" considered less serious than being a "troubled human being? What, beyond mere assertion, makes her passion now more serious, touching and urgent than when it was more personal? On what level of human reality are they brought closer together than they were previously? In each case the criteria of value are impersonality, distance from physicality, loss of individuality; the movement, despite what White says--and it is he who makes these last assertions--is away from the human realm. A page later we see the destination of the movement:

She was at her ugliest, wet and matted, but any disgust which Himmelfarb might have felt was swallowed up in the conviction that, despite differences of geography and race, they were, and always had been, engaged on a similar mission. Approaching from opposite directions, it was the same darkness and the same marsh which threatened to eng-

ulf their movements, but however lumbering and impeded those movements might be, the precious parcel of secrets carried by each must only be given at the end into certain hands. (p. 327)

Unable to acknowledge the creative possibilities of a personal human relationship--however compellingly rendered--White retreats into his symbolic framework. The meeting of Miss Hare and Himmelfarb becomes an archetypal situation--the meeting and melding of sensation and intellect on the road to transcendent reality. What we come to recognize is that, in effect, the characters must be purged of their humanity before they can attain the higher plane of lovingkindness.

The story of Himmelfarb's marriage with Reha, and his response to her death at the hands of the Nazis, dramatizes the movement from a sterile, cerebral wilfulness to humility and lovingkindness. Here as well, however, the plane of lovingkindness is seen to be an inadequate response to the poverty of Himmelfarb's earlier human relationships, which are rendered with a masterly ironic touch. I want to demonstrate that while the irony directs us towards life, the lovingkindness, which ostensibly does so, turns away from it.

We can begin by looking at Himmelfarb's wedding scene, in which the old dyer accosts him with expressions of confidence in his ability to "justify our expectations" (p. 134).

Himmelfarb accuses the clinging figure of speaking in riddles or secrets:

"There is no secret," the dyer appeared to be saying, or shouting back. "Equanimity is no secret. Solitariness is no secret. True solitariness is only possible where equanimity exists. An unquiet spirit can introduce distractions into the best prepared mind."

"But this is immoral!" Mordecai protested, shouting. "And on such an occasion! It is a denial of community. Man is not a hermit."

"Depending on the man, he is a light that will reflect out over the community--all the brighter from a bare room."  
(p. 134)

Given the figure of the dyer, who had recognized a religious potential in the young Himmelfarb; who is named Israel and who, though childless, has discovered other ways to "sow the seed" (p. 129); and whose skin is bathed in indigo, the colour of heaven (Himmelfarb)--we are virtually forced to see Himmelfarb's plea for community in an ironic light. The use of exclamation marks, in fact, contributes to our seeing Himmelfarb's protesting phrases as clichés, and consequently the weight of significance falls on the dyer's words. Thus we have, at the beginning of Himmelfarb's married life, an indication that at least part of White endorses a solitary, mystical life which runs counter to a creative marriage relationship.

The presentation of Himmelfarb's and Reha's life together, however, carries ironies which clearly suggest that



Himmelfarb's scholarly and, later, mystical pursuits are undertaken at the expense of marital wholeness. Though Reha labours to disguise the fact, it is obvious that there is a great gap in their life. She begins to suffer from breathlessness, which some ladies attribute to certain causes and others to "the absence of a family":

One of the latter, a gross creature by intellectual standards, whose husband was a haberdasher in a mean street, and who was received on account of a relationship, knew no better than to say outright, "But Rehalein, it is time you had a child. Why, the duties of the rabbanim do not begin and end in books. Give me a good, comfortable, family Jew. He may not spell, but he will fill the house with babies."

Two other ladies, one of whom was noted for her readings from the West-Östlicher Diwan, decided it was time to break off even forced relations with the haberdasher's wife, who was smelling, besides, of perspiration and caraway seeds.

While Reha Himmelfarb simply maintained, "Who are we, Rifke, to decide what a man's duties shall be?"

And Himmelfarb loved his wife the better for overhearing.

They were brought together closer, if anything, in an effort to express that love of which it seemed no lasting evidence might remain. None would know how Himmelfarbs had rejoiced in each other, unless by an echo from a library, from the dedication in a book: To my wife, Reha, without whose encouragement and assistance . . . But words do not convince the doubting soul like living tokens, as the wife of the haberdasher knew, for all her simplicity, or perhaps because of it. (p. 138)

Both the endorsement in the last sentence, and the irony at the expense of the socialite friends, indicate that the haberdasher's wife has recognized a real problem. The normal mari-

tal route of children has been foregone and Reha has to quell her natural feelings in order to support her husband.

As the relationship develops it becomes apparent that although Himmelfarb recognizes disquietude in Reha he is only too ready to let her explain it away; his scholarly self-interest makes it easy for him to avoid the kind of responsibility one would associate with genuine lovingkindness. We see this in the following exchange:

"Reha, darling, I can tell you are badly disappointed."

And took her resisting hand, and put it inside his jacket, so that it was closest to him.

"Why?" she cried. "When our life together is so happy? And soon there will be the Chair. Everybody is convinced of that."

He was half exasperated, half in love.

"But not the babies that your Cousin Rifke advises as the panacea."

She would not look at him. She said, "We must expect our lives to be different."

"Referring in cold abstractions," he answered, "to matters we do not understand. But for our actual lives—for yours, at least—I would ask all that is comforting and joyous."

"Oh, mine!" she protested. "I am nothing. I am your footstool. Or cushion!" She laughed. "Am I not, rather, a cushion?"

She did appear her plumpest looking up at him, happy even, but, he suspected, by her own effort.

Then she put her arms around his waist, and laid her face against his vest, and said, "I would not alter a single detail of our lives." . . .

Then he left, relieved that his wife was such a simple loving creature. If her words sometimes hinted at deeper matters, no doubt it was pure chance; she herself remained unaware. (pp. 139-140)

The ease with which he desires for her "all that is comforting

and joyous" indicates just how out of touch with her life he really is. The lack of specificity, of personality, in the desire reveals that his gesture is conventional and empty, and that he would rather be considering his cold abstractions. It is by way of these abstractions, "the driest, most cerebral approach" (p. 143), that he begins his mystical ascent. And logically enough given the method, he "cannot begin to see the expression of the faces" of the riders in the chariot he dimly recognizes. When a face does, finally, become recognizable he is "transfixed by his own horror. Of his own image, but fluctuating, as though in fire or water. So that the long-awaited moment was reduced to a reflection of the self" (p. 143).

The consequence of Himmelfarb's self-centredness--his inability to hearken to the hints of distress in his wife--is symbolized most clearly in his desertion of her in a moment of fear. She is taken by the Nazis and he is utterly desolated, and for the first time humbled.

It is at this point that the presentation of Himmelfarb becomes problematic. As an example of White's more subtle diagnostic powers the scenes quoted above clearly show that Himmelfarb needed to take a more active part in his marriage, needed to express a personal concern for Reha as an individual.

When, however, Himmelfarb is bludgeoned into an awareness of his human responsibility by Reha's death, his concern assumes the shape of an abstract lovingkindness which actually maintains the separation from active human life it is ostensibly overcoming:

. . . he continued his search for a solution to the problem of atonement. . . . he had, in fact, reached a state of practical disembodiment, and would enter into the faces that he passed.

This became a habit with the obsessed Jew, and he derived considerable comfort from it, particularly after it had occurred to him that, as all rivers must finally mingle with the shapeless sea, so he might receive into his own formlessness the blind souls of men, which lunged and twisted in their efforts to arrive at some unspecified end. Once this insight had been given him, he could not resist smiling, regardless of blood and dogma, into the still unconscious faces, and would not recognize that he was not always acceptable to those he was trying to assist. For the unresponsive souls would rock, and shudder, and recoil from being drawn into the caverns of his eyes. And once someone had screamed. And once somebody had gone so far as to threaten.

But their deliverer was not deterred. He was pervaded as never before by a lovingkindness. (p. 166)

But mere assertion does not convince the doubting soul, as both the haberdasher's wife and Patrick White were aware in the scenes prior to Reha's death. Although White's diagnostic capabilities are acute, when it comes to fulfilling the diagnosis, portraying the right relationship that his own novelistic perception calls for, problems arise. In the quotation above Himmelfarb's lovingkindness, in its lack of

discrimination, is like a syrup that he pours over mankind. By covering everything in its path equally it stifles the possibility of creative, personal relationship; its effect is to insulate Himmelfarb from human contact, to manifest, contrary to the intention of both character and author, a lack of concern.

What we see overriding genuine human concern in the novel is White's symbolic scaffolding. White knows compassion and concern are necessary elements in human life--the lack of them in Theodora's childhood was disastrous--but he can't feel them genuinely himself. He turns to a symbolic framework which can provide the needed qualities without demanding more than a cerebral commitment from him. Any hints of irony recognized in the last quotation--for example, the fact that Himmelfarb "would not recognize that he was not always acceptable to those he was trying to assist"--are purely local and are in no way meant to call into question the programme of loving-kindness. In any event they are soon left behind as Himmelfarb strives for the equanimity the dyer had said was a prerequisite to complete lovingkindness. In his "obscure box" in the Stauffers' country house "he was rarely unemployed, but had not yet arrived at that state of equanimity, of solitariness, of disinterest, from which, it had been suggested

by the dyer, he might illustrate the vaster darkness" (p. 172).

The most weighty endorsement of Himmelfarb's direction comes when the Chariot itself protects him during a bombing raid:

Then wheels were arriving. Of ambulance? Or fire-engine? The Jew walked on, by supernatural contrivance. For now the wheels were grazing the black shell of the town. The horses were neighing and screaming, as they dared the acid of the green sky. The horses extended their wobbling necks, and their nostrils glinted brass in the fiery light. While the amazed Jew walked unharmed beneath the chariot wheels. (p. 179)

He turns himself in and is transported to a railway holding shed full of Jews destined for the death camps. Here "Himmelfarb embraced the children of the dyer. Even when they would not have him" (p. 182). With this hint of possible persecution by those to whom the love is offered, the stage is set for the messianic and Christian symbolism that culminates in the crucifixion and deposition scenes that form the novel's climax. But nowhere is all this symbolic freight grounded in tangibly personal human relationships. Only in Himmelfarb's interaction with Miss Hare is this human wholeness approached and, as I have shown, the authenticity and vitality there are due to a momentary abeyance of the extrinsic symbolic framework.

White's endorsement of compassion, humility, and lovingkindness, then, makes no claim upon the wholeness of his being. The symbolic framework into which these qualities fit

is accorded a cerebral commitment because it insulates the realm of significance from contamination by raw life. And raw life is something that evokes White's misanthropy. Loathing is never far from the surface in this novel; we see it in the programmatic hatred for suburban values, "The voice of Sarsaparilla . . ." (p. 224),<sup>13</sup> and in the revulsion with sheer physicality which occasionally breaks through the symbolic frame with the force of a boil being lanced.<sup>14</sup> Himmelfarb's train ride through night-time Sydney is the most graphic example in the novel of White's dissociation of intellect and emotion. Symbolically Himmelfarb's journey back to Sarsaparilla from the Rosetrees' home in Paradise East is his return to bondage in Egypt after an abortive attempt to enter an illusory Promised Land.<sup>15</sup> Sydney's seedy night life comes to represent for him the biblical fleshpots of Sodom, Nineveh, and Babylon. But, as John Colmer rightly says, "This extravagantly mannered vision of a people in 'a state of bondage' cannot be accepted as belonging to Himmelfarb's humbled Jewish sensibility; it is so obviously the product of White's Swiftian rage and disgust."<sup>16</sup> I want to quote the majority of the scene; simply reading it makes clear, with a facility I cannot match, that the lovingkindness presented in the novel is a programme with little substance:

The train burst across the night where it was suspended, miraculously, over water. In the compartments no one but the Jew appeared to notice they were returning to a state of bondage they had never really left. But the Jew now knew he should not have expected anything else.

The train was easing through the city which knives had sliced open to serve up with all the juices running--red, and green, and purple. All the syrups of the sundaes oozing into the streets to sweeten. The neon syrup coloured the pools of vomit and the sailors' piss. By that light, the eyes of the younger, gabardine men were a blinding, blinder blue, when not actually burnt out. The blue-haired grannies had purpled from the roots of their hair down to the ankles of their pants, not from shame, but neon, as their breasts chafed to escape from shammy-leather back to youth, or else roundly asserted themselves, like chamber-pots in concrete. As for the young women, they were necessary. As they swung along, or hung around a corner, or on an arm, they were the embodiment of thoughts and melons. As if the thoughts of the gabardine men had risen from the ashes behind their fused eyeballs, and put on flesh at last, of purple, and red, and undulating green. There were the kiddies too. The kiddies would continue to suck at their slabs of neon, until they had learned to tell the time, until it was time to mouth other sweets.

All along the magnesium lines swayed the drunken train. Because the night itself was drunk, the victims it had seemed to invite were forced to follow suit. Himmelfarb was drunk, not to the extent of brutishness; he had not yet fetched up. Released from the purple embrace, sometimes he tottered. Sometimes hurtled. Watching.

As the darkness spat sparks, and asphalt sinews ran with salt sweat, the fuddled trams would be tunnelling further into the furry air, over the bottletops, through the smell of crushed pennies, and not omitting from time to time to tear an arm out of its screeching socket. But would arrive at last under the frangipani, the breezes sucking with the mouths of sponges. Sodom had not been softer, silkier at night than the sea gardens of Sydney. The streets of Nineveh had not clanged with such metal. The waters of Babylon had not sounded sadder than the sea, ending on a crumpled beach, in a scum of French letters.  
(p. 421)

Corroboration of my point that this excessiveness is coming



from White rather than Himmelfarb is found in Flaws in the Glass. The dissociation is, again, clearly seen:

I tell myself I must not hate human beings. I try to conjure up my vision of an actual landscape and the inhabitants to whom it belongs. But it is hard for visions to survive in the plastic present, as mascara trickles from smeared eyes and blown-up lips gorge themselves on mass-produced food. There comes a moment when a stream of semi-digested eggplant, mincemeat, and tomato is vomited across the screen of memory in a sour splurge. (pp. 204-205)

There is a strange force in these passages. What Colmer calls an "extravagantly mannered" style in the Sydney piece can, from another perspective, be seen as an impressive and original marshalling of creative resources. The direction taken, however, is purely destructive.<sup>17</sup> The basic human respect necessary for engendering a constructive attitude--even if a satiric one; the two are not mutually exclusive--is absent. Force there is in abundance--its author deserves to be called major--but its use is an indulgence. White lets himself be carried away from human responsibility by the emotional tide of his misanthropy.

Emotional assaults of this magnitude are rare in the novel, though the indictment of suburban and bourgeois characters and values is definitely akin to it. Normally the extrinsic symbolic framework which carries White's intellectual endorsement is able to keep the misanthropy in check. Unfortun-

ately, in doing so it also tends to suffocate the genuine life that White's novelistic creativity engenders. In the climactic crucifixion scene, for example, White's striving for analogical symmetry goes on at the expense of a potential for fuller life we were beginning to glimpse in Harry Rosetree. Cast first as Pilate to Himmelfarb's Jesus, and then as the conscience-stricken Judas who hangs himself, Rosetree's personal life is never allowed more than superficial status. Certainly he is a minor character but the sense we get from his presentment is that he exists, finally, to flesh out the crucifixion scene. The fears of alienation and persecution that he and his wife have evaded in their attempt to assimilate, and the anguish of conscience that Harry begins to feel when confronted with Himmelfarb, are done an injustice when White slots him into the role of Judas. Here is Margaret Walters:

White catches very well the absurdities and dangers implicit in the Rosetrees' denial of their Jewishness. Their frantic efforts to assimilate reveal effectively the damage they do to themselves, as well as the inadequacy of the standards to which they aspire. The melodramatic parallel between Harry and Judas is not only psychologically unconvincing and imposed from without; more seriously, it throws no light at all on the previous study of the Rosetrees, and evades the problems raised there. The transcendent parallels are a way of escaping the full brunt of human issues. Instead of truly exploring the situations he creates, White simply assimilates them to a ready-made pattern of symbols.<sup>18</sup>

Just as we have seen in Himmelfarb's relationships with his wife and Miss Hare, the significance is referred to a symbolic or archetypal frame at the expense of the life.

The novel, then, has two conflicting attitudes: an intellectually motivated extrinsic frame of significance which expresses White's conception of lovingkindness and determines the shape of the novel; and an emotionally motivated misanthropy which undermines the ostensible direction of the work. John Colmer has noted this problem: "For all the imaginative energy and technical resources displayed in achieving imaginative unity, there is a continuous conflict between the positive and negative sides of White's vision in Riders in the Chariot, between his compassionate love for a few individuals and his distaste for humanity en masse."<sup>19</sup> I agree that White has compassion for his illuminati but this is because they are all aliens, outside of society, and, therefore, uncompromised. They are seen to be significant just as the extrinsic symbolic framework is significant because, being extrinsic, it is uncontaminated by the chaotic flux of human life and can act as a stationary point of reference. The alienness of the illuminati makes them ideal representatives of the extrinsic symbolic perspectives: "[Himmelfarb] shuddered to realize there could be no end to the rescue of men

from the rubble of their own ideas. . . . Only the Chariot itself rode straight and silent, both now and on the clouds of recollection" (pp. 329-330). Though the sincerity of White's compassion cannot be questioned, it is divorced from the human centre that is most in need of it.<sup>20</sup>

This split between the ideal and the real, between significance and banality, and, finally, between intellect and emotion is reflected in White's statement that his writing operates "on two planes, the immediate detailed one and the universal."<sup>21</sup> These two planes are, in turn, reflected in Alf Dubbo's artistic creed:

He realized how differently he saw this painting since his first acquaintance with it, and how he would now transcribe the Frenchman's limited composition into his own terms of motion, and forms partly transcendental, partly evolved from his struggle with daily becoming, and experience of suffering. (p. 368)

This accurately describes White's own method in creating, for example, *Himmelfarb*. His life is a daily struggle with both becoming and suffering from the holocaust on; on the other hand the transcendental aspect of his life appears in his various symbolic roles: Jesus, the Messiah, Moses, and also the Jungian "function" of intellect; roles which are assigned to him largely from outside the novel.<sup>22</sup> But as we have seen, for all these symbolic roles and all his suffering, he lacks

truly creative relationships with people--relationships which involve personal commitment. The dimension that is missing is that of the human world--the world of meaning and value--which is created and maintained by committed collaboration. Similarly, Dubbo expects his vision of significance to "complete itself in time, through revelation" (p. 367). The collaborative dimension is, again, devalued: "On the whole he had little desire to learn from the achievement of other artists, just as he had no wish to profit by, or collaborate in the experience of other men" (p. 367).

Dubbo's vision, in fact, seems to be compromised by human community. Declared medically unfit for military service, he is drafted to spray-paint aeroplanes:

that was part of his rather unconvincing, to himself always incredible, communal experience. But there were the people in the house, the people in the street, who now forced their way deeper into his mind. His brush would quiver with their jarring emotions, the forms were disintegrating that he had struggled so painfully and honestly to evolve. (p. 375)

When Hannah (the prostitute at whose home Alf is living at the time) expresses her horror at the thought of growing old, Dubbo's reaction indicates his isolation: "But he could not help her, although he saw she was waiting for some sort of easy sign" (p. 377). Collaboration with human beings--in this case a gesture of basic human concern--is seen as an easy way

out, a straying from the rigorous route of vision. That White knows there is something evasive in this stance is made clear in Hannah's responding accusation: "Alf, you got something shut up inside of you, and you bloody well won't give another person a look" (p. 378). Despite this momentary uneasiness, however, White insists that Dubbo's visionary quest is a movement into a higher moral dimension. We move from the lower plane of detailed human life--becoming and suffering--to the higher plane of universal love--the transcendent realm of vision. This movement, which Hannah senses is an evasion of human responsibility, is justified by White's faith--Dubbo sees the vision, truth is revealed to him:

Everything, finally, was a source of wonder, not to say love. Most wonderful was the Jew's voice heard again above the sound of the cistern and the wash-room tap:  
 . . . And I looked and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire unfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire . . .

The blackfellow rolled over on the bed, biting the back of his hand. The window was blinding him, with its four living creatures in the likeness of a man. (p. 492)

We have a split, then, between Dubbo as man, and Dubbo as The Artist. As a man he is powerless, and is therefore appropriate for the role of Peter the betrayer in the crucifixion scene. As The Artist he becomes one of Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators of the world". He sees his visions,

paints his pictures, and dies, true to stereotype, from a tubercular haemorrhage. His paintings, of course, are lost. Just as White pulled Himmelfarb out of human life into the symbolic framework, so he pulls Dubbo out of human life into the stereotype of the Alienated Romantic Artist. White sees significance residing on the higher plane, but again and again, it is on the lower plane that the true problems of living humanly arise and need to be met, as the novelist in White instinctively knows. The following quotations from Flaws in the Glass bear this out:

Detesting, misunderstanding Dickens when I was a boy, I had suddenly cottoned on to him. As blood flowed, and coagulated in supperating wounds, as aircraft were brought down in flames and corpses tipped into the lime-pits of Europe, I saw Dickens as the pulse, the intact jugular vein of a life which must continue, regardless of the destructive forces Dickens himself recognized. (p. 96)

Manoly and I won't breed another generation unless those who read and understand my books. I believe that books could breed future generations in spite of the pressures on Australian children to choose illiteracy and mindlessness. (pp. 201-202)

White's response to Dickens is proof that books can breed future generations. In these passages there is implicit recognition of the creative potential of collaboration. The potential is realized, of course, in the novels we are able to read. They are the result of a language and tradition that White shares with us. Through the heuristic thought of

the novel his search for meaning is simultaneously his sharing of meaning. Our human ability to meet in meaning in the novel is indicative of how the human world comes into being, is maintained and extended. It is also indicative of how the spiritual realm is incarnated. The novel, after all, is more than the black marks on the page. It is a reality, but not one that can be measured. It exists in the same way all the qualities that make us human exist. Though we can't prove their existence we know that we lose them at our peril.

This is not to deny the existence of a transcendental realm, of vision, or of God. It is to say, however, that this realm can only enter our lives meaningfully through collaboration. The visionary dwells in the human world and in his attempt to understand his vision he relies on a collaboratively created cultural context without which meaning is impossible and vision unrecognizable as such.<sup>23</sup>

To separate significance from human life, then, is to falsify our life in the world, and is, therefore, potentially destructive of that life. It is this possibility that makes Mrs. Godbold, who is ostensibly so loving, in actuality a rather chilling figure. She is the clearest manifestation of White's schematic imposition. In her presentation we see the limitations and destructive implications of the dualistic



split between the planes of significance and banality.

In the cathedral scene, in which Ruth is caught up ecstatically in the organ music, the two planes of existence are established. The prelude to her ecstatic experience is her loss of control over her younger brothers and sisters:

Then they were swept away, in one gust, though by different paths, clattering and dispersing, bursting, for all the hissing and snatching of their mentor, the eldest sister. She might as well have hoped to restrain with hands or threats a batch of freshly hatched trout, as catch the children once they had been poured back into their own hilarious element. Soon she had lost them.  
(p. 252)

What is impressed upon us is the futility of attempting to bring order into this youthful chaos. Once she accepts this futility and relinquishes her grasp she becomes attuned to a new rhythm of life and is carried away:

She was glad, though, to feel exhausted by her powerlessness. . . . the organ never stopped playing. She had been conscious of it, but only now began to hear. . . . The organ lashed together the bars of music until there was a whole shining scaffolding of sound. And always the golden ladders rose, extended and extended, as if to reach the window of a fire. But there was no fire, only bliss, surging, and rising, as she herself climbed upon the heavenly scaffolding, and placed still other ladders, to reach higher.<sup>24</sup> (pp. 252-253)

The problem here is that White is dealing only in extremes.

Since the children inevitably escape Ruth's control White has her move to the opposite extreme; Ruth begins to follow the organ music out of the human realm toward a plane of trans-

endent significance.

The destructive implications of this dualism appear in the non-relationship that Ruth has with her husband Tom Godbold. It is natural in a novel with four central characters to want to compare their development. Consequently we look for similarities or differences between Himmelfarb and Reha's relationship and Ruth and Tom Godbold's relationship. The differences we find are problematic. Where Himmelfarb's quest for esoteric knowledge, in his life with Reha, is shown to be a failure in human living which indirectly causes Reha's death, White manifests an uneasiness in his attitude to Ruth's relationship with Tom. Ostensibly she gives her all for him and he, resenting her strength and surety, treats her boorishly, leaves her, and leads a life of utter dissipation ending inevitably in his death. White's uneasiness is suggested, however, by the occasional irony present in Ruth's depiction. While there is enough to make us begin to question Ruth's style of love, there is not enough to elicit a sustained criticism such as we were able to make in Himmelfarb's case. White wants to endorse her because her all-embracing lovingkindness--which he has already committed himself to in Himmelfarb's humbled response to his wife's death--is the only solution he can envision at this juncture

for an all-too-human world. Yet he feels that something, somehow, is being overlooked. This oversight is what the occasional irony points to, but White won't follow it up. The symbolic system is ready-to-hand and arbitrarily solves the problem. When we follow that irony up though, trust the tale, we discover that the oversight leads to a different interpretation than the ostensible one. In this view Tom is never allowed out of the pigeonhole White's dualism puts him in. His vitality beats itself to death against the impermeable wall of his wife's mythic stature. For she is, finally, far closer to the archetypal Magna Mater than she is to a human being.

We see the division between them at work in a scene of their first lovemaking. Resisting Tom's attempts to pressure her she says she would be willing to marry him and take on all that entails:

Again he began to feel oppressed by that honesty which was one of her prevailing qualities, and now, as in later life, he tried to assure that it would not threaten him.

He reached out very gently, and tried by every dishonest strategy of skin to reach that core which he resented. Until at last she took his hand, and laid it against her burning cheek.

She said, "But what is it, Tom? It is not as if I did not love you."

By now, he realized, he was really very tired. He lay heavy on her. He rested his head against her cheek. He was too exhausted, it seemed, for further bitterness.

It was only then that she allowed him to make love,

which was at best tentative, at worst ashamed, beside her riper one. (pp. 280-281)

Even though her wilful control of him is subjected to a slight irony, it is clear that she is honest and loving while he is dishonest and filled with resentment. The different planes they inhabit move further apart in the aftermath of their sexual consummation and his agreement to "Make [her] an honest woman!" by marrying her. She sees their act as a sin, for both of them, and disregards his denial:

"But I would bear all your sins, Tom, if it was necessary. Oh, I would bear them," she said, "and more."

That made him leave off. He was almost frightened by what he meant to her.

"I don't see," he complained, "why you gotta take on so, not when you got the conditions you wanted."

But he, of course, was not to know what she had forfeited.

"No," she said. "I won't take on. We must go now, though. Give me your hand up."

Very early she had sensed that her love was on two planes, one of which he might never reach. (p. 281)

The two planes, of course, are the spiritual and the sensual. They correspond to earlier distinctions we have made between significance and banality, impersonality and personality, the ideal and the real, and, most centrally, intellect and emotion. Within the novel White won't commit himself to nurturing the kind of personal involvement in creative relationship that might unify these separate elements because he can't finally believe in human creativity. The most he can do is

produce an arbitrary, cerebral, symbolic "wholeness" by having the higher plane encompass the lower.

Mrs. Godbold, as the representative of the higher plane, encompasses her husband but doesn't truly tender him the recognition necessary to a creative relationship. When he feels swamped by the Christianity of his wife and daughters he lashes out violently, and his words have a certain truth: "That is what I think," bellowed the husband and father, 'though nobody in this place gives a bugger!'" (p. 248). He beats his wife to the floor in an attempt to assert his "masterfulness", but her response renders his action futile:

The children were whimpering, away from him. All was turned away, except his wife's face, which she still held exposed to whatever might come.

Such was her nature, or faith, he saw again with horror.

"I'm gunna get out of this!" he announced at last. "I'm gunna get shickered stiff!" (p. 249)

Even in his trip to Khalil's whorehouse he fails to escape Ruth's encompassing influence. When he emerges from the bedroom she is waiting for him: "Tom Godbold crossed to his wife, and said, 'You done a lot to show me up, Ruth, in our time, but you just about finished me this go'" (p. 305). They go outside and, in her typical fashion, she makes the gesture which, in its all-inclusiveness, virtually prevents a response: "'I was wrong, Tom,' she said. 'I know. I am wrong. There!'"

she said, and made a last attempt to convince him with her hand. 'I will follow you to hell if need be'" (p. 306). Then comes White's uneasy endorsement of her position: "Tom Godbold did not wait to see whether he was strong enough to suffer the full force of his wife's love" (p. 306). The irony here disappears, however, with the removal of the problem. Tom leaves and is not heard of until Ruth is notified of his death, the result of "disease and indulgence".

Tom is made to represent an intractable humanity which, in its petty self-concern, persecutes and rejects the love it is offered. While I don't want to deny that Tom's character fits this interpretation, I do want to stress that White's imposition of his symbolic framework in Ruth's near-divinity effectively nullifies Tom's individuality, and thus removes the possibility of his taking an alternative route. In this sense it is she, as the representative of White's cerebral "wholeness", who kills Tom.

The lack of a personal quality of response we can unhesitatingly call human is apparent in Ruth's response to the death of her husband. Waiting at a tram-crossing she begins to cry:

The large woman was simply standing and crying, the tears running out at her eyes and down her pudding-coloured face. It was at first fascinating, but became

disturbing to the other souls-in-waiting. They seldom enjoyed the luxury of watching the self-exposure of others. Yet, this was a crying in no way convulsed. Soft and steady, it streamed out of the holes of the anonymous woman's eyes. It was, it seemed, the pure abstraction of gentle grief.

The truth of the matter was: Mrs. Godbold's self was by now dead, so she could not cry for the part of her which lay in the keeping of the husband she had just left. She cried, rather, for the condition of men, for all those she had loved, burningly, or at a respectful distance, from her father, seated at his bench in his prison of flesh, and her own brood of puzzled little girls, for her former mistress, always clutching at the hem and finding it come away in her hand, for her fellow initiates, the madwoman and the Jew of Sarsaparilla, even for the blackfellow she had met at Mrs. Khalil's, and then never again, unless by common agreement in her thoughts and dreams. She cried, finally, for the people beside her in the street, whose doubts she would never dissolve in words, but understood, perhaps, from those she had experienced. (p. 307) [my emphases]

This passage amounts to Ruth's apotheosis; any hints of irony in White's treatment of her drop away as she is "endorsed as a Magna Mater, bounteous source of the milk of lovingkindness that floods the last chapters of the novel".<sup>25</sup> Though we have seen her unable to relate to her husband in a manner that might evoke a change in him, by the end of the novel White has invested her with universal power:

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

So her arrows would continue to be aimed at the forms

of darkness, and she herself was, in fact, the infinite quiver. (p. 529)

But this, we protest, is just too contrived for comfort.

F.R. Leavis, commenting on Eliot's "Four Quartets", makes a diagnosis that aptly fits our case: "When we come to the theological affirmation we have to recognize that the emphatically firm explicitness, is, for us, not acceptable, it is so clearly addressed by the divided man in an admonitory way to himself."<sup>26</sup>

The appropriateness of Leavis's judgement to Riders is brought out by a subsequent development in White's career. In 1962, one year after Riders, White published the short story "A Cheery Soul" in which the emotion he had repressed in his depiction of the saintly Mrs. Godbold is vented in a vicious satiric attack on Miss Docker, who kills people with her kindness. H.P. Heseltine gives an adequate summary:

The hypocritical destructiveness of her cloying sweetness is exposed mercilessly and totally. The Custances, protected by their simplicity and a streak of toughness, escape before disaster overtakes them; but in Mr. Wakeman, the Anglican parson of Sarsaparilla, Miss Docker finds a victim altogether worthy of her talents. Mrs. Wakeman's anguished cry over her husband's dead body is one of the great moments of The Burnt Ones [where the story was later collected]: "Miss Docker, you have killed my saint. Only time will show whether you have killed my God as well." After that, one can only regret that White allows himself the petty revenge of a dog urinating on Miss Docker's leg.<sup>27</sup>



Miss Docker is Mrs. Godbold without White's justifying cerebral system. Here he clearly recognizes that a love that is poured over humanity like a syrup, without any respect for a person's individuality, is potentially deadly; it does not allow any relationship in which love is given and taken to develop. This recognition, of course, has dire consequences for the vision of "wholeness" so systematically worked out in Riders.

The implications begin to surface in The Solid Mandala (1966). The fact that the duality of reason and emotion is blatantly embodied in the twin brothers Arthur and Waldo Brown is evidence that White is acknowledging a major problem in his vision; a problem that is summed up in Arthur's perplexed recognition that "Waldo was preparing to die of the hatred he had bred in him. Because he, not Waldo, was to blame. Arthur Brown, the getter of pain" (p. 284). Just as Mrs. Godbold's syrup love drove Tom to his death through dissipation, so Arthur's undeviating love for his brother, which threatens to obliterate Waldo's armoured reason, forces Waldo to commit suicide to escape. The difference is that in The Solid Mandala White is conscious of the problem and makes Arthur conscious of it as well.<sup>28</sup> Yet he can see no way out of the paradox. Despite this aspect in his presentation Ar-

thur remains the carrier of the novel's moral perspective. White insists that it was love that Arthur expressed for Waldo. Once Waldo dies White's endorsement is unequivocal: Arthur undergoes apotheosis, Mrs. Poulter worships him, and the paradox is quietly forgotten.

In The Vivisector (1970) this patent confusion has been sorted out, after a fashion, and the result is a toughness of vision that The Solid Mandala lacked. At the same time, however, The Vivisector presents us with the clearest picture of dissociation in White's fiction. There is no artificially imposed wholeness; what we are given is an artist who finds truth and God at the expense of human life. The moral perspective--previously given to the illuminati--is given to Duffield's victims, and this is an honesty previously evaded. Yet they are victims; White allows them no creative potential or power. This he gives only to the artist, whose vision takes him beyond morality.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup>Thelma Herring and G.A. Wilkes, "A Conversation with Patrick White", Southerly, XXXIII (1973), 137.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Margaret Walters, "Patrick White", New Left Review, 18 (1963), pp. 41-42.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>7</sup>Geoffrey Dutton, Patrick White (2nd ed.; Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1962), p. 36.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Wood, "Moral Complexity in Patrick White's Novels", Meanjin, 21 (1962), p. 26.

<sup>9</sup>"Systems that too readily order the universe can distort the artist's vision, and White's mandalas, like Lowry's cabbalism or Stow's Tao mysteries, can all be seen as escapes from reality as much as perceptions of it." (W.H. New, Among Worlds [Erin, Ontario: Press Porcepic, 1975], p. 186.)

<sup>10</sup>"In order to prepare for their heavenly ascensions, the Merkabah mystics, called Yorede Merkabah (Those who Descend to the Chariot), had to submit to a strict regimen of ascetic practices, including fastings and ablutions, invoke the secret names of God and those of his angels, and finally work themselves up into the ecstasy of a trance, culminating in a kind of metamorphosis, wherein the flesh turned into fire. Having reached this stage, the mystic imagined himself admitted to the seven Heavenly Halls and, if worthy enough, rewarded by 'a vision of the divine chariot' and also, at

the same time, initiated into secrets of the future or mysteries of the celestial world." (Isidore Epstein, Judaism [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959], p. 225.) Susan Moore's article, "The Quest for Wholeness in Riders in the Chariot", Southerly, XXXV (1975), 50-67, gives a good summary of the mystical elements in the novel. Unfortunately, her acceptance of White's symbolic givens without question means that she severely impairs her ability to detect problems. A similar study is Colin Roderick's "Riders in the Chariot: an Exposition", Southerly, XXII, 2 (1962), 62-77.

<sup>11</sup>Edgar L. Chapman, "The Mandala Design of Patrick White's Riders in the Chariot", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, XXI, 2 (Summer, 1979), 188.

As well as articles documenting the wealth of allusions in Riders and explaining the symbolic vision presented, there have been others that question what White is doing. Margaret Walters's article (see note #4) is probably the best of these, although John Colmer's book, "Riders in the Chariot: Patrick White (Melbourne: Edward Arnold, 1978), is good as well. They have not received much attention, however. That went to Leonie Kramer, whose "Patrick White's Götterdämmerung" Quadrant, 17 (June 1973), 8-19, caused something of a stir (she even earned a derogatory reference in Flaws in the Glass, p. 154). Kramer sums up the orthodox view of the novel and then drops her bombshell: "But these positive signals to the novel's general direction are balanced by negatives which in my view are strong evidence that, so far from endorsing transcendentalism, White is offering a critique of it" (p. 9). Having convinced herself that White is actually advocating secular humanism she is faced with a problem: "Why then does he permit the language to suggest meanings that the characters, incidents and action of the novel combine to deny?" (p. 16). Her manoeuverings to offer a solution are questionable at best.

Dorothy Green responded to Kramer's article with her own: "The Edge of Error", Quadrant, 17 (December 1973), 36-47, in which she demolishes Kramer's argument for its "slick . . . frivolous grounds" and reveals its lack of a "grasp of religious concepts" (p. 47). Unfortunately, Green did not recognize that Kramer's paper, shoddily argued as it might have been, was responding to a genuine problem in the novel. Green simply reaffirms the orthodox position: Miss Hare "is meant to represent Instinct" (p. 39); Himmelfarb is "Intel-

lect" (p. 40); Mrs. Godbold "represents pure Feeling, emotion, Love-in-action" (p. 41); and Dubbo, of course, is "Imagination" (p. 42). Together "the quartet . . . makes up the fully human being" (p. 42).

Where Kramer went wrong was in attempting to turn White's ostensible position inside out and make him into his opposite. If she had been satisfied with recognizing the contradictions in the novel, or if she had carefully read Walters's paper (by this time 10 years old), she might have advanced our understanding of White's dissociation rather than contributing fuel to the orthodox view of adverse White criticism as "culpably obtuse".

<sup>12</sup>See The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung, Violet S. deLaszlo, ed. (New York: Modern Library, Random House, 1959), p. 253.

<sup>13</sup>J.F. Burrows sees White's "satirical analysis of suburban values" as a "series of automatic gestures", as "cheap and repetitive gibes", and says, "it becomes difficult to take the social dimension of the novel seriously and impossible to distinguish in it any precise significance." ("Archetypes and Stereotypes: Riders in the Chariot", Southerly XXV [1965], 58.) Brian Kiernan concurs with Burrows: "Wickedly amusing at its best, the Sarsparillan satire does not serve the implied comparison [between Australian suburbia and Nazi Germany], seeming instead a purely personal and aesthetic revulsion which has replaced serious moral concern." (Patrick White, pp. 80-81). Compare this, from Leavis's discussion of Swift's Tale of a Tub: "The ironic detachment is of such a kind as to reassure us that this savage exhibition is mainly a game, played because it is the insolent pleasure of the author: 'demonstration of superiority' is as good a formula as any for its prevailing spirit." (The Common Pursuit, [London: Chatto and Windus, 1952], p. 80.)

<sup>14</sup>"White's allegorical intentions and his more obvious fictive ones operate against each other to distort and shatter the work as a whole. . . . The most debilitating element in the novel is the air of exasperation and sheer irritability which keeps breaking through." R.F. Brissenden, Patrick White, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup>The train ride might also be seen as Himmelfarb/Christ's "agony in the garden" or "dark night of the soul" before full acceptance of his mission. However, though these are plausible intellectual interpretations, they don't answer to the depth of revulsion in the scene. Himmelfarb, as we have come to know him, is not capable of this vision.

<sup>16</sup>John Colmer, "Riders in the Chariot": Patrick White, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup>Colmer's mention of Swift was sound. Here is Leavis on Swift: "The final impression that Swift, in any representative place, leaves us with is one of having been exposed to an intense, unremitting and endlessly resourceful play of contempt, disgust, hatred and the will to spoil and destroy." (The Common Pursuit, p. 89.) Though White's Swiftian aspect is by no means representative, it is undeniably there.

<sup>18</sup>Margaret Walters, pp. 49-50. In this connection see also A.A. Phillips's "Patrick White and the Algebraic Symbol", Meanjin Quarterly, XXIV, 4 (December 1965), 455-461.

<sup>19</sup>John Colmer, "Riders in the Chariot": Patrick White, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup>At the risk of encroaching too closely on White's personal life, here is a passage from Flaws in the Glass in which White acknowledges this discrepancy in himself: "My inklings of God's presence are interwoven with my love of the one human being who never fails me. This is why I fall short in my love of human beings in general. There are too many travesties of an ideal I am still foolish enough to expect after a lifetime's experience, and knowledge of myself." (p. 145).

<sup>21</sup>Ian Moffitt, "Talk With Patrick White", New York Times Book Review, 18 August 1957.

<sup>22</sup>Even if we grant J.F. Burrows's point that the Messiah and Moses symbolism can be expected to come from a devout Jew, and that the Jesus Christ references--crucifixion and deposition--are of a piece with Mrs. Godbold's evangelical Christianity and Dubbo's Christian background, this does not account for the extent of the analogical symmetry, especially in the crucifixion scene. Nor does it account at all for the obvious Jungian reference.

<sup>23</sup>A passage from F.R. Leavis pulls a number of these threads together as they relate to the creative writer:

All writers of major creative works are driven by the need to achieve a fuller and more penetrating consciousness of that to which we belong, or of the "Something other than itself" on which the "physical world ultimately depends". It is inseparable from the need to strengthen the human grasp of a significance to be apprehended in life that will inform and guide creativity. The English language in the full sense is alive, or becomes for the creative writer alive, with hints, apprehensions and intuitions. They go back to earlier cultural phases. The writer is alive in his own time, and the character of his response, the selective individual nature of his creative receptivity, will be determined by his sense--intensely individual--of the modern human condition.

He needs all the resources of the language his growing command of his theme can make spontaneous--can recruit towards the achieving of an organic wholeness: his theme itself is (being inescapably a prompting) an effort to develop, in realizing and preventing it, living continuity [Dickens is the jugular vein of a life which must continue]. The less he has to ignore or play down in achieving his "heuristic conquest" out of representative human experience, the better . . . [my emphasis] (The Living Principle, p. 68)

<sup>24</sup>It is interesting to compare this scene with Will Brangwen's similar ecstatic experience and his wife Anna's response to it in Lawrence's The Rainbow.

<sup>25</sup>Burrows, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup>Leavis, The Living Principle, p. 249.

<sup>27</sup>H.P. Heseltine, "Writer and Reader, The Burnt Ones", Southerly, XXV (1965), 70. One small qualification is necessary here: Miss Docker is not "hypocritical"; she believes fully in her own goodness.

<sup>28</sup>See Beatson, p. 37, for corroboration of this point.

### III

#### THE VIVISECTOR

White's recognition that to "lavish what is seen as Christian love, indiscriminately on all mankind, is in the end as ineffectual and destructive as violence and hatred" (EG, p. 251), had major consequences for his novelistic vision. The extrinsic symbolic framework which dominates Riders in the Chariot is largely missing in The Vivisector, and with it has gone the sense of surety that it provided. While the dualistic split between significance and banality is still present, the values that attach to each side of the split have changed. Whereas Riders made lovingkindness an aspect of the plane of significance, in The Vivisector Hurtle Duffield's search for truth through art appears opposed to love and morality. The dissociation in White clearly manifests itself in this dualism. On the one hand he maintains fidelity, finally, to what he sees as the truth in Hurtle's vision; on the other an ethical imperative he feels causes him to rebel against the apparent truth that



Hurtle's art and life reveal. The elements of this dissociation are caught in the epigraph from Rimbaud:

He becomes beyond all others the great Invalid, the great Criminal, the great Accursed One--and the Supreme Knower. For he reaches the unknown.

The implication is that because Duffield's creative vision reaches the unknown he is not limited by the demands of morality that arise in human relationships. Being an artist exempts him from human responsibility. The moral realm, to follow the logic, is inhabited by those who don't see as far, who are uncreative. As Veronica Brady says:

If Hurtle's life is taken up with the search for truth, with trying to realize and live out what it truly means to be a man, mortal and vulnerable, then the fact that he appals and overwhelms most people he meets suggests a widespread inability to cope with truth. . . . "human kind cannot bear very much reality" (Eliot).<sup>1</sup>

This reflects a single-minded allegiance to Hurtle's quest for truth which overlooks the moral objections that White has shown arising in Hurtle's wake. For White is by no means as single-minded as Brady.<sup>2</sup> Both he and his artist --the two are not, finally, separable<sup>3</sup>--have qualms about the destructiveness that seems to issue from Hurtle's vision. The objections point toward an understanding of "reality" very different from that implied by Brady's use of Eliot; one that is closer to David Holbrook's conception:

human existence itself depends upon "encounter"--complex and close relationships especially in the formative years. The capacities of the human person to mature; to perceive the world and to act in it; to exert his freedom and fulfil potentialities; to be creative--all these have their roots in the complex of "being for" which we call love.<sup>4</sup>

To see the meaning, and therefore reality, of human life residing in "encounter" is not to deny the existence of a transcendent God but to say, with Blake, that for human beings this God "only Acts and Is in existing Beings and Men".<sup>5</sup> This recognition, far from loosing us into a valueless moral relativism, makes stringent demands on us to lead responsible lives. Leavis on Lawrence is pertinent here:

No one of course who has read him would suggest that Lawrence doesn't bring home to us that it is an essential condition of life-as-intelligence to know itself faced--ultimately, but not remotely--with the unknown, and with the unknowable. Lawrence's awareness of the unknown and the unknowable, however, unlike Eliot's, is at the same time an exaltation of creative life, and inseparable from an acceptance of responsibility as inhering, necessarily, in the human individual's self-gathered, delicately intent and unanalysably intuitive wholeness.<sup>6</sup>

This passage offers a counter to the epigraph from Rimbaud: responsibility is not opposed to an awareness of the unknown but is a necessary part of it, because that awareness happens in lives, in a human world. Each of us,


and the artist pre-eminently, must interpret the significance of that awareness, and the interpretation we arrive at--our vision--is a creation in which we dwell and which forms a part of the human world which is the result of the weaving together of the personal horizons of each of our individual "dwelling places".<sup>7</sup> The quality of life in our human world, then, is in direct relation to the degree of responsibility we assume in the creation of it. We are in relationships, willy nilly, whether we would or no, that is what being in the world means. From the baby at the breast to the man facing the unknown, facing God, we exist "in-relation-to". Responsibility, therefore, is an inherent "principle" in human life. We approach wholeness in our relationships and in ourselves when we accept and embrace this responsibility.<sup>8</sup> We must choose life.

The dissociation in The Vivisector becomes apparent when we realize that while parts of the novel throw out this need for choice as an important and delicate issue, and in fact embody White's choice in the irony he expends on Hurtle's actions with people, other parts of the novel display a virtually deterministic sense of man's--and especially the artist's--existence. As a general observation we can say that as long as Hurtle is not closely involved

in adult relationships the deterministic vision holds sway. But once White involves him in serious encounters--which is one criterion for judging an author major--the vision of life demanding choice and responsibility gains ascendance. The persistence of the deterministic strain, however--White's justification of Hurtle--even in the relationships which, in their fullness of realization, show the barrenness of Hurtle's vision and the fertility of White's own, indicates the rupture in White's sensibility. He will deny the creative power of human relationship even as he manifests it in his novelistic art--an art which is "the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has yet discovered".<sup>9</sup> The rupture becomes blatantly structural in the final third of the novel where Rhoda Courtney and Kathy Volkov represent the two sides of Hurtle's sensibility.<sup>10</sup> Rhoda, the moral sense, is deformed and relegated to the lower regions of the house while Kathy, the vision of perfection, is a nymph-  
et who visits Hurtle's upper sanctum just as the Muse of poetry visits a certain kind of romantic poet. Their relationship never becomes something to be taken seriously--and White's awareness of this makes him dispose of her quickly. Her presence in Hurtle's life assumes the form of letters which deliver the justifications for Hurtle's solip-

sism and enforce the deterministic view. The final statement of this vision comes in the letter of Christiana McBeath, Kathy's mother, who makes explicit what the other side of White's sensibility--repressed in this part of the novel--undermines; namely, that Hurtle is part of an elect, separated by his nature from the banality of the rest of humanity.

White's inability to acknowledge the creative potential of what he sees as the "actual" world leads him to see an active concern for the wholeness of relationships as sentimental, because inevitably futile. In opposition to the illusory healing power of love he places the vivisectionary vision which pierces the veil to find truth, Reality with a capital R, "Significant Form"<sup>11</sup>:

So he became ashamed of his shabby, silly mother. He became ashamed of himself for loving, yet not loving her more. Because it was Mumma he loved, not Mrs. Courtney. That was different: the vision made him shiver with joy; he wished he had  been in a position to touch her. (p. 22)

While he "loves" Mumma Duffield, it is Mrs. Courtney, who eventually buys him from the Duffields for £500, who is the powerful attraction. But the attraction to her is not to her as a person but as an amalgam of forms: "He was in love with how she looked. Each of her dresses was more than a dress: a moment of light and beauty not yet to be explained. He

loved her big, silent house, in which his thoughts might grow into the shapes they chose" (p. 43). The Courtney house comes to symbolize the "real" world for the young Hurtle:

It was necessary for him to see the Courtneys' house again. The felted door went pff as he passed through.

And at once he was received by his other world; of silence and beauty. He touched the shiny porcelain shells. He stood looking up through the chandelier, holding his face almost flat, for the light to trickle through and collect on it. The glass fruit tinkled slightly, the whole forest swaying, because of a draught from an open window.

He was himself again. (p. 24)

The chandelier comes to represent the vision of wholeness--all-inclusive Oneness--that Hurtle strives to realize in his art. The sense of this wholeness is something to be found within him rather than in the world of human relationships in which he lives: "Nobody, not his family, not Mrs. Courtney, only faintly himself, knew he had inside him his own chandelier. That was what made you at times jangle and want to explode into smithereens" (p. 43). In fact there seems to be an essential opposition between the outer and inner worlds:

This was his family. He should have loved them. He did of course: riding with Pa on the cartload of slippery bottles; Mumma's smell of warm ironing; the exasperating hands of younger, sticky children; in bed with Will; Lena giving him a suck of a bull's-eye, hot and wet from her own mouth. All this was family, a terrible muddle,

which he loved, but should have loved better. Perhaps he was "too proud", as Beetle Boothroyd wrote in one of those notes. Didn't love himself, though. No. If he loved something he had inside him, that was different. (p. 63)

The accusations of pride and self-love, so damning later in the novel, don't carry as much authority in these early stages because the context is such a limited one. The Duffield family is drawn from the outside, though fondly, and would not feel uncomfortable in a minor corner of a Dickens novel. Hurtle is too obviously different. As Mumma tells him: "You're what Pa and me knows we aren't" (p. 15). Consequently we accept his denial of self-love; even though it is primarily assertion; with little substance to back it up.

In the same way, White's presentation of life at the Courtney house does not lead us into sympathy with Maman in her accusations of Hurtle's coldness. For superficiality, insincerity and self-centredness are the focus of a stinging satire that draws our attention away from other issues:

"The ethical side of life is so important," she told him. "Even when I am run off my feet--my husband says I undertake too much--I only have to remind myself of that. Nothing will make me neglect the charities I have taken up. Lonely seamen, for instance. And girls who--who have fallen by the wayside."

"Why have they fallen by the wayside?"

"Well," she said, "the city is full of vice, and

human nature is weak. But we can't merely accept, Hurtle. We must help others help themselves."

He understood better now, but didn't know you could do anything about human nature: of the people he knew, one half called the other half hopeless.

Mrs. Courtney was carrying on. "Then there's the question of cruelty to animals. It's heart-rending," she moaned and rubbed at a spot of chocolate she had spilled below her creamy bosom . . . . (p. 26)

By reducing the ethical imperative to sentimentality the obvious ineffectuality of Maman serves to justify *for us* Hurtle's blanket judgement of human nature rather than call that deterministic judgement into question. In the same way her limitations serve to blunt the impact on us of his emotionless, vivisectionary observations:

"You did right to only take her head."

"Why?" Mrs. Courtney gasped, but it could have been because she had jogged her cup of chocolate.

"Well, the back. You wouldn't want to see the back. The head is the best part of her."

"It's only a slight curvature," Rhoda's mother spluttered. "It can be corrected." (p. 25)

The Courtney sequences, on the whole, give the impression of a cotton-wool façade that hides a rather sordid, deformed reality. Hurtle's distanced, vivisectionary stance, in enabling him to pierce the façade, gains authority in our view. The only counters to this authority are the occasional accusations made by Rhoda: "you're always trying to work something out--on somebody. I know you!" (p. 121)--or Maman:



"You, Hurtle--you were born with a knife in your hand. No," she corrected herself, "in your eye" (p. 129). But given the woolliness of the world from which these accusations come we cannot take them as an authentic alternative to his vision. The configuration of scene, setting and character in this early part of the novel continually juxtaposes Hurtle's awareness of truth--cold and hard though this may be--to the sentimentality and banality around him. And given this juxtaposition we tend to believe and support him when he states that he has been accused unjustly:

"Only Hurtle got something out of it [the trip to Europe]. He's learned better ways of being nasty."  
 He turned around. Did she really believe this? Apparently she did. He started to defend himself, but his voice died in a croak. If that was what she believed. But did she? Then nobody would believe in his other, his real intentions. (p. 122)

We are also willing to give Hurtle the benefit of the doubt about his "real intentions" at this point because he is still young and has not yet embraced his vocation. To judge him by strict adult standards of responsibility would be unjust. Actually the deterministic vision of life which Hurtle holds as a child and youth is credible on two counts: first, on the general plane, simply in being a child Hurtle's life is largely controlled by others; and second, in his

personal situation, the experience of being sold, and, later, of being an object of gratification for Maman's quasi-incestuous perversities--specifically the chocolate-eating episode which occurs in her bed--can only have undermined his sense of autonomy. Given this latter circumstance, it seems understandable that Hurtle turns cold, becomes a detached observer who sees significance as residing deep inside him or in a transcendent realm.

This hypothesis can only be borne out, however, if we can discover within the novel evidence that White recognizes the problematic nature of Hurtle's vision. This evidence will be largely of two kinds: direct accusation and situational irony. Now, in the first part of the novel there are accusations made, as we have seen, but there is also situational irony which focuses on the accusers rather than the accused:

"you're always trying to work something out--on somebody. I know you!"

He couldn't understand why she hated him so.

"Everybody says--all the girls: Edith, Lizzie, Keep--my parents were mad to attempt it. It could only fail--with you. From where you came. You!"

She took up a fruit-knife and jabbed it into his thigh. It didn't enter, but felt as though it nearly did.

"You're the one who's mad!" His voice sounded like that of a boy with the wind up. "Somebody'll see us."

He was shaken by the impression he seemed to make

on others; it was so wrong: if he could have shown them. (p. 121)

Rhoda's subjection to irony--in her being the one to wield the knife, while saying he works things out on others--undermines the force of her accusation.

With the introduction of the prostitute Nance Lightfoot the configuration begins to change. As Hurtle enters into an adult relationship his limitations stand out in relief against the rich background White has provided. For Nance is no surface creation; if Maman is a Toulouse-Lautrec line drawing Nance is closer to a Reubens or Renoir oil. As in our experience of Shakespeare's *Mistresses Quickly* and *Overdone* there is with Nance a sense of whole life supporting the bit we see. William Walsh is largely correct when he says, "she is a magnificent creation; brimming with life, realized with completeness and force and splendidly capable of sustaining the function she is allotted."<sup>12</sup> We question his judgement, however, when he sees Nance's "function" as being the product of "a psychology which assumes that the purity of Duffield's artistic purpose needs to be liberated and nourished by the coarseness, toughness and sensuality embodied in Nance. The grossness of the latter is inversely --but essentially--related to the fineness of the former."<sup>13</sup>

Peter Beatson makes this point in a religious connection:

"it is only by passing through and experiencing inwardly all the conditions of matter that the soul can reach God."<sup>14</sup>

For both these writers Nance is simply Hurtle's means to his aesthetic end. They never actually consider her as a person deserving recognition outside a symbolic pattern. Hurtle cannot dismiss her so blithely, however. He has to face her, whereas critics can close the book. By doing her "in the round" rather than in profile, White has introduced a life into the novel which consistently spills out of any a priori pattern just as Nance's buxom body spills out of her camisole. The critics, reading with what they see as White's vision in view, reduce the reality in front of them to manageable proportions.

And for this reading they have some justification, for White does endorse Hurtle's artistic role and the symbolism it engenders; but he does so at the same time as his own creativity looses into the novel a vitality which undermines the ostensible stance. To complicate the situation further, he is aware that Hurtle's position as vivisector is being undermined; Nance's arguments against Hurtle are cogent ones, and White reinforces them with situational

irony. This is the major difference between this novel and The Aunt's Story. There the degree of White's awareness of the problem was always in question. Theodora's quest was never the target of direct, author-backed, irony. In the central chapters of The Vivisector Hurtle's position, and, ultimately, White's own, is given an increasingly restricted compass. The protests from the human world, the world of relationship, normality, value and love, the world that the major novelist contributes to the maintenance of, form a repeated criticism of the vivisectory mode of discovery.

I say that Hurtle's position is ultimately White's own because, although White is aware that Hurtle's position is undermined, he can't help finally seeing it as right, despite its consequences. Hurtle is the artist, sees truth, and is, therefore, justified. White won't acknowledge that creative relationship is integral to human life, even when his art demonstrates this in scene after scene. To acknowledge this would involve an acceptance of responsibility for the shaping of the world we live in. And this responsibility White recoils from. This explains the deterministic cast of Hurtle's vision. The world is "given", and finding truth means piercing the veil to the permanent forms that transcend

the surface actuality, which by virtue of its lower position of significance is seen as banal.

This dualism appears even in Hurtle's anguished desire for life in the midst of the terror of war:

At the height of the bombardment he felt he only believed in life. At its most flickery, with the smell of death around it, life alone was knowable. His ghostliness yearned after its great tawny sprawling body. He found himself praying for survival: that he might reveal through the forms his spirit understood this physical life which now appeared only by glimpses, under gunfire, or in visionary bursts, by grace of melting Verrey lights. (p. 154)

Life, here, is reduced to physical life, which in turn is reduced to "forms". Nance Lightfoot fulfils the symbolic requirements; she is the "great tawny sprawling body" and provides him with the experience of physicality necessary to the fulfilment of his artistic vision. The question of entering into a mutual relationship with Nance, of seriously encountering her as a person, doesn't really arise: "It seemed to him he loved this woman he hardly knew as a person: at least he loved and needed her form" (p. 171). He is aware he is simply using her: "As they walked, swinging hands like any pair of lovers, he realized that he was the prostitute: he was seducing Nance Lightfoot into giving him, not money, not her actual body so much as its formal vessel, from which

to pour his visions of life" (p. 183); but justifies such use by saying she has "something of the unconscious nobility of some animals, moving intently on felted pads" (p. 185). His need of her never involves her conscious existence which, in his opinion, is irredeemably banal. Hence the quotation marks around "love" in the following passage:

he needed her; not the humiliating fivers, not her "love", necessarily; but because on one level he was resuscitated by the breath he breathed, the saliva he drank, out of her mouth, and because on a purer plane they solved together equations which might have defeated his tentative mind, and which probably never entered Nance's consciousness. (p. 190)

The physical life serves simply to fuel the abstract "purer plane" where wholeness and resolution reside for Hurtle. The plane of creative relationship, where human life, as opposed to mere physical existence, dwells is ignored.

But White doesn't ignore this plane. It is implicit in the following letter from Nance to Hurtle:

Dear love Hurtle,

I am no good to you I know, dragging you into the gutter where you don't belong. I won't love you any less if you tell me it is over and I must get, but know that without you inside me I am not whole, I am not

Your

Nancy Lightfoot (p. 190)

Relationship is necessary to Nance's wholeness. Her concern for what she is doing to Hurtle indicates that the physical is only one facet of their relationship, though given her

personality and occupation it becomes an important symbol. Similarly, the abstract plane carries much less significance for her than for Hurtle. Nance has great difficulty understanding his paintings and her frustration expresses itself in an attack on self-indulgence and a defence of love:

Suddenly she had got her mouth, or muzzle, into his ear: the words were propelled like bullets. "What your sort don't realize," she wasn't saying, she was firing into his brain, "is that other people exist. While you're all gummed up in the great art mystery, they're alive and breakun their necks for love." (p. 178)

Hurtle defends himself by suggesting she is simply sentimental. In relation to his conceptions of art and reality she has only "marshmallowy ideas" (p. 179).

White won't let him off so easily, however. In a scene of poignancy and irony, the depth of her awareness and emotion reveal his almost crass self-enclosure as he informs her of the sale of two Nance-inspired paintings:

"Which of the pictures did the person buy?" Her ears were pricked.

"The one I call 'Electric City'."

"Oh, that!" She sniggered and tossed away her cigarette. "What else, Hurt?"

"I don't think you saw it. One called,"--he hesitated because he was about to expose himself--"'Marriage of Light'."

They sat staring out from under the Moreton Bay fig at the dazzlingly iridescent water.

Nance was holding her head set at an angle which made her neck look brittle. "That was my painting," she said, or gasped.

"You never looked at it." He could have flattened



her. "Or once, I think, you kicked at it."

"I saw it," she insisted. "I know I'm supposed to be too big a dope to see. I'm only good for stretchun out on the kapok. But I seen you, didn't I? In the fuckun dark!"

She took a handkerchief out of her bag and rubbed her mouth very vigo\_rously; then she spat; and sat with her hands palm upward in her lap.

He lay chewing grass, hoping the blood wouldn't burst out of his veins, the breath explode in his chest: it would be terrible if Nance enjoyed glimmers of sensibility.

"I liked it," she said in a dead, even voice, "it had sort of sparks in it. It was my paintun." Suddenly she was shedding the last rags of her aggressiveness. "I practically painted it with me own bloody tail." (p. 191)

Hurtle's shock at Nance's awareness of her degree of involvement in his paintings points up the truth of her earlier statement that his sort don't realize "that other people exist". She realizes he is making use of her body but stays with him out of love. Though there is doubtless a certain amount of sentimentality involved there is an even greater degree of raw courage. She is willing to risk herself for the reality that only creative human relationships can provide. Hurtle's fear that she might enjoy "glimmers of sensibility" indicates clearly to us his inability to deal with serious adult relationships. He wants Nance to remain the "unconscious animal". If she is docile and pliable his vision of life will form more readily. Her consciousness introduces

awkward moral questions; as well as threatening his vision --the more important issue in his eyes. Following directly upon the lovemaking which was the impetus for "Marriage of Light", "he wanted to leave. He didn't want her to comment on what she imagined he had experienced or seen. However clumsy, slippery, he had to escape quickly from the whore's increasingly stuffy room: to protect what she had given" (p. 188).

Our moral hackles rise at this virtual theft Hurtle has perpetrated. And White is quite deliberate in evoking this response; he describes Hurtle escaping from Nance's room "with his loot" (p. 188). Yet White, as well as Hurtle, is in a moral quandary here. In The Vivisector White displays a far greater awareness of the artist's dependence on human relationships than he did in Riders in the Chariot. There Dubbo was virtually isolated from other people, solipsistically waiting for artistic revelation. Here Hurtle knows his need of Nance, but White also wants to maintain his deterministic belief in revealed truth. Consequently the moral choices that arise in relationship--whether to accept human responsibility or not--must be evaded.<sup>15</sup> This has the effect of depicting Hurtle as a moral renegade.

To counteract this effect White divides Hurtle in

two. As with Dubbo in Riders we have Duffield the man co-habiting with Duffield the Artist. The man may be corrupt but the Artist exists on a purer plane where moral questions are irrelevant. The man is weak, "flabby, frightened that his only convincing self might not take over from him at the easel" (p. 189); he trusts "nobody, not even himself, or only that part of him which, by some special grace, might illuminate a moment of truth" (p. 183). But this dissociation (can a person who speaks of himself in these terms be considered whole?), is White's as well. The scenes of Hurtle alone painting are not qualified by the least hint of irony. The "only convincing self" has taken over and White believes in it. But more and more he is realizing that life does not consist of isolation. The artist is in a world. It is this growing realization that has him send Nance to visit Hurtle, after he has escaped with his loot into the bush. White's misgivings are apparent in the following exchange, which occurs after Nance has been talking about the importance of "The 'uman Touch":

"That's the trouble, Hurtle," she slowly said.

"That's what you aren't. You aren't a 'uman being."

"I'm an artist." It sounded a shifty claim.

"You're a kind of perv--perving on people--even on bloody rocks!" (p. 203)

White knows that Hurtle's claim is shifty; given his depiction of their relationship thus far, Nance's accusation has an almost irresistible moral authority behind it. For Duffield to defend himself with his vocation is for him to evade the moral responsibility of his being a man.

Brian Lee, discussing Eliot's criticism, describes this retreat into vocation as a "failure of nerve before the exactions of sincerity".<sup>16</sup> He goes on to quote Lionel Trilling, for whom the modern devaluation of "sincerity" is:

bound up in an essential though paradoxical way with the mystique of the classic literature of our century, some of whose masters took the position that, in relation to their work and their audience, they were not persons or selves, they were artists, by which they meant that they were exactly not, in the phrase with which Wordsworth began his definition of the poet, men speaking to men.<sup>17</sup>

White is recognizing this problem in The Vivisector. His chosen art form--the novel--continues to show him the primacy of human relationships. And with them goes a moral dimension. As White gives Hurtle serious adult relationships--as he must if the novel is to be taken seriously--there is less and less space for White himself to hide from the implications and responsibilities that these give rise to. Yet he won't commit himself fully to a world shaped by creative collaboration. Even as the force of his novelistic "thought"

carries Hurtle toward Nance's sincerity, there is a perverse streak in White that undermines or devalues that sincerity:

"It's funny," she said, "you go on the job and know more or less what you'll get. It's what you never find that keeps you at it."

Then, realizing the extent of her confession, she collapsed whimpering: "I dunno what made me say that."

They fell upon each other, on the bags, in the tenderest demonstrations either of them could make: their mouths had become the softest, most accommodating funnels of love.

"You're my real steady bloody permanent lover that I need and can't do without," she cried, and rubbed against him, and cried.

He was reminded of an old face-washer, often grubby, one of the maids had crocheted for him, in wide mesh, comforting in warm, soapy water: the opalescent shallows of childhood. (p. 205)

The last sentence reduces their mutually tender demonstrations of love to sentimentality.

Of course in the last quoted passage it is Hurtle--and not obviously White--who sees Nance's love as sentimental. But the fact that White can't move beyond this observation to a new basis for relationship, but keeps playing this scenario over and over like a stuck record, indicates his close association with what he sees as Hurtle's problem. The scenes oscillate from endorsements of Hurtle painting in isolation, to criticisms of him from a human moral perspective embodied in Nance, and back again once her perspective has been sentimentalized. The critic who reviews Hurtle's

first show catches the poles of this oscillation perfectly:  
"In his three canvases here on view he reveals a pretentious predilection for sensuous exercises in egotism. He doesn't convince us in either of his two manners: the meticulous dissection and abstraction of nature, or the sloppy, self-indulgent, anthropomorphic forms executed in bestial colour" (p. 211). That White can put this criticism in the reviewer's mouth indicates his ambivalence toward Hurtle. He is aware of Hurtle's self-indulgence, but goes beyond the reviewer in seeing a core of truth or sincerity at the centre of it. For this core--revealed to the Artist--he is willing, finally, to support Hurtle even as those around him are over-whelmed. In White's depiction of Hurtle's response to the review we see both irony at Hurtle's self-indulgence and sympathy with his predicament:

That night Duffield stood on the edge of the gorge and let out his anguish. It came up out of his chest, his throat, in increasing waves. He was fortunate to enjoy such an immense privacy, for the waves of rage and anguish broke loud enough to reach the indifferent public and the poisonous press. Then he shut up. If his roar had suggested a wounded lion, its echo returned in little protesting dribblets of sound, as if from a soul still haunted by the self-pity of which its earthiness had died.

He went into the house, stubbing his toe for good measure. (p. 212)

What White won't acknowledge is that Hurtle's rage against an indifferent public actually implies a reality to be found in

creative human collaboration.<sup>18</sup> Hurtle's desire for recognition, like Nance's desire for a loving response from Hurtle, is seen as sentimental. But these desires are only sentimental because White won't allow them a sustained creative power. The sentimentalization defuses both Nance's power as a critic of Hurtle's self-enclosure and Hurtle's potential as a creative force for life. The only option White leaves open is for Hurtle to turn inward to find truth at the expense of the world of human relationships. This, of course, results in Nance's death.

And White is fully aware of the circumstance; but caught by his fear of commitment and responsibility, combined with his belief in revelation, he sees no way out. Nance's last encounter with Hurtle in the bush is tinged with deterministic symbolism:

Nance arrived. It was late afternoon. He saw her coming down the track, the stones trying her shoes as usual. This time she was dressed in black. The black dress and the late light gave her a coppery tinge.

"What," he said, "are you on your way to a funeral?" He could have hit her if there had been something suitable to do it with. (p. 219)

Nance is on her way to funeral, of course--her own. She looks "thinner than usual" (p. 220), and he has never heard her "sound so detached from a situation" (p. 221). She has been the fuel for his artistic vision and she is almost used

up. William Walsh feels that "The violence of Nance's end . . . matches the brutality of her existence and the part, sacrificial and creative, she has played in the painter's life."<sup>19</sup> The superficial element is certainly there, but focusing on it tends to downplay the fact that Nance has come to Hurtle because she loves him. She literally "gives her all" for him, against her better judgement. The wholeness she longs for is one that comes in relationship: "This man I never met I hoped could 'uv taught me somethun I mightn't 'uv otherwise understood. Not about sex. Well, about sex as well" (p. 222).

In The Aunt's Story Theodora found this wholeness in a relationship with Holstius--a figment of her imagination. Unlike Theodora, Nance risks herself in an actual relationship with Hurtle Duffield and he destroys her in the name of Truth. That White is aware of the reprehensible nature of this action is manifestly clear in the moral force of the following:

"Nothun is ever what you expect. I never thought I would 'uv taken up with a so-called artist I was lookun for somethun else I would'uv done better to 'uv got fixed up with some bloke who expects 'is chop at five-thirty 'is regular root Saturday because you're married to 'im anyway he thinks you are you aren't inside you are free but with an artist you're never free he's makun use of yer in the name of the Holy Mother of Truth. He thinks. The Truth!"



She spat it out on the floor.

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

. . .  
Suddenly she grabbed the lamp, and the light, from being restricted and austere, blazed at the self-portrait which he was hoping she wouldn't notice, or intended to ignore. She had only been saving it up, it appeared. She made it look devilish: furtive, ingrown, all that he had persuaded himself it wasn't, and worse than anything else--bad, not morally, but aesthetically.

"There," she said, holding her torch. "That's Duffield. Not bad. True. Lovun 'imself." (p. 225)

Despite the moral implications here, however, White still sees Hurtle as if not fully justified--at least helpless in the face of his vision. Even when Hurtle self-disgustedly begins to smear the self-portrait--"all that he repudiated in himself"--with his own excrement, the ostensibly humbling action becomes an exploration of the depths of his own depravity:

He had thought he knew every inch of that painted board, till working over it now. With enlightened fingertips. As he worked, he bubbled at the mouth, wondering wondering what would be left.

Nance watched for a bit. Then she turned away. She got down, inside her dress, on the rusty bed. She was shrivelling. The lamp pointed at her old shammy-leather breasts.

"Leave it!" she moaned in the end. "For Chrissake, leave ut!"

"But I stink!"

He knew he smelled loathsome. By now they had both reached the depths. (p. 226)

What was supposedly an action which would bring him closer to

Nance becomes an instrument which further separates them. He takes the observation she gives and uses it to further explore himself, rather than using his human creativity to respond to her in a manner which might allow a new basis for their relationship to be established. Hurtle's absolute inability to make this gesture, and White's virtually resigned acceptance of Hurtle's way as the only one, are seen at the moment when Hurtle discovers Nance's dead body:

On arrival, he stalked around her, hoping something he had experienced before this encounter with the full stop of suffering might help him deal with it; but nothing in his life or art did. He got down at last beside her, on his knees, and laid his forehead on a rock, the corrugations of which didn't fit with his; as he hung there, sweating and trembling, groaning aloud for the inspiration withheld from him. (p. 229)

Hurtle's grief is not for Nance, but for the "inspiration withheld". The vessel from which he had been pouring his visions has been smashed, and it is this, rather than the loss of a woman who cared greatly for him, that engenders the "full stop of suffering" in him.

The depiction of this relationship has shown us clearly that there is a side to Patrick White that deplores the vision Hurtle holds allegiance to. Scene after scene throws before us the necessity of responsible choice. And time and again Hurtle is implicated because he refuses to

accept the responsibility his encounters present to him. But White has another side which can't believe in the efficacy of responsible choice and creative human collaboration. He evades the moral imperatives along with Duffield through suggestions of sentimentality, banality, and sterility, and by justifying the Artist through his vocation.

In Hurtle's meeting with Cecil Cutbush in chapter five of the novel the dual perspectives that result from White's dissociation assume almost schizoid proportions. First we have the introduction of the Divine Vivisector, whereby men receive "their cruelty--and their brilliance" (p. 236). With this introduction Hurtle shifts responsibility for his moral lapses as well as his creativity from himself to God. White certainly sympathizes with this view, as the final third of the novel makes amply clear. We have seen how White evades the painful moral questions and demands for responsible action he is confronted with in the Hurtle-Nance relationship. The ultimate evasion is to attribute to God the causes of Hurtle's failures of imagination and morality. From being an arbitrary source of lovingkindness in Riders in the Chariot, God has now become a vivisector, just as arbitrarily.

Following immediately upon Hurtle's declaration of

faith in the Divine Vivisector we hear from the other side of White's sensibility:

The grocer didn't know how to rise to the occasion; but something mild and reconciled in his companion's tone reminded him of an incident, interesting, if irrelevant.

"There was a bloke I knew--a caterer, name of Davy Price--decent, decent all the way--got into a spot of trouble when an entire wedding party died of food poisoning'. 'Our mistakes are what we make, Cec,' Davy says to me, 'and it's only us can live them down.' The following night 'e blew 'is brains out."

The anecdote now seemed very irrelevant indeed, but even so the grocer was put out when his friend made no attempt to respond. (p. 236)

Despite Cutbush's disclaimer, the anecdote is extremely revelant. Davy Price's story is a lesson in moral responsibility, even if his suicidal method of accepting responsibility for his actions is questionable. Davy's "decency", plus the fact that it was a wedding party (a conventional symbol of ascendent life) that he destroyed, indicates that the anecdote is White's deliberate, albeit implicit, criticism of Hurtle's evasion of responsibility. This is reinforced by Cutbush's irritation at Hurtle's lack of response; a sure echo of Nance's accusations of Hurtle's self-enclosure.

The critical perspective continues: "'I can't tell you how much it's done for me--our talk. I didn't expect anything like this. I'll go home now and work" (p. 236). We

have just witnessed Hurtle's lack of response to Cutbush and realize that the "talk" has gone all one way. Hurtle has used Cutbush as a catalyst to vision, and that is all. He is still completely self-absorbed. This self-absorption prevents a healthy creativity from issuing into the world. What results instead is the obscene "Lantana Lovers Under Moonfire": "A great white arse shitting on a pair of lovers --as they swim through a sea of lantana--dislocating themselves" (p. 238). The malicious nature of Hurtle's vision is targeted again by White when he has Cutbush respond to the proposed painting in this way: "It was the sort of joke an educated person could afford to make. The grocer laughed, of course, but wondered whether he wasn't being made to laugh at himself" (p. 238). The implication of this critical perspective is that there is an alternative to Hurtle's vivisectionary truth which involves breaking the shell of self-absorption.

This is where the deterministic side of White's sensibility assumes control again, just at the point where genuine commitment to human collaborative creativity is called for:

The unusual encounter, the feel of the dew along the bench, his own blind thoughts still nosing after his new friend's electric suggestions--didn't remember to get his

name out of him to tell the wife--had left the grocer with the shakes. He began recklessly, in spite of the lamp-post in the near distance, to expose himself, then to masturbate at the lantana. Yairs. All this talk of creation. He sat hypnotized, watching the seed he was scattering in vain by moonlight on barren ground.

The painter looked back once, but only very briefly, at what he already knew; it was already working in him. (p. 238)

Although we have seen a potential for creative collaboration in Cutbush's recognition of Hurtle's self-enclosure, White now removes that potential arbitrarily; Cutbush has "blind thoughts", and is "hypnotized"; he scatters his seed "in vain" on "barren ground". Creativity is reserved for the artist who "already" knows the significance of the scene before looking back at its actuality. Hurtle's limitations --so clearly shown through ironic juxtaposition to Cutbush-- are simply forgotten for the moment. Hurtle is again the Artist who has a direct inspirational link to God and so inhabits a purer plane than the banality belonging to the rest of us. "Once again," as Brian Lee says, speaking of Eliot (whose case is the most usefully analogous), "a forceful impulse remains uncompleted; the reader feels that something has been given, and then half-taken away."<sup>20</sup>

The greatest ostensible difference between Hurtle's relationship with Nance and the one he has with Hero Pavlousis is that where Nance was to offer him experience of phy-

sical life, Hero is to be an ideal, innocent soul who will offer him an inspiration free of earthly contamination. As he explains it to himself,

He was falling in love with her, not in the usual sense of wanting to sleep with her, to pay court to her with his body, which, after all, wasn't love. Physical love, as he saw it now, was an exhilarating steeplechase in which almost every rider ended up disqualified for some dishonesty or another. In his aesthetic desires and their consummation he believed himself to be honest; and in his desire to worship and be renewed by someone else's simplicity of spirit, he was not forsaking the pursuit of truth. So he was falling in love with Hero Pavloussis. (pp. 292-293)

Of course, as even Hurtle senses from early on in their relationship, Hero isn't the ideal soul he desires. She is a woman, and her humanity--or, in his terms, her flaws--becomes more apparent as he enters deeper into relationship with her. Just as Nance's personality kept obscuring the "forms" of physicality Hurtle was actually interested in, so here Hero's sexuality destroys the vision of perfection he had hoped she was. But this sexuality also destroys the ideal Hero herself is striving to attain. When Hurtle mentions the Divine Vivisector while explaining "Lantana Lovers under Moonfire" to her, her response is revealing:

"The Divine Destroyer--is that what you truly believe?" She took his hand, and for a brief moment seemed to be looking in it for an explanation of some division in herself. "No, you needn't tell me," she hastened. "It is true. There is that side as well. I know it." (p. 307)

Even as they stand in what he believes is a rare harmony: "a point above the lantana from which they were able to communicate" (p. 304), the seeds of division are pushing up from below. The division Hero senses in herself is between the innocent ideal both Hurtle and her husband Cosma want her to represent, and the highly sensual woman she knows she is. This blatant mind-body dissociation has made her virtually schizophrenic. After a particularly bestial scene of sexuality, for example, she is described as snapping herself "back into her formal identity: hooked and smooth". Once so snapped she is "suddenly upset. 'Oh darling, did I do this to you? How bestial! I am disgusted!'" (p. 321). The concerned and moral tone here is attributed to her "formal" identity. The real self, it is implied, is the depraved sensualist. Since she cannot fulfil the expectations of others, but can only assume a faked approximation of the ideal, she turns to the other extreme, her perverse, but "true" self. Following this path, of course, is self-destructive. And Hurtle, seeing his vision of the innocent soul polluted, follows her into these depths, brush in hand.

Along the way there are moral objections raised against this manifestly destructive understanding of life.



An important exponent of the moral perspective is Olivia Davenport. When Hurtle shows Hero and Olivia his "Lantana Lovers under Moonfire" Olivia's reaction is empathetic: "The whole thing's disgusting. Not as painting--morally. It's Duffield the exhibitionist at his most abominable!" (p. 305). But her criticism is defused in a number of ways. First, its stridency suggests that she is responding superficially. This is enforced by Hurtle's acknowledging a "grain of truth what she had said" (p. 305), while enjoying the reaction his painting has evoked. Second, Olivia is clearly presented as an outsider to Hero and Hurtle's closed circle. When Hero asks what the painting means Olivia, who is "furious to find herself left out" (p. 304), harangues her: "'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 learned the language her friend was talking with her friend" (p. 305). Her moral sense is depicted also as a form of cowardice, inability to face the truth. In an earlier scene she asks Hurtle if she can buy his nude portrait of the hunch-backed Rhoda--"Pythoness at Tripod"--which she had labelled cruel and he had defended as "the truth!" (p. 266):

"Perhaps I'll give you the painting--when I've finished with it; and after we know all about each other." A kind of love token.

As they stood on the landing his hands were outspread to test whether she was prepared to accept his advance.

But she laughed and said: "The thought of knowing everything about anybody gives me the horrors!"

He could only see her back as she was walking ahead of him down the stairs. She went buoyantly enough, considering the depths to which he had proposed they should plunge together.

"Twice I've found out all there is to know about a person," she said in an almost jaunty voice. "I haven't the courage to face it again. I thought I'd made that clear in the beginning."

She had taken such precautions to protect herself against the future, he was tempted to push her down those steep stairs; but Olivia Davenport might have survived. (p. 267)

The depths Hurtle is here proposing they plunge together recall, of course, those he and Nance had wallowed in, and in which Nance had drowned. Through the deaths of her two husbands Olivia has experienced these depths, and there is more than a little implication that she was instrumental, if not deliberately, in those deaths. Yet her admission of a lack of courage, and his desire to break her resistance to the future, work together to present her decision as a cowardly refusal to live authentically, if dangerously. But we can't accept this understanding of the situation as valid. A refusal to vivisect, to transcend the boundaries of moral decency--even if done in the name of truth--is not a refusal to face the future. On the contrary, to make a stand, to

say "thus far and no further", takes a great deal of courage and moral depth. But White won't allow this possibility. Olivia's reticence, here, is seen as of a piece with her general lack of creativity. She is depicted as a dilettante collector in the artistic realm and a voyeuristic lesbian in the sphere of human relationships.

I should, perhaps, make clear that I am not arguing against the creation of characters like Olivia Davenport. The problems arise when she is invested with a large element of the novel's moral perspective. By association, the moral stance is stripped of any power, is rendered sentimental. Given the life-context out of which Olivia speaks, Hurtle and Hero's plunge into the depths appears "honest", if grotesque.

In fact, savage grotesquerie seems to be a function of their facing the truth about human life:

On the landing: their knees trembling and knocking. He felt cold behind the knees, knee caps thin and breakable. Now he was thirsty rather than hungry, now that the last of his saliva had run down outside their mouths, evading their attempts to drink each other up. So, on the landing, he began to tear her breasts apart, to get at the flesh inside the skin: the scented, running juices; in a drought even the bitter seeds could be sucked and spat out.

He hadn't tested more than the small rubbery nipples when she cried out: "You are hurting me! We are animals!"

"Yes, Hero. Come in here."

He hadn't intended to take her into that [room], but nothing develops as conceived: the pure soul, for example; the innocent child, already deformed, or putrefying, in the womb. (p. 317)

If the innocent ideal can't be had then being honest means going to the other extreme. Cannibalism, violence, and rot become the terms of reality, and disgust--for self and others--becomes the bond of relationship.

But there is a kind of legerdemain going on here which a comment by William Earle on Sartre will help us come closer to:

There are very few writers who can so thoroughly disgust themselves with their own themes, and Sartre's method is clear; all he need do is turn a clinical detachment upon the caress, or a couple in bed, for it to become hideous. Objectification is the technique, a withholding of any participative sympathy.<sup>21</sup>

The "clinical detachment" Earle speaks of is Hurtle's, and White's, vivisectionary vision. What we recognize with Earle's help is that, far from being an illusionless view of human reality, the disgusting vision presented here is a result of White's misanthropy. He refuses to participate sympathetically in human life. Hurtle and Hero's bestial lovemaking inhabits the same fictional realm as the revolting Sydney train-ride in Riders in the Chariot. In that novel, however, the extrinsic symbol system covered this fetid "reality"

with a syrupy lovingkindness--the idealism Hurtle, and White, know can't be realized, was realized, arbitrarily and unconvincingly, in the four illuminati. And, just as in Hurtle's relationship with Hero, White's realization forces him to the outer extreme in The Vivisector. As Patricia Morley says:

in none of White's earlier novels do we find such an obsessive preoccupation with snot, spilled semen, dung, vomit, dandruff, blackheads, foul breath, grease, sweat, farts, rats, flies--in a word, with things rancid and rotting and putrid. . . . White is throwing at his reader the same problem which is torturing Hurtle's Greek mistress, Hero: man is Dreck, and if reason and purpose exist, they must be wrung out of such Dreck as we are.<sup>22</sup>

Between the extremes of innocent purity and Dreck, White places only Olivia's voyeurism and Cosma's impotence. There is no creative alternative offered. And as in the Cutbush episode, this determined vision is attributed to the Divine Vivisector and is symbolized by the bag of cats Cosma drowns:


"Who is cruel? Greeks? Turks? Man is cruel!" she shouted back. "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 the 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." (p. 320)

The moral counter to this comes when Hurtle says, "You could have saved the cats" (p. 320). To do so would be to wring reason and purpose from the Dreck, would be to assert creative life over death, to replace determination with choice. But White won't follow up the implication in Hurtle's statement. His own determined vision turns perceived avenues of escape into dead ends. As the passage continues, recognition of guilt combines with futility to produce resigned acquiescence:

She grew quiet at once. "Why--yes--I could have saved the cats by giving an order after he had left. But I am myself also condemned, as I sit, waiting in the house, and the drowning do not care about the other drowning." She reached out. "Do you see?" She laughed hoarsely as she dragged him down with her into her watery inferno.

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. (pp. 320-321)

In this world of Dreck, in which the moral dimension is rendered powerless, there is only one saving grace: the grace that is given to the artist in inspiration. This is why Hurtle's plunging into the depths with Hero does not lead him toward self-destruction as it does her. He can escape, when his only convincing self takes over from him at the easel. Though  as a man he is condemned equally with her, as an Artist he is a member of the elect. The two are caught

here: "They were holding in their arms mild dyspepsia, incurable disease, old age, death, worst of all--scepticism. He couldn't suggest to Hero Pavloussi that his paintings alone might survive the debacle, because it wouldn't have been of comfort to her. . ." (p. 325). Hero wouldn't be comforted by the power of his paintings to survive because they all reflect the debacle she wants to escape. Whereas Hurtle insists on their "truth", she castigates him for their morbidity:

"If you do love me, as I think you are perhaps too sensitive to admit," she said, putting out an encouraging hand, "why can't we make together, out of our love, something beautiful and lasting, instead of morbid, drowned cats?"

He put on his coat. He was afraid she might see herself as a kind of Boucher: a vision of pink tits and dimpled cheeks. (p. 327)

Her seeing the paintings as morbid is considered a refusal to acknowledge their truth. She would rather cast herself as a lover in a play with a happy ending. Hurtle recognizes this love for the sentimentality it is and refuses to compromise himself for it.

What Hurtle, and White, don't consider is that a response to Hero's outstretched hand might not be a compromise, but commitment to a genuinely creative human reality. The possibility that love can inspire the artist to healthy

creation involves an element of self-determination and personal, "intentional"<sup>23</sup>, commitment to the growth of the human world that is absent from the novel. The sense of human worth is very small. Rather than seeing himself as having a definite role in shaping the world we live in, Hurtle "aspire[s] to be a tabula rasa" (p. 376). For David Holbrook this view of man's creative capacities amounts to "implicit nihilism". He comments on the phenomenon and its negative implications:

in the English tradition [of philosophy], the mind is essentially receptive--the Lockean tabula rasa. It receives impressions: in the parallel psychology "stimuli" promote "impulses" along pathways, through synapses and loops, and so on. Anyone can hear this kind of mechanistic thinking about the human mind, on popular scientific or philosophical radio programmes on the "brain", in discussions of computers and cybernetics, and in much psychology given to students (often with a Behaviourist background). Apart from the staggering naivety of the models behind such ways of talking, the effect of these passive views of the mind is that we lose sight of the intentional, and of the creative dynamics of consciousness. The "I can" element in human nature is eliminated. . . .<sup>24</sup>

The truly dangerous aspect of this situation is that man's intentional capability is not destroyed so much as perverted. He loses his awareness of it. Consequently, he denies responsibility for the warped creativity he continues to produce. We see this happening with Hurtle when he invokes "truth" or the Divine Vivisector to counter charges of



cruelty or obscenity. When, for example, he shows Hero the painting which depicts her in a self-destructive pose, and which precipitates her attempted suicide, he realizes, "his heart was beating as it used to sometimes while he found the courage to speak the truth in front of Maman. His repeated downfall was his longing to share truth with somebody specific who didn't want to receive it. Was it why he had failed so far in love?" (p. 328). The extent to which this is White's own attitude is clear in this passage from Flaws in the Glass:

Where I have gone wrong in life is believing that total sincerity is compatible with human intercourse. Manoly, I think, believes sincerity must yield to circumstance without necessarily becoming tainted with cynicism. His sense of reality is governed by a pureness of heart which I lack. My pursuit of that razor-blade truth has made me a slasher. (p. 155)

The question we need to ask in the face of this attitude is whether Hurtle's painting actually does convey the truth? Certainly there is a self-destructive streak in Hero--we have already discussed the elements of it--but there is also her desire for love, her outstretched hand, which the painting takes no account of. What we have, actually, is only Hurtle's interpretation of Hero's significance; and as such he is responsible for it. This leads us to realize that White's

sympathy with Hurtle's notions of truth indicates certain limitations he has as a novelist:

In [The Vivisector] it becomes evident that White has a rather flat notion of character. . . . What Hurtle Duffield does in his paintings, in cruelly rehearsing and revealing the key or essential truth about the particular model for the occasion, underscores for us White's own procedure. . . . We expect to discover a maturing of character, as in say Jane Austen, but White's characters do not in that sense mature.<sup>25</sup>

Though Mitchell's comments are perceptive, they need qualification. In Nance Lightfoot White reveals himself to be a novelist with potentially great insight into human character. As we have seen, however, he thwarts his own creativity just when the potential begins to be realized. The greatness of a Nance Lightfoot is that she won't succumb to White's stratifications--his artifice shows clearly. What his creation of Nance shows us--despite himself--is that, as Brian Lee says, "The desire of human fulfilment is to hold as much of ourselves together as a whole as we can." He continues:

We shouldn't be anxious, like Peer Gynt, that there is nothing in the middle of the onion--that is mere scientific modernism, looking for the basic particle, the material soul-substitute. That's all that is. Why despair, so long as we are sound onions, proper persons? Who wants to live as the analogy of a brass tack, a fact or a "concept" (a kind of mental fact, a Lockean "idea" on a scrap of paper)? It is not nature we are enslaved to, but only a way of looking at it, which we ourselves thought up. . . .<sup>26</sup>

White is aware of the destructive implications of Hurtle's

reductiveness. In a "cold flash" Hurtle imagines himself standing "at the end of his life listening to rats scampering through an otherwise deserted house" (p. 328). The similarities to Eliot's Waste Land vision are striking. And similar, also, is Hurtle's escape from this dead end. Where Eliot turned to Anglicanism, Hurtle finds the purer plane through art. Love, again, is considered no more than a triviality:

That he couldn't love her entirely, or call out through the window, or run after her offering the small change of the flirtatious male, was due to the fact that he was left with his painting in the darkening cubby-hole of a room, and in the painting they each existed on another level, neither pathetic nor tragic, neither moral nor, as she continued erupting in his eardrums, "pornographic". They were, rather, an expression of truth, on that borderline where the hideous and depraved can become aesthetically acceptable. So, in the hot little dusk-bound room, the man's phallus glowed and spilled, while the woman, her eyes closed, her mouth screaming silent words, fluctuated between her peacock-coloured desires and the longed for death-blow. (p. 329)

Truth exists, but it cannot be ascribed a value. This is White's version of the message found in Forster's Marabar Caves. Ian Robinson restores our proper bearings to us:

"Everything exists, nothing has value." Mrs. Moore in A Passage to India learns this from the god of the Marabar Caves, and it is the end of her. As far as we are concerned . . . we have to be able to rewrite the sentence and say everything has value, nothing merely "exists". With her values, her sense of the difference between marriage and rape, Mrs. Moore has lost what F.R. Leavis calls "a grasp of the real", as well as her will to go on living. Her death, merely reported later in the novel, only confirms, without much emphasizing it,

that anything truly to be called "her life" has ended.<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Moore's "truth" kills her; Hurtle's truth kills others. By virtue of his vocation he is exempt; to express the truth is justification enough, despite the consequences.

But a larger problem here is White's inability to enact this truth. Adrian Mitchell is correct when he says of White's visionaries: "Their visions ultimately lack conviction, because they can only be communicated by assertion--The Vivisector provides the most telling examples of this".<sup>28</sup> Again and again, as we have seen, White will assert the artistic and spiritual significance of Hurtle's cruel, obscene and destructive experiences. Rather than attempt to change the painful situation through creative collaboration, participative sympathy, or basic human concern, White splits Hurtle into the man condemned to hell and the artist who is saved. While the depiction of the condemned is powerful, that of salvation is very weak.

The problems of enactment, of capturing the "whole" in art, are suggested while Hurtle lies with Hero after her aborted suicide attempt:

So far he had conceived in paint no more than fragments of a whole. If he were only free of women who wished to hold somebody else responsible for their self-destruction; more difficult still: if he could ignore the tremors of his own balls, then he might reach his resisted objec-

tive, whether through mottled sausage skins, or golden chrysalides and splinters of multi-coloured glass perhaps purposefully strewn on a tessellated floor, or the human face drained to the dregs, or the many mirrors in which his sister Rhoda was reflected, or all all of these and more fused in one--not to be avoided--vision of GOD.  
(p. 336)

The problem here is clear (though it involves more than White recognizes): enactment is impossible so long as Hurtle denies the importance of human life and his inevitable part in it. He absolves himself of complicity by reducing women to a self-destructive type, and by separating his sexuality from his self. These procedures are false on two counts: first, as the quotations from Mitchell and Lee on page 210 have already shown, character can't be reduced without losing its vitality; nor can natural sexuality be an impediment to wholeness. Second, wholeness for human beings can only be found in relationship, and relationship introduces the idea of responsibility.<sup>29</sup> As long as the artist maintains a reductive view of human reality he is neglecting his responsibility to other people, and, consequently, will be unable to enact his vision for them. He can harangue them, bludgeon them, vivisect them, but he won't be able to share his vision with them--to collaborate--because the vision already sees them as sterile and banal, unable to reciprocate.

A scene on the island of Perialos presents this

problem:

Forgetting she had finished it, she took a mouthful of her coffee, and now had to spit out the muddy dregs; however he remembered Hero, and there was still the return voyage to Piraeus, this might remain the key version: the black lips spluttering and gasping; the terrible tunnel of her black mouth.

"Dreck! Dreck! The Germans express it best. Well, I will learn to live with such Dreck as I am: to find a reason and purpose in this Dreck."

All this time a little golden hen had been stalking and clucking round the iron base of the café table, pecking at the crumbs which had fallen from their mouths. The warm scallops of her golden feathers were of that same inspiration as the scales of the great silver-blue sea creature they--or he, at least--had watched from John of the Apocalypse, ritually coiling and uncoiling, before dissolving in the last light.

"See--Hero?" he began to croak, while pointing with his ineffectual finger. "This hen!" he croaked.

Hero half-directed her attention at the hen; but what he could visualize and apprehend, he could really convey only in paint, and then not for Hero. The distressing part was: they were barking up the same tree. (p. 357)

It is clear from both Hurtle's vision of the vitality of nature, and his attempt to bridge the chasm between himself and Hero, that White has a personal stake in this scene. There is no irony here: Hurtle is making a genuine attempt to share, to help Hero rise from the Dreck, which is unlike any prior action of his in the novel. White is obviously trying to accommodate both the moral and aesthetic sides of his sensibility. What he fails to realize is that in having Hurtle see Hero's Dreck-nature as the "key version" of her character--her essential self--he is sabotaging the very

bridge he is wanting to build. White's view of man as a creature of Dreck, or at best of Dreck glazed with banality, perpetuates the dissociation Hurtle's singular vision of wholeness in nature is meant to overcome. Like Dubbo in Riders, Hurtle will paint pictures which no one will understand except those who through an arbitrary "special grace", are members of the elect.

Yet we are able to understand this because White has communicated it to us in a common language, through a novel. His doing so is an indication of his implicit faith in our ability to collaborate with him in the sharing of meaning. Explicitly, however, within the novel's relationships, he denies this faith.

In the final third of the novel this denial of human creativity is accomplished with less opposition from White's moral sense because Hurtle is not so deeply involved in human relationships. The irony that often springs up to accuse him in his encounters with Nance and Hero is far less evident as Hurtle passes from middle to old age and his dealings with life beyond his art diminish. In fact, Hurtle and the novel he animates move into a world of primarily symbolic significance. This move is accomplished only because the relationships are not so intense. Nance would not succumb

without a fight to being reduced to the symbolic significance the critics see. Because White created her so fully she gained a life his patterning could not subjugate short of killing her. Hurtle's guilt over her murder is White's as well.

With Rhoda Courtney and Kathy Volkov the situation is different. Neither presents the problems Nance did. Kathy, because she is a child, hasn't the depth of character and experience of an adult, and Rhoda is depicted only in her spoiled, petulant youth and her resigned age--the large stretch of adult life is neglected. Further, her deformity is an arbitrary separation from normal relationship which serves White's purposes well. In his initial handling of these two characters problems hover around the pattern he envisions, but these are smoothed over once the relationship is established. The symbolism takes over and White has his way.

What he wants to do in this part of the novel is consolidate the insights made earlier and justify Hurtle's approach to God. He must, therefore, come to terms in some way with the moral dimension of the world he has created. He does this by embodying it in Rhoda Courtney. In her mission to the cats of Sydney's gutters Rhoda becomes an



archetype of moral compassion. Her occupation picks up the drowning cats imagery from earlier, and dramatizes the saving of the cats that both Hurtle and Hero avoided.

But, as we have seen throughout, White's vision won't let him take the moral dimension seriously. He continually undercuts and sentimentalizes it. And this happens with Rhoda. Though she symbolizes moral strength and compassion, the fact that she ministers to cats ludicrously undercuts the seriousness of her mission. In relation to humanity, which the drowning cats symbolize after all, she is ineffectual. Mrs. McBeath can say that "Miss Courtney is of the earth she is strong and would carry us all on her back . . . to the end" (p. 563), but this is an assertion not borne out by experience. Though Hurtle employs her "as a moral force, or booster of his conscience" (p. 404); though she is to be "quickly installed" (p. 412) in order to protect Kathy Volkov from "debauch" (p. 411), her defence is nonexistent. At Kathy's first attempts she succeeds and Rhoda becomes Hurtle's "lapsed conscience" (p. 427). We shouldn't really have expected anything else, however. Her ineffectuality is an integral part of the symbolism White has contrived for this part of the novel. She is confined to the lower

floor of Hurtle's house, for example, because she "couldn't manage the stairs" (p. 406). Symbolically, this indicates that the moral realm finally has no jurisdiction over the aesthetic. In his studio--where Hurtle and Kathy's mutual seduction occurs--morality is powerless. Consequently, Rhoda's function as moral symbol appears to be White's gesture of appeasement to his conscience, and possibly to that of his readers.

The powerlessness of her symbolic role quickly extinguishes the glimmers of authentic moral issues that might arise in Rhoda and Hurtle's relationship. On her first visit to Hurtle's home Rhoda makes her only, painful, ascent to his studio. White briefly allows the moral and aesthetic dimensions to meet and, as in his clashes with Nance, Hero and Olivia, Hurtle is indicted by the scene:

"And all these paintings," she dared only mumble.

"What about the paintings?" he dared her back.

They were coming to it now.

"Well,"--Rhoda coughed and smiled--"I might be vivisected afresh in the name of truth--or art."

"How? How?" He was shocked.

"Don't you remember that dog we saw with Maman somewhere in London? I shall never forget its varnished tongue."

How could he forget the smell of their own wet frightened fur as they huddled together escaping in the cab?

"But what has that to do with art?" As if he didn't know the answer.

He heard Rhoda's voice. "I was born vivisected. I couldn't bear to be strapped to the table again."

"I can't help it," he apologized, "if I turned out to be an artist."

There was little else he could say. (pp. 406-407)

Hurtle is clearly subjected to irony in this scene; even the familiar recourse to his vocation seems blatantly evasive given the moral context. But White can see no way out of the dilemma, so he simply removes the irritant. Hurtle leads "the way downstairs", Rhoda seems "relieved by a descent", and both agree it "was delicious to discover that, on this level, they were still brother and sister" (p. 407; **emphasis mine**). Rhoda's next trip upstairs is at Hurtle's death. In the interim they alternately praise and badger one another, safe within their symbolic roles of the aesthetic and the moral. But the issues are not truly faced.

With Kathy Volkov the spiritual element is introduced to complete the makeup of the archetypal human personality that the house on Flint Street and Chubb's Lane has become. She symbolizes the spiritual purity of Hurtle's artistic endeavour. He appropriates her as "his spiritual child" (p. 396), and invests her with the "perfection and purity" (p. 412) that he had hoped to find in Hero. But just as with Hero, Kathy has a very human sexuality and once more Hurtle finds that he can't "ignore the tremor of his balls". The

second time she enters his studio she is transformed into his "aborted spiritual child" (p. 426). Her spiritual, symbolic significance is what both Hurtle and White want, however, not her humanity. The sexual episode is useful in that while it can tangibly demonstrate the power that Kathy as inspirational force has in Hurtle's life, it is also obviously morally unacceptable. We have already noticed how concerned Hurtle was to install Rhoda as a moral defence. And when the act occurs Hurtle's moral awareness is in full operation: "At least he was, technically, the passive one; he could console himself morally with that: he hadn't attempted" (p. 425). In a perceptive moment Veronica Brady recognizes something of this:

Kathy's presence introduces into the novel what is almost a sentimental note and there is a certain sense of strain in her presentation which obliges White to use forced erotic metaphors to describe their relationship, as if he lacked confidence in its emotional credibility. Certainly the feelings he wants to generate are in excess of the facts about her.<sup>30</sup>

In Hurtle's relationship with Hero the "fact" of her sexuality completely undermined the idealism he had aspired to. Hero was too "there" to evade. Consequently Hurtle plunged to the depths of her sensual "reality" and in the process she was destroyed. With Kathy the plunge is avoided for two reasons: first, because Hurtle, and possibly White as well,

would never survive the moral backlash from a depraved and bestial sexual relationship with a 13-year old; and second, because Kathy, being 13, is not "there" enough to destroy the artist's idealistic aspirations. The symbolic significance can survive in spite of their brief foray into sexuality. All White need do is remove her to a safe distance, just as he removed Rhoda when things got too hot. He packs her off to music school and has Hurtle sit down to paint "the real Katherine Volkov", "not the sweaty schoolgirl of vulgar lapses, touchingly tentative aspirations, and at times brutal, because unconscious, sensuality" (p. 431). The "actual" Katherine Volkov becomes the "one he was at present creating in his mind, as opposed to the figment of his original lust" (p. 437). He is justified in seeing the spiritual dimension as, finally, the "real" one, by his vocation, which gives him a direct link with God:

fortunately there was also painting: the physical act which rejuvenated and purified when he and nameless others were at their most corrupt. . . . there were the days when he himself was operated on, half drunk sometimes, shitting himself with agony, when out of the tortures of knife and mind he was suddenly carried, without choice, on the wings of his exhaustion, to the point of intellectual and--dare he begin to say it?--spiritual self-justification. (p. 430)

Hurtle's justification also comes from Kathy herself, in the form of letters which reinforce the split between

significance and banality, actuality and figment, which Hurtle has seen in her. The first letter, from Melbourne, is largely a banal description of shopping sprees and outings, but it also has two post scripts. The first indicates her awareness of her own banal surface:

Oh dear this looks as insipid as I knew it would, and you will think me of no account. I wonder why you intimidate me? Gerry Thurston doesn't and he too is a brilliant man. Love and kisses and the best kiss of all.

Kathy (p. 450)

The second P.S. penetrates to the core of her being:

The Quasi Adagio is still giving me trouble. I can't always bring it out clear enough, then at other times it becomes so very easily and naturally pure.

K. (p. 450)

The second letter comes after Kathy has forged a world class reputation. In it she confirms all the intentions Hurtle ever had regarding her. She tells him he is the one who taught her "how to see, to be, to know instinctively" (p. 494), and she acknowledges his spiritual parentage: "I prefer to think of you as the father of anything praiseworthy that will come out of me" (p. 494). The inspirational power of this letter is clear in Hurtle's reaction: "he began priming a board on which, probably tomorrow, he would start to paint, when his idea had descended out of the clouds, into the more practical extensions of space" (p. 495). This

gives us the clue to the source of the inspiration, and also indicates a problem. Kathy's letter arrives, virtually, from the ideal realm. Even Hurtle admits that the more practical extensions of space are necessary for the creativity to manifest itself. Yet when Kathy was with him in those practical spaces--when he had to deal with a human relationship with her--moral problems arose. The letters, finally, are a convenient way for White to assert the rightness of Hurtle's artistic vision without appearing to be merely asserting. They offer the façade of relationship with Kathy when in fact there wasn't any, and couldn't be any serious relationship with her given the circumstances White established. With Nance and Hero serious relationship was possible--even if it was evaded--and Hurtle's vision--and White's--was severely undermined. The sense of a deterministic order inspiring the artist from outside has got to go if relationships are to be faced responsibly. Yet it is just this external inspiration that the letters provide.

Of course, the clearest cases of this phenomenon are Hurtle's experiences of being "stroked by God" (p. 563). The first stroke reveals the indigo vision to him, and the second, which occurs just as he achieves the vision in paint,

kills him. Both scenes, and especially the final one, are tours de force and I don't want to take anything away from their manifest power. As instances of spiritual significance, however, they are arbitrary gestures which convince more by their dazzle than by their "integrat[ion] into the world of the characters in the novel."<sup>31</sup> As Adrian Mitchell continues:

The language reaches a stage where it can only gesture at meaning: the vision splendid itself cannot be conveyed, only something of the rapt attention of the moment of heightened vision. The rest is mental perception, not experience. The meaning of the experience itself has either to be flatly asserted by some intrusion of the narrative voice. . . or he maintains the dramatic intensity of the moment, and the vision becomes inexpressible. Just what did Hurtle see in his vision of the indigo?<sup>32</sup>

We get a virtual gloss on what Hurtle is about to experience in his final stroke in Christiana McBeath's letter. It is here we get the idea of being "stroked by God"; Hurtle's deterministic vision of being vivisected or "worked on" (p. 566), is embodied in her experience of the wasp nest: "I got stung not by putting up my hand my hand was put" (p. 562); and finally the existence of an elect is made clear:

I have ventured to run on Mr. Duffield because I believe the afflicted to be united in the same purpose, and you of course as an artist and the worst afflicted through your art can see further that us who are mere human diseased. . . My dear friend Miss Courtney I do not love less for not including among us . . . (p. 563)



This letter is virtually equivalent to an "intrusion of the narrative voice" since Kathy's mother ~~has~~ figured only very slightly in the action.

White's recourse to minor figures, epistolary assertion, and acts of God to deliver the significance of Hurtle's vision in the latter part of the novel is indicative of his lack of surety when depicting serious human relationships. As we have seen, these inevitably evoke fierce opposition to the vision and result in destructiveness. The arbitrary symbolic structure and device in the final third (which resemble, in function, the extrinsic symbolic system in Riders), can be seen as White's turning away from the problems his novel has presented to him. Olivia Davenport's gesture in the following passage follows the same pattern:

"Always at my most desperate, or cynical," Olivia said, watching as the sea continued sucking round their ankles, "when I've most hated men for their lies and presumptuousness, and their attempts to reduce love to a grotesque sexual act, I've felt that somewhere there must be some creature, not quite man, not quite god, who will heal the wounds." (p. 382)

The elements of this god-man we have seen, of course, in Rhoda's mission of healing to the cats, and Kathy's role as artistic and spiritual inspiration. But White won't conceive of these elements being bound into a creative wholeness of personality in the human world--the world of relationships. He keeps the

moral and spiritual/aesthetic realms separate--dissociated-- thereby sentimentalizing the strength of the one, and making the strength of the other arbitrary. Despite the pressure exerted by the serious relationships in the central third of the novel, White maintains his belief in a wholeness which is an all-inclusive Oneness to be achieved, finally, as Hurtle's quest makes plain, only after death.

In White's next novel, The Eye of the Storm (1973), this concept of wholeness remains. But there exists along with it a new respect for the wholeness to be found in human relationship. In the following passage we can see both views expressed:

Mrs. Hunter was enjoying the luxury of being alone and perfectly silent with somebody she loved. (They did love each other, didn't they? You could never be sure about other people; sometimes you found they had hated you all their lives.) This state of perfect stillness was not unlike what she enjoyed in her relationship with Sister de Santis, though in essence it was different; with the night nurse she was frequently united in a worship of something too vast and selfless to describe even if your mind had been completely compos whatever it is. This other state of unity in perfect stillness, which she hoped she was beginning to enjoy with Dorothy, she had experienced finally with Alfred, when she returned to "Kudjeri" to nurse him in his last illness. There were moments when their minds were folded into each other without any trace of the cross-hatching of wilfulness or desire to possess. Yet at the same time all the comfort of touch was present in their absorption. At least that was the way you had felt, and believed, or hoped for the same in someone else. (pp. 62-63)

While White still sees morality as irrelevant to a worshipful apprehension of the indescribable God, his depiction of Elizabeth Hunter's life expresses his awareness (new found, we sense) of the necessary part of morality in the wholeness of human relationship. As Peter Beatson says: "Elizabeth Hunter, unlike Voss and Hurtle, also develops a genuine moral sense which takes her back to Kudjeri to nurse her dying husband, and she has the moral courage and honesty to face the implications of her own guilt and to feel genuine pangs of remorse."<sup>33</sup>

Of course, in this dual wholeness we have dissociation again. ☞ We have the feeling that White is attempting to get the best of both worlds: the spiritual and the human. It is only with A Fringe of Leaves that the inseparability of these worlds is squarely faced. Ellen Roxburgh works through dissociation to human wholeness, and her awareness of an authentic spiritual reality is part and parcel of her acceptance of her responsibility to the human world.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>Veronica Brady, "The Artist and the Savage God", Meanjin Quarterly, XXXIII (Winter 1974), 137-138. Just as Brady's allegiance to Hurtle's quest causes her to miss the problems that even White is aware of, so John Docker's simplistic understanding of the novel as an opposition between "a free, natural way of living" "focussed in the life of the painter Hurtle Duffield" and "the repressive ways of society" "focussed in the lives of various women" in his paper "Patrick White and Romanticism: The Vivisector," Southerly, XXXIII (1973), 44-61, allows him actually to praise one of the major problems in the novel: "Working through The Vivisector, then, are apriori and formulaic concepts of what is 'real' and 'true' in life. They allow White always confidently to know the true and the false in his characters' relations with society and nature, or natural processes, a confidence clearly revealed in the novel's tone and judgments." The confidence is Docker's, though; only by relying on the symbolism and oracular statements, and by avoiding the dramatic life of the novel could he miss the conflict White is engaged in with himself. But, for Docker, the social and historical aspect of character is "merely" "accidental". Robert S. Baker ("Romantic Onanism in Patrick White's The Vivisector", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, XXI, 2 [Summer 1979], 203-225), believes John Docker is "the best reader of The Vivisector to date." His article, too, relies on symbolism and romantic theory to attempt to come to terms with the dualism and ambiguities he discerns. Though he is not so reductive as Docker, Baker never really comes to a settled position; rather he seems at points almost overwhelmed by the amount of material he has garnered. John Beston ("Patrick White's The Vivisector: The Artist in Relation to His Art", Australian Literary Studies, 5, [1971-72], 168-175) focusses more closely, if briefly, on the dissociation in the novel: "White in creating the portrait of an artist at such length appears to be inviting the reader to analyze his creation while defying him to do so, and to be inviting pity for the artist's sense of alienation while rejecting sympathy. . . the psyche of an artist is revealed here by a writer himself

preoccupied with the problem of artistic alienation."

<sup>2</sup>Peter Beatson, as well, is far more ready to accept the givens of White's work than to follow leads that might upset his pre-determined plan: "If, as the endings of the novels seem to suggest, Voss, Hurtle and Elizabeth [Hunter] are granted Grace in spite of the fact that, if not Great Criminals and Great Invalids, then all three are a little crooked and Voss is more than a little sick, we may be justified in asking the premises from which Patrick White's ethics develop. The obvious answer is that for Patrick White the categories of 'the ethical' and 'the spiritual' do not completely coincide. Moral flaws may be irritants or catalysts that lead to spiritual development" (p. 38). Rather than push at that gap between the ethical and the spiritual Beatson is content to close the issue. His method needs closed issues because it is static and can't accommodate change in White's canon. Though he occasionally notices ambivalences, they soon become structural "antinomies" and the problems disappear.

<sup>3</sup>"Whether Hurtle Duffield is or is not a painter, I see him as a composite of several I have known, welded together by the one I have in me but never became." (Flaws in the Glass, p. 151).

<sup>4</sup>David Holbrook, Lost Bearings in English Poetry (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1977), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Brady, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup>F.R. Leavis, Thought, Words and Creativity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 18-19.

<sup>7</sup>"Our humanity is the complex of criteria, of evaluative structures, within which we have come to dwell, and are content to dwell. To deny the multiplicity and complexity of such hard-won dwelling places, to deny our 'natural artificiality', is to beg the question of facts and values from the start." Marjorie Grene, The Knower and the Known (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 159.

<sup>8</sup>The conclusion of D.H. Lawrence's poem "The Song of a Man Who Has Come Through" illustrates this acceptance of

responsibility nicely:

What is the knocking?

What is the knocking at the door in the night?

It is somebody who wants to do us harm.

No, no, it is the three strange angels.

Admit them, admit them.

<sup>9</sup>D.H. Lawrence, "Morality and the Novel", in Phoenix, edited and with an introduction by E.D. McDonald (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), p. 528.

<sup>10</sup>Thelma Herring has noticed something of this: "If one compares The Vivisector with Voss it becomes apparent that the function of Laura Trevelyan is divided in the later novel between the two characters: Kathy as lover and psychopomp, Rhoda as the conscience, the moral censor." "Patrick White's The Vivisector", Southerly, XXXI, 1 (1971), 3-16. What she does not recognize is that White was able to hold the elements together in Laura Trevelyan because she was not truly in relationship with Voss. Their communication was through letters (as Kathy's with Hurtle comes to be), or through mystical transport--something which avoids the exigencies of dramatic presentation.

<sup>11</sup>"Oh, purify yourselves, ye who would know the aesthetic ecstasy, and be lifted up to the 'white peaks of artistic inspiration'. Purify yourselves of all base hankering for a tale that is told, and of all low lust for likenesses. Purify yourselves, and know the one supreme way, the way of Significant Form. I am the revelation and the way! I am Significant Form, and my unutterable name is Reality. Lo, I am Form and I am Pure, I am Pure Form. I am the revelation of Spiritual Life, moving behind the veil. I come forth and make myself known, and I am Pure Form, behold, I am Significant Form." (D.H. Lawrence, "Introduction to His Paintings", in Selected Essays [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950], p. 324.)

<sup>12</sup>William Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala, pp. 39-40.

<sup>15</sup>This ambivalence over whether to acknowledge the

human need for relationship is also reflected in the issue of the artist's relation to a tradition. Terry Smith comments usefully here: "Duffield's art begins at those points where he interacts with others, and these moments gradually come to occupy the main body of the novel. The implausibility is evident, I repeat, in that White only rarely (and then unconvincingly) takes the next step to a full exploration of the artist working with his medium and his art history. Duffield grows and changes, but his art does not." ("A Portrait of the Artist in Patrick White's The Vivisector", Meanjin Quarterly, XXXI [June 1972], 167-177.)

<sup>16</sup>Brian Lee, Theory and Personality, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>See my discussion of this circumstance on pp. 45-46 above.

<sup>19</sup>Walsh, p. 104.

<sup>20</sup>Lee, Theory and Personality, p. 85. And David Holbrook, in a similar vein, makes an observation that sheds light for us: "Strangely enough, although they are poets, the attitudes to human beings in Eliot and Pound. . . express a schizoid sense of superiority, and a distrust of creativity itself. In this they are complementary to the functional attitude to life [a machine-like, quantitative view of man] of our civilization, even as they criticize it." (Lost Bearings in English Poetry, pp. 233-234.) This is the contradictory situation we are faced with in The Vivisector. While criticizing the superficiality and banality of our civilization for its hatred of creativity and its false sense of its own importance, White presents an artist whose world view can be accused of very similar shortcomings.

<sup>21</sup>William Earle, "Man as the Impossibility of God", in Christianity and Existentialism by William Earle, James M. Edie, and John Wild (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 108.

<sup>22</sup>Patricia Morley, The Mystery of Unity, pp. 209-210.

<sup>23</sup>Holbrook, p. 233.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>25</sup>Adrian Mitchell, "Eventually, White's Language: Words, and More than Words", in Ron Shepherd and Kirpal Singh, eds., Patrick White: A Critical Symposium, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup>Brian Lee, Poetry and the System (Retford, Notts.: The Brynmill Press, Ltd., 1983), pp. 35-36.

<sup>27</sup>Ian Robinson, The Survival of English (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup>Mitchell, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup>As John Wild says of man in general: "He is free to become inhuman and to inflict untold agonies and even annihilation upon himself and others. He is also free to recognize his guilt, to take it over responsibly, and to organize a more human world. But whichever way he chooses, he is responsible, for he has power over the non-living and living things of nature. He can communicate with his fellows and is free to interpret and order things as he wishes." ("The Rebirth of the Divine" in Christianity and Existentialism, p. 184.) We have seen, throughout the novel, White's awareness of this responsibility, but we have also registered his refusal to embrace it--to make the choice for life. He evades by attributing the cruelty, finally, to a vivisectionary God of a determined world. John Wild knows this procedure; his passage continues: "Hence the traditional conception of of a divine plan to which he can attribute his evil intentions and vicious mistakes will have to go. These divine plans are comforting constructions of his own, to relieve him of responsibility. They are bad excuses which have now lost their power. If there is any divine plan, it is that man should become free and responsible. If he does not do so, he is to blame, and in his heart he knows this. God is not responsible for Hiroshima, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz." (Ibid.)

<sup>30</sup>Brady, p. 144. She continues: "Yet this is inevitable, for Kathy sounds a kind of grace note; she represents in a sense the advent of that graciousness which finally overwhelms Hurtle." But how, if sentimentality is inevitable, can one take the grace seriously? Brady simply won't follow through with her own implications.



<sup>31</sup>Mitchell, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Beatson, p. 39.

#### IV

#### A FRINGE OF LEAVES

In A Fringe of Leaves Patrick White strips Ellen Roxburgh of the trappings of her civilized humanity and forces her to come to terms with the darkness, the savagery, which lies within all of us, and which enables us to survive on a purely bestial level. To become conscious of the existence of this savagery is an important step in fashioning a world as far free of it as we can ever hope to be. Once recognized, however, the knowledge of this potential in us casts an ironic shadow over our civilized beliefs. We know what we are capable of and can never be sure that the beast has been tamed.

This knowledge, however, is no excuse for despair. As Ishmael says, "There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness."<sup>1</sup> To see only savagery in human existence is a severe blinkering of one's vision. Blinkering of this kind was a central part of the dissociated vision in both Riders and The Vivisector. In Riders the human world

was seen as savage, evil, and banal, and to avoid despair White arbitrarily posited a realm where the problems didn't apply. The illuminati had access to this higher plane, which was the source of an abstract lovingkindness which poured like syrup over humanity. In The Vivisector White let go of this sentimental notion in an extreme way. Now the higher plane itself was inhabited by a vivisector who could provide the elect with visions of wholeness at a cruel cost to humanity.

The lovingkindness of Riders and the vivisection of The Vivisector are extreme opposite ends of a spectrum of response to human existence, and <sup>are</sup> suspect for that reason. Before A Fringe of Leaves, however, White could not seriously envision a more balanced, middle-of-the-road response. His gesture in this direction in The Vivisector is Olivia Davenport, who is a collector rather than a creator, a voyeur rather than a participator, an observer of the spectacle of life. If she doesn't cause anyone any harm, White suggests, that is because she isn't fully alive. She is devoid of any creative power.

In A Fringe of Leaves this middle ground between the extremes of "idealism and despair"<sup>2</sup> is explored far more

thoroughly than previously, and the result is that the somewhat negative and resigned concept of "balance" (embodied superbly in Austin Roxburgh and Miss Scrimshaw), is transformed, gradually, through Ellen Roxburgh, into a positive, creative concept of "wholeness". The ingredient that brings about this transformation is love.

In his brief meeting with Ellen Roxburgh in Commandant Lovell's parlour, near the end of A Fringe of Leaves, Mr. Pilcher--the only other survivor of the wreck of the Bristol Maid--confesses to a change of perspective which is instructive for us in this connection:

"I forget, if I ever knew, whether you have a wife, Mr. Pilcher?"

From snivelling, he hardened, as though frozen by a vision of the past. "Yes," he said. "I had. But did not love her as I undertook. I was ashamed, I suppose, by what I must have thought a weakness. That is how she died, I can see."

He sat rocking in recollection.

"Love was weakness. Strength of will--wholeness, as I saw it--is what I was determined to cultivate. That is why I admired you, Mrs. Roxburgh--the cold lady, the untouchable." (pp. 378-379)

Pilcher's change of direction parallels what seems to have been White's own change between The Vivisector and A Fringe of Leaves. In The Vivisector Hurtle Duffield's visionary programme was carried out with a **deliberateness** that was surely wilful, and we have seen on numerous occasions how White

sentimentalized love, thus revealing his fear of commitment, his fear of risking himself in relationship even while his novelistic art was showing him the necessity of creative loving relationships to human wholeness. In the struggle between the deterministic bent in White's sensibility and the bent towards responsibility and choice, the deterministic won. The final part of The Vivisector revealed a quite cerebral symbolism reminiscent of Riders.

In A Fringe of Leaves White finally makes the commitment to human relationship, to the human world, that he has previously been holding at bay. The epigraph from Louis Aragon gives us the basis of this commitment:

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

This love is neither the sentimentality of The Vivisector, nor the abstract lovingkindness of Riders, but is the result of Ellen Roxburgh's acceptance of the human world as necessary to her existence. Ellen chooses life; gradually comes to embrace the responsibility which inheres in an understanding of life as being lived "in relation to". What the novel shows us is Ellen's education toward a genuine wholeness from a dissociated state in which her social surface consisted of an almost resigned acceptance of

responsibility out of a sense of gratitude and duty, while her spiritual and sensual inclinations chafed against this duty and longed to go in other directions. The gratification of these longings is seen to involve vivisection of others, just as Hurtle's search for the truth of his vision destroyed those he used as means to his end. But whereas the White of The Vivisector finally supported Hurtle's vision, despite its consequences, the White of Fringe sees Ellen's vivisection of others as unacceptable, and implies that the quasi-wholeness she feels in this experience can only be made complete through collaboration in creative human relationships.

As this last observation implies, White's achievement in A Fringe of Leaves is that he avoids implicating himself in the dissociation so clearly embodied in Ellen Roxburgh and the other characters. White's authorial perspective displays a wholeness of vision unlike anything in his previous work. His control is firm but not imposed; the irony is subtle, deft, and accurately targeted. This wholeness of perspective is exemplified in the compassion he can extend to characters like Austin Roxburgh and Miss Scrimshaw, who, as Veronica Brady says, "might have been savagely treated in an earlier novel."<sup>3</sup>

The compassion apparent in A Fringe of Leaves in no way suggests a complacent attitude on White's part. He is aware of the depths, as The Vivisector showed us only too clearly, and invests Ellen Roxburgh with this chastening awareness. Near the end of the novel, she tells the chaplain: "I don't know what I any longer believe" (p. 385). When the chaplain attempts to smooth away her disquietude by suggesting she attend the barracks church, and tells her she will have nothing to fear from the prisoners there, she replies: "Only my conscience, and that can be more terrifying than any unknown criminal" (p. 386). Ellen's conscience is stricken because, as she says: "I was never able to live up to all that others expected of me" (p. 385). Of course we remember her husband who had depended on her in his semi-invalid state and whom "she had failed in the end to protect" (p. 242); but we also remember Jack Chance on whom she "had failed to impress that loving-kindness<sup>that</sup> inspires trust" (p. 367).

Ellen's failures, here, are also reminiscent of Hero's in The Vivisector. Unable to live up to her own, as well as others', expectations, Hero recoiled into the depths of depravity. In Fringe White has moved beyond this black/white, either/or thinking, into a mode of thought which,

while acknowledging the risks of human existence, the potential savagery that lies in us, is still able to affirm human society. Marjorie Grene gives us a description of this mode of thought:

There is no absolute, once for all, knowing by human beings, neither in supernatural confrontation with Really Reals nor in a logical checking off of falsified not-knows. There are only ourselves, using all the means at our disposal: bodily orientation, sensory images, verbal formulations with all their over--and undertones, social taboos and imperatives--including all the lore of practice and procedure of any given discipline we have been trained to--and, finally, our deepest, widest vision of the world we dwell in: using all these clues to the nature we are in a given instance trying to understand. In this sense understanding, knowing, is learning to understand; always susceptible to error, but also, though never wholly and though never known to be so, capable of success.<sup>4</sup>

In A Fringe of Leaves Ellen certainly learns that her understanding of others, and primarily of herself, is susceptible to error; this is the easier lesson. The harder one, which she begins to learn after plumbing the depths, is the possibility of success in these relationships. In this chapter I want to trace the development of Ellen's learning process and, simultaneously, to comment on the change in White's perspective.

In chapter one, the "prologue" to A Fringe of Leaves, Miss Scrimshaw tells us that "Every woman has secret depths with which she, perhaps, is unacquainted, and which sooner



or later must be troubled" (p. 20). She has the impression "that Mrs. Roxburgh could feel life has cheated her out of some ultimate in experience. For which she would have been prepared to suffer, if need be" (p. 21). Miss Scrimshaw's use of "cheated" implies a criticism of Ellen, suggesting a somewhat self-indulgent attitude on her part. But the criticism is not only Miss Scrimshaw's. It represents White's attitude as well. He will subject Ellen to real suffering later in the novel and then her attitude changes --the ultimates in experience carry more than she had bargained for.

It would be unwise of us to dismiss Miss Scrimshaw too easily, as we might have done in an earlier novel. She is an astute observer of others, sharing some of Hurtle Duffield's ability to see through people, and also his desire for the "secret depths". But White has a more settled perception of what she is than he had in Hurtle's case. Miss Scrimshaw, like Ellen, whom she diagnoses so clearly, is a romantic: "Miss Scrimshaw herself had composed verses when a young girl and wreathed them in water-colour violets and pansies" (p. 17).<sup>5</sup> But unlike Hurtle and Ellen she is terrified of the depths she is attracted to and takes refuge

in a legalistic moralism. This combination of elements turns her into a "professional pythoness" (p. 20), an oracle for banal society ladies of the Fanny Goodman ilk, like the delightfully obtuse Mrs. Merivale.<sup>6</sup> White's recognition of Miss Scrimshaw's depth, and her fear of it, allows him to present her as a person rather than a caricature like Mrs. Merivale. He has looked more closely at her--in the terms of my argument he has entered into a relationship with her which allows her to live, to become three dimensional. The hints of depth we see in her in the prologue are realized when she returns as a genuine friend after Ellen's return to the colony. White's presentation of her is suffused with compassion because he knows her limitations are rooted in fear:

But that which Miss Scrimshaw did not care to recall as she pursued her ministrations was the screaming of the man they had strung up to the triangle in the gateway of the prisoners' barracks. She must banish it from her memory, along with anything else too naked or too cutting, which her upbringing and undefined social position had taught her to ignore. She only hoped her friend Mrs. Roxburgh would not make it too difficult for her. (p. 388)

White's participation in Miss Scrimshaw's situation makes for a more humane sense of ironic control:

"How I wish I were an eagle!"

"An eagle. Why?" Although she could see for herself the curved beak cutting the semi-obscurity, the

fixed eyes glittering by starlight, it would have been impolite of Mrs. Roxburgh not to have sounded mildly surprised.

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

Mrs. Roxburgh felt dazed by the sudden rush of rhetoric.

Once launched, Miss Scrimshaw was prepared to reveal still more. "Have you never noticed that I am a woman only in my form, not in the essential part of me?"

Somewhat to her own surprise, Mrs. Roxburgh remained ineluctably earthbound. "I was slashed and gashed too often," she tried to explain. "Oh no, the crags are not for me." (p. 402)

If Miss Scrimshaw's desire for transcendence appears poignantly comic given her fear of raw experience, Ellen Roxburgh's admission of restraint assumes the appearance of understatement given the experience she has endured. Like Miss Scrimshaw, Ellen had hankered "after something deeper" (p. 104); unlike her spinster friend, Ellen plunged the depths and came away chastened and subdued.

Mrs. Roxburgh's youth as Ellen Gluyas is reminiscent, in many respects, of Theodora Goodman's youth at Meroë. Like Theodora, Ellen led a "solitary life, apart from visits to the cousins, flagging conversation with an ailing and disappointed mother, and the company of a father not always in possession of himself" (p. 50). Again like Theodora, Ellen turns to the landscape: "She was drawn to nature as she

would not have been in different circumstances. She depended on it for sustenance, and legend for hope" (p. 50).

The difference between the situations of Theodora and Ellen is suggested by White's acknowledgement that "in different circumstances" Ellen would not have been so drawn to nature. In our study of The Aunt's Story we recognized that Theodora's solipsistic search for significance beyond the human world was making a virtue of necessity. Since her family situation was so lacking in nourishment, Theodora turned to the landscape, and through her empathetic identification with it--greatly influenced by her vibrant imagination--she was able to gain brief access to a transcendent realm of wholeness. Although acknowledging the sterility of Theodora's "circumstances", White was unable to believe in any alternative in human relationships.

In Ellen's case the existence of other avenues to wholeness is implied by White's depicting her turning to nature and legend as a romantic escape:

It was Ellen Gluyas's hope that she might eventually be sent a god. Out of Ireland, according to legend. Promised in marriage to a king, she took her escort as a lover, and the two died of love. Pa confirmed that they had sailed into Tintagel. She had never been as far as Tintagel, but hoped one day to see it. Her mind's eye watched the ship's prow entering the narrow cove, in a moment of evening sunlight, through a fuzz of hectic summer green. (pp. 50-51)

Of course, indulgence in romantic dreams is perfectly natural for young people, like Theodora and Ellen, who have reached "the age of discontent" (p. 50). In The Aunt's Story, however, youthful imaginative indulgence became, as Theodora reached adulthood, the route to significant reality. In A Fringe of Leaves White has revised this perspective. His use of the Tristan/Iseult legend is his way of conveying that Ellen's youthful dream is just that. To continue to live in hopes that these dreams will be fulfilled is an avoidance of human reality. Granted, Ellen has reason to want to escape. What she gets instead of a Tristan who will transform her into his waiting Iseult is a semi-invalid named Austin Roxburgh. There is a sense, as Miss Scrimshaw noted, that she feels cheated: "she tried comforting him, when it was no comfort to herself; she would have liked to see him hale and perfect, leaping from the ship as the prow beached in the cove at sunset. (She was that foolish, or "romantic".) . . . He was nothing if not moral, she felt. It did not console her" (p. 50). The use of inverted commas around "romantic" is a subtle way of investing the word with a double meaning. While the word still implies that Ellen's desire is foolish, as it would do without the inverted commas, their addition indicates that the label "romantic" does

not get to the bottom of Ellen's predicament. She has a need that her marriage to Austin can't fulfil.

The need is for a personal wholeness, a sense of self which inhabits the space between the poles of romantic idealism and moral legalism. An essential element in this wholeness is her sensuality. A full and vibrant blossoming of Ellen's sensual nature is the necessary corrective to her retreat into dream, because that blossoming will involve, necessarily, the kind of enriching human relationship which contributes to a fulfilling human reality. This sensual wholeness will also reflect the moral responsibility that creative relationship demands as opposed to either the self-gratifying lust such as we witnessed in Hurtle and Hero's vivisectionary acrobatics, or the pinched moralism that proscribes sensuality out of fear.

Ellen's relationship with Austin Roxburgh involves just such a proscription. His world of refined sensibility has no room for *genuine* passion. Ellen tries to fit the mold that marriage to Austin imposes on her:

To please and protect became Ellen Roxburgh's constant aim; to be accepted by her husband's friends and thus earn his approbation; to show the Roxburghs her gratitude in undemonstrative and undemeaning ways, because anything else embarrassed them. What she would not admit, or only half, was her desire to love her husband in a manner acceptable to them both. (p. 75)

The manner acceptable to her, at any rate, would be one in which the sensual elements in her nature would be at full play. This, however, is too much for the staid Austin to take: "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" (p. 76).

Austin Roxburgh, clutching his Virgil (which performs the same function for him as the Tristan/Iseult legend does for the young Ellen), and seeing death as a "literary conceit" (p. 35), inhabits a fictional world which includes such people as Mr. Casaubon in George Eliot's Middlemarch and Jørgen Tesman in Ibsen's Hedda Gabler.<sup>7</sup> Though these figures are largely symbols of cerebral sterility there is a certain pathos in their situations which warrants our compassion. Here, for example, is a passage from Middlemarch which deals with Casaubon but which just as accurately describes Austin Roxburgh:

It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self--never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted.<sup>8</sup>

Ellen's initial reaction to Austin sums up the spirit of

this passage very simply: "It made her sorry for him: that his life should be so empty, and at the same time complicated" (p. 56).

The note of pity here is rare in White's earlier fiction. It represents a new-found willingness to accept people's limitations, a willingness grounded in a greater understanding of personal circumstances. Austin Roxburgh, for example, may only live vicariously through his books, but this existence is not the result of an inability to recognize life beyond the page. It is, rather, a response to an actual world which Austin finds terrifyingly ambiguous. In that world, inhabited by passions of the kind a part of Ellen is drawn to, Austin with his rational, timid disposition has no place:

Oh the blackness in which it is never possible to distinguish the outline of a beloved form, or know the wife of one's own choosing. No wonder that a state of doubt, of anguish, even terror, should exist, to explore which might prove disastrous. I am from time to time the original Abyss, into which I must restrain my rational sense from plunging for fear of the consequences. Happy, indeed, is he who can ignore the too substantial shadows of long afternoons at sea. The mornings can be filled with domestic details, and recall of life as we have experienced it, but not the reflecting glass of endless afternoon and evening . . . (p. 68)

If White allows Austin a measure of compassion, this does not in any way mean he condones Austin's mode of exist-



ence. Despite his "frail dignity"<sup>9</sup>, Austin's preference for art (in the sense of artifice) over life has destructive tendencies. When Austin marries Ellen Gluyas he is more interested in the "outline of a beloved form", which he might fashion into his own living work of art, than he is in the farm girl herself. Made over into his creation Ellen would become a representation of what he knows, and he would, therefore, feel secure with her.

Though their situations are vastly different, there is a faint echo here of Hurtle Duffield and his relationships with his women, especially Nance Lightfoot: "It seemed to him he loved this woman he hardly knew as a person: at least he loved and needed her form" (The Vivisector, p. 171). That this comparison can be made indicates that in Austin's marriage to Ellen, White is perceptively dramatizing the kind of vivisection that can issue from a supposedly loving relationship. An example is the occasion when Austin's brother Garnet asks Ellen to go riding with him while he surveys his "Dulcet" property:

Her husband encouraged her to accept. "Go with him if you are disposed to, Ellen. You are not holding back on my account, I hope?"

She answered no, she was simply not disposed to ride around aimlessly.

"But there's purpose enough in Garnet's need to oversee those who are working on his property. You would

not be riding aimlessly by accompanying him."

She wondered how Mr. Roxburgh would have reacted had she gone off into hysterics.

Instead she had a fit of remorse, and went and kissed him on a dry cheek. "I wish I could oblige everybody--myself too."

Mr. Roxburgh hoped she was not becoming capricious. (p. 110)

Austin's complacent reasonableness is completely out of connection with Ellen's need. To extend the comparison with Duffield a little further, we can say that just as Duffield reduced Nance's desire for wholeness through love to sentimentality, so Austin reduces to capriciousness Ellen's desire for a life different from the one he is content to lead. The difference is that White finally justified Hurtle's vivisection of Nance. In Fringe there is no endorsement of Austin; Ellen is clearly suffocating. But whereas Hurtle consciously engaged in vivisection for the sake of his artistic truth, Austin is totally unconscious of the vivisection his rational, morally sententious world-view entails. Quite unawares, he has erected an invisible wall between his wife and himself which prevents their relationship from achieving a living wholeness. Though he is tender to her at times, the tenderness is according to plan.

That Austin is unaware of his vivisection, that he is ostensibly so loving, and that he does warrant compassion,

exacerbates the dissociation Ellen Gluyas had already felt in her natural family. As mistress of her newer family, Ellen Roxburgh represses not only her unpolished Gluyas nature, but also her sensuality and the romantic guises in which it had appeared. She dons the armour of "accepted moral precepts and social rules", and cultivates "virtuous resolves" in order to accommodate the "honourable gentleman" (p. 80) who has taken her to be his wife.

On meeting Austin's brother Garnet Roxburgh, however, Ellen feels "less confident of her armoury" (p. 80). Garnet, of course, as his name implies, is the opposite, the sensual underside, of his cerebral brother Austin. Garnet has been banished to Van Diemen's Land (White's Australian locale has never meshed so perfectly with his symbolism as it does in this novel) by respectable Victorian society just as Ellen's sensuality has been labelled unacceptable and forced "down under" her cultivated surface. Her reaction to Garnet, in its sensual attraction combined with moral repulsion, displays her dissociation:

He had about him something which she, the farmer's daughter and spurious lady recognized as coarse and sensual. Perhaps this was what she resented, and that a Roxburgh should both embody and remind her of it. As he held the reins in his hands during what had become this monotonous drive, she noticed his thick wrists and the hairs visible on them in the space between glove and cuff. She turned

away her head. She more than disliked, she was repelled, not only by the man, but by her own thoughts, which her husband and her late mother-in-law would not have suspected her of harbouring. (p. 83)

Ellen's inherited moral rigour won't allow her to acknowledge her re-awakened sensuality. Yet she is now more conscious that her life with Austin lacks substance. In her journal she confesses that "Virgil often makes [her] jealous!" (p. 90), and registers her wistful mood: "the line which divides contentment from melancholy is but a narrow one. . . ." (p. 90). It is in this frame of mind that she goes for a walk in the woods, turning to nature for sustenance as she had in her youth. Yet White makes it clear that her communion with nature is a sublimated form of her desire for a denied sensuality:

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, but whom she suspected must exist none the less.

The delicious cool, the only half-repellent smell of rotting vegetation, perhaps some deeper prepossession of her own, all were combining to drug her, at first with mild insidiousness, then with overwhelming insistence. She could have been drifting at the bottom of the sea, in the cove which had awaited the ship's prow, carved and festive. Then he was bending over her. She put up her hand to touch the incipient stubble on a ruddy cheek. Their plum-skin mouths, perfectly matched, received each other, flowing, overflowing, withdrawing. When she noticed a flaw: his lower lip had a dint in its too pronounced upholstery. Repulsion drowned the attraction she had

felt. (pp. 92-93)

The dream brings her gradually closer to the sensual being she has repressed. As she sinks into sleep Ellen moves through an absorption into nature to a manifestation of her Tristan/Iseult legend. These we recognize as the ways she sublimated her sensuality in her youth. Finally the sensuality appears undisguised in her encounter with the "ruddy" Garnet. It is at this point that her Roxburgh moral censor forces Ellen out of her dream and back to the "cultivated fields" (p. 93) of reason, from the perspective of which the dream "was already becoming indistinct" (p. 93).

Ellen's problem is that while she is emotionally receptive to sensual wholeness--which necessarily involves intimate encounter with another human being--, her rational consciousness--largely shaped by Austin's moral world--recoils from human intimacy. While her unconscious desires reveal themselves in dream, as we have just seen, her rational faculty works overtime to find a way to soothe the claustrophobia she is increasingly feeling at "Dulcet". She turns to memory, and reminisces in her journal:

Often on such a night at Z., a country to which I belonged (more than I did to parents or family) I wld find myself wishing to be united with my surroundings, not as the dead, but fully alive. Here too, in spite of gratitude and love for a husband dependent on me as I on him, I

begin to feel closer to the country than to any human being. Reason, and the little I learned from the books I was given too late in life to more than fidget over, tells me I am wrong in thinking thus, but my instincts hanker after something deeper, which I may not experience this side of death. (p. 104)

This desire to meld with the countryside should be familiar to us now, both from Theodora Goodman and Miss Hare. In both The Aunt's Story and Riders this sympathetic union with nature was seriously suggested as an alternative to human banality. In Ellen's case, however, the desire to be "united with [her] surroundings, not as the dead, but fully alive" is presented as a wish-fulfilment fantasy, given the prior scene of her passionate dream. Ellen is certainly sincere in her desire for a wholeness to be found beyond the human realm, but White has come to a settled understanding that human wholeness can only be found in the world of human relationship.

Ellen's acknowledgement that she may not experience her "something deeper" this side of death is given a practical demonstration in Ellen Gluyas's pilgrimage to St. Hya's Well:

She found the well (or pool, rather) in the dark copse where they told her it was, its waters pitch black, and so cold she gasped as she plunged in her arms. She was soon crying for some predicament which probably nobody, least of all Ellen Gluyas could have explained: no specific sin, only presentiment of an evil she would have to face sooner or later. Presently, after getting up courage, she let herself down into the pond, clothes and all,

hanging by a bough. When she had become totally immersed, and the breath frightened out of her by icy water, together with any thought beyond that of escaping back to earth, she managed, still clinging to the bough, to hoist herself upon the bank. . . .

For the first time in many years she remembered this incident, and how her presentiment of evil had oppressed her over months, and then come to nothing, or else she had exorcized the threat by immersion in the pool . . . .(pp. 110-111)

From her perspective at "Dulcet" Ellen believes that immersion in the pool had exorcized her "presentiment of evil". Read closely, however, the scene reveals that contrary to the symbolic baptism, it is the fear of the icy water, which drives "any thought beyond that of escaping back to earth" from her mind, that temporarily rids her of the threat of evil. She is frightened back from this symbolic descent into the abyss by the nature of the abyss itself: a quite unsymbolic pool of pitch black icy water. To come into full sympathetic union with this nature is impossible; if she continued in her endeavour Ellen would soon be dead. From a more experienced perspective--her time with the natives and Jack Chance--Ellen recognizes the actual significance of the Hya'episode:

"Did I ever tell you Jack, how I walked all the way to St. Hya's and let meself down into the pool? In they days people went to the saint for all kinds of sickness. What I went there for I dun't remember, not at this distance. Or if I were cured. I dun't believe a person is every really cured of what they was born with. Anyway, that is what I believe today." (pp. 331-332)

The "presentiment of an evil she would have to face sooner or later" is, stated simply, Ellen's fear of facing the contingency of human experience, which is certainly something she can't be cured of this side of death. Since she is a human being, living in time, in situation, her knowledge of herself and her world is necessarily incomplete--and will always be so. Consequently, there is always the possibility of implication in evil; in fact to the extent that her world is the matrix of relationships she lives in, Ellen is implicated in, and responsible for, the evil in her world. She senses this and hopes the saint's well will cure her of her morbid thoughts.

What focuses these thoughts at this time in her youth, of course, is her incipient sensuality. Sensuality, or, more specifically, sexual initiation, is traditionally seen as the passage from innocence to experience. Ellen, like Blake's *Thel*, is fearful of entering experience--sensual or otherwise. Having no one to help initiate her into the joys of her sensual nature and so into experience, except her cousin Will, whose fumbling attempts are thwarted by Aunt Triphena's rigid morality, Ellen turns, instead, to her version of Beulah. The St. Hya's incident is interpreted religiously, and becomes a part



of the romantic worship of nature and legend that gives her sustenance while holding the presentiment of evil at bay.

This youthful religion consciously lasts only until she marries Austin Roxburgh. Then she learns by rote the Christianity of his family. The rigid religious, moral and social codes of the Roxburghs provide a bulwark against experience similar to that her nature worship supplied. Until the sense of foreboding, the presentiment of evil, returns in the claustrophobic atmosphere of "Dulcet"--"almost as though she had heard a whip crack in her ear, or pistol shot" (p. 111)--Ellen has been spiritually complacent in the civilized manner of her new social standing. Although she is somewhat disturbed by the text "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts" at Garnet's church, she smooths the disquietude away: "there was no reason to complain when she belonged on the winning side" (p. 108).

In spite of her cultivated Christianity and her attempts to reactivate her youthful nature religion, the foreboding she feels at "Dulcet" persists, causing her to feel conspicuous and to question her own identity: "she was faced with her own vulnerable image, swimming at her out of the mirrors in this ill-lit house, making her wonder whether those around her recognized what was happening to her" (p. 111).

The episode comes to its climax when Ellen's repressed sensuality bursts into the light of consciousness. On her bolting mare--symbol of Ellen's unrestrained passion--she rides wildly into the forest with Garnet Roxburgh in pursuit. She is carried to the same clearing in which she had dreamt of passion; White's use of the same location prepares us for the physical encounter that is about to occur. The meeting between Ellen and Garnet will not be a compassionate, loving exchange, but a lustful one. Once tempted beyond the moral boundaries imposed on her by Austin's life, Ellen does not want a mutual relationship with Garnet; she is only interested in experiencing the depths of her own sensuality. Like Hero who, when she realizes she can't live up to her ideals, rebounds in a depraved direction, so Ellen is unable to see her own sensuality, enticing as she finds it, as anything but depravity. The tone of the narration is one of disgust:

What prevented her feeling afraid was to realize she was the one in control. She thought she heard herself snicker, before contempt (for both of them) made her suppress it.

She was again this great, green, only partially disabled, obscene bird, on whose breast he was feeding, gross hands parting the sweeping folds of her tormented and tormenting plumage; until in opening and closing, she might have been rather, the green fathomless sea, tossing, threatening to swallow down the humanly manned ship which had ventured on her.

Destroying in a last moaning gurgle. (p. 116)

Ellen realizes that Garnet is her victim, even though of his own choice. He had been willing to go, but through her lack of resistance she had ushered them into the depths. Once in those depths her moral code cannot allow her to acknowledge him as anything other than an object for her sexual gratification, because to do so, to give him the status of a human being, would be tantamount to condoning her adultery. Consequently, her involvement with him amounts to vivisection; there is a savagery conveyed by the imagery which foreshadows the later scenes of cannibalism. Garnet is "feeding" on her breast; as the sea she is "swallowing" him; she imagines her body as that of a murdered woman with "the flesh of a thigh half buried in leaves"; their mouths are "clamped" together. Following directly on the imagery of violence and savagery the tone changes:

when she freed her mouth from the mouth clamped to it, and lay contemplating the gently stirring fernfronds above her, they sprinkled her surfeited skin with a fine moisture, and she closed her eyes again for an instant, to bask beneath the lashes in an experience of sensuality she must have awaited all her life, however inadmissible the circumstances in which she had encouraged it. (p. 116)

Ellen feels a sensual fulfilment that she has lacked in her life with Austin, but won't admit that the fulfilment was only possible because of an intimate relationship with Garnet Roxburgh. She would like to banish the thought of him from

her mind. She knows the adulterous circumstances of her act are inadmissible. White, however, is looking at a broader issue. Certainly the adultery is not to be taken lightly, but White has taken pains to show that the adultery resulted from Ellen's inability to find human wholeness in the dissociated state in which Austin's world kept her. The problem is not so much the adultery in Ellen and Garnet's relationship as the dissociation which forces her to vivisect him in order to achieve a sensual quasi-wholeness. It is only a quasi-wholeness because it lacks the creative relationship without which human wholeness is not possible. Ellen's fulfillment, lacking her commitment to the relationship which fostered it, is "only the briefest sensation" (p. 116); and she, herself, "could only have admitted to carrying away a cold, consummated lust" (p. 117).

Garnet, realizing that he has been made use of, though willingly, rightly points an accusatory finger in Ellen's direction:

"Oh, Lord! What have you done to us, Ellen?"

She would have preferred to accuse herself and later. "I was thrown from my horse, and while I wasn't in my right mind you took advantage of it." Hearing her own defence, she knew it to be insufficient, as well as untruthful, but had to escape from what was becoming an increasingly loathsome situation. (p. 117)

Ellen lies at this point because she wants to escape the limited

self-knowledge she has gained. She attempts to cover her actions with the veneer of Victorian respectability. Garnet won't let her escape so easily, however: "Propped on an elbow at her side, he was staring at her, his eyes glazed with an insolent scepticism. 'If that was not your right mind, we shall never know it!' he declared and laughed" (p. 117). Garnet has touched a partial truth here; Ellen has briefly broken out of Austin's mold and has discovered an hitherto hidden aspect of herself. However, because she won't acknowledge Garnet, but treats him only as an object, she forfeits the humanity that a genuine relationship with him might have bestowed on her. She describes her own actions (the narration is from her perspective) as monstrous rather than human: she is an obscene bird, or the swallowing sea--not a woman.<sup>10</sup>

Ellen Roxburgh wants to escape from her limited self-knowledge back to the comparative safety of Austin, not simply because she recognizes what she has done to Garnet, but because her cultivated sense of morality is offended and she is disgusted that she could behave so grossly:

However painful her ankle, and ungainly her movements, she must hobble as far as possible beyond physical contact with the one who was less her seducer than the instrument she had chosen for measuring depths she was tempted to explore. (p. 117)

Whereas her egoistic explorations of her sensuality had separated her from humanity, now her self-loathing is doing the same thing, forcing her to get "as far as possible beyond physical contact". What she does not realize is that in attempting to escape from the scene of her adultery, and her sensual vivisection of Garnet, she has simply gone to the other extreme and taken into her own hands the moral vivisection we saw Austin subject her to earlier. Consumed with self-hatred, she is unable to respond genuinely to even uncharacteristic expressions of tenderness from Austin, and when Garnet learns of her decision to leave "Dulcet" and confronts her about it, her response, ostensibly concerned with her failings, is downright cruel:

He had jumped up after she had risen, and came round the table to thrust himself at her. "I'm told you are planning to leave us to our festering!"

He was grasping not so much at her hand, as for some immaterial support he had no hope of finding.

In refusing him her hand, she uttered, "I can't make excuses for my own weakness--or ignorance. I still have not learned enough to help myself, let alone others."  
(p. 127)

It is no wonder that Garnet refers to her as "morality itself" (p. 105) and that Pilcher later sees her as "the cold lady, the untouchable" (p. 379).

What Ellen gradually comes to learn in her ordeal of

the wreck of the Bristol Maid is her need for her fellow men, a need which can only avoid vivisection through an ability to forgive and render compassion to herself and others. Forgiveness is called for because human beings are weak and fearful in the face of life's contingencies, and tend to "grasp at any circumstantial straw which may indicate an ordered universe" (p. 405) regardless of the consequences. An attitude of forgiveness, of genuine respect and concern for those we are in relationship with, is a loving attitude, and makes for trust and commitment--for wholeness in our humanity.

In the experiences that Austin and Ellen undergo on the reef where the survivors first land, White displays the power of relationship to create a world of meaning and value --a distinctly human world. But he also displays the contingency that this human world is subject to by existing in the natural world. The episode on the reef forms a novelistic interlude in which White consolidates the themes which will be illustrated in detail in Ellen's encounter in the darkness. Austin's and Ellen's sequences are virtual set-pieces, closely paralleling each other in configuration but leading the characters to different conclusions. White's structure suggests that he intends them to be compared and so I believe

a close examination is warranted.

Upon beaching the longboat its cramped inhabitants immediately disperse, "for physical as well as spiritual reasons" (p. 206). Austin, we soon realize, uses the occasion to indulge in that personal angst which he records in his journal from time to time. He discovers the island's southernmost tip, "a narrow spine of razor-edged coral", where "opposing currents raised their hackles in what was probably a state of permanent collision." He feels "drawn to this desolate promontory by something solitary and arid, akin to his own nature," and is soon engaged in a wonderfully ironic flight of abstraction which puffs him up almost to the point of bursting with his own unimportance:

Mr. Roxburgh was fully exposed. In advancing towards this land's end, he felt the trappings of wealth and station, the pride in ethical and intellectual aspirations, stripped from him with a ruthlessness reserved for those who accept their importance or who have remained unaware of their pretentiousness. Now he even suspected, not without a horrid qualm, that his devoted wife was dispensable, and their unborn child no more than a footnote on nonentity. (pp. 207-208)

Taken alone, without regard for the speaker or the context, this passage might appear to be one of White's oracular statements of theme. This is apparently how Zulfikar Ghose would read it. Discussing chapter five of the novel--which



includes the wreck and the subsequent time in the boats and on the reef-island--he says it is cliché, like "any old shipwreck story":

one does perceive White's intention of wanting to submit a diverse group of people to the severest trial to see what will be left of their humanity and to confirm to himself again the spiritual frailty of mankind as well as the meaninglessness of human ideas in an elemental and hostile universe. But we saw all this as long ago as Voss . . . .<sup>11</sup>

Certainly we saw this as long ago as Voss, but Ghose misses the fact that in Fringe this vision is placed in context and put into Austin Roxburgh's mouth. By reading the novel as, in part, a "schoolboy's adventure story"<sup>12</sup> he misses the subtlety of White's presentation. In the passage that continues Austin's scene, for example, there is cliché, but the cliché is so hackneyed it can't be anything but deliberate<sup>13</sup>: "So the solitary explorer gritted his teeth. sucked on the boisterous air with caution, and visibly sweated. He might have been suffering from a toothache rather than the moment when self-esteem is confronted with what may be pure being--or nothingness" (p. 208). The irony becomes explicit as the passage continues:

Arrived at his destination, the dwindling headland on which he might have erected a moral altar for the final stages of his martyrdom, Mr. Roxburgh discovered that he had taken too much for granted. Stretched on

the ground as though consigning his meagre flesh to decomposition by the sea air, lay Spurgeon the steward. It could not have been an unpleasanter surprise. (p. 208)

White is clearly undercutting Austin's solipsistic preoccupation with the meaninglessness of existence, and intimating that this stance is veiled self-indulgence. Just as Austin has philosophically dispensed with humanity, he is faced by an all-too-real lump of it. Spurgeon informs Mr. Roxburgh that he has started a sea-boil and is "simply fizzlin' out" (p. 209). His resignation, given the change in situation from the abstract to the concrete, is as complete as Austin's appeared to be: "I knewed this mornin' early that I'll never come out of this. There's nothin' like the sea-boils for makin' a man fall apart quick" (p. 209). Austin sees in Spurgeon's case a reality which his own life has never approached--"Faced with this human derelict, Austin Roxburgh realized afresh that his experience of life, like his attitude to death, had been of a predominantly literary nature" (p. 209),--but feels that nevertheless, it is his duty to make some consoling gesture. The platitude he voices is a standard part of the urbane upper-class façade which Austin presents to the world: "'Cheer up, old chap!' he encouraged, and his voice echoed the accents of some forgotten tutor. 'Don't you feel--I mean--that you owe it to your wife?'" (p. 209).

The façade is apparent when we remember that Austin himself has just expressed an abstract resignation in which he has concluded that his wife is dispensable. The contradiction between the façade and the personal attitude becomes apparent to Austin as he continues to talk with Spurgeon and recognizes himself in the steward's attitudes. Spurgeon reveals that he has no wife and doesn't need one, and in response to Austin's statement that marriage "is not entirely physical" says "'If it wasn't, a man could settle for a dawg. I did too'" (p. 210). As Austin tries to argue against this sterile conception of marriage he realizes that his own marriage fits Spurgeon's description. He finds himself stuttering "for what must have been the first time":

"but--mmmorally there is no comparison with the love of a devoted woman."

"Don't know about that," the steward replied. "I weren't born into the moral classes."

If Mr. Roxburgh did not hear, it was on account of a sense of guilt her was nursing, for the many occasions on which he had abandoned someone else to drowning by clambering aboard the raft of his own negative abstractions. Her hair floated out behind her as though on the surface of actual water instead of in the depths of his thoughts. (p. 210)

What Austin realizes--and White beautifully emphasizes this with the triple "m" on "mmmorally"--is that his morality has been immoral, that his rigid codes have allowed him to

indulge himself and desert his wife. Recognizing his refusal to accept responsibility, Austin is spurred to action. Positive practical remedies, as opposed to "negative abstractions" begin to pour from him and quite overcome Spurgeon's determinism:

[Austin] recovered himself and informed his friend, "salt water has medicinal properties. Or so they tell us." He cleared his throat. "Have you tried rubbing it with salt water?"

"Rubbin' what?"

"The boil, of course!" Elated by his own inspiration Mr. Roxburgh resolved to overlook the obtuseness of another.

"There's no way out if you're for it." Spurgeon snorted so contemptuously he might have attained social status without his companion's realizing.

"But who's to know, my dear fellow, unless we try? The ability to correct wrong was vested in us for practical use."

Mr. Roxburgh would have been hard put to it to explain how he had come by a precept which was as reasonable as it sounded arcane. . . . (pp. 210-211)

Austin's platitudinous "duty" has been transformed into a genuine, if somewhat comically depicted, "faith":

... Mr. Roxburgh stooped to plunge his cupped hands.

There was little enough water in the cup by the time the physician reached the patient's side.

"Open up! Quick! The place!" Mr. Roxburgh cried; faith, once lit, was blazing in him.<sup>14</sup> (p. 211)

This faith in the possibility of healing Spurgeon is grounded in Austin's conscious commitment to a human relationship. We remember Olivia's despairing wish, in The Vivisector, for a god-man to come and "heal the wounds", and we recognize

that White has stopped hoping for miracles, and has shown, instead, how Austin becomes a healer when he accepts his moral responsibility. He also shows how this acceptance transforms Austin's world from "a state of permanent collision" in which people were "dispensable" into a vital, meaningful human world:

For the first time since landing on this desert island Austin Roxburgh was conscious that the blood was flowing through his veins. To an almost reprehensible extent, he throbbed and surged with gratitude. He was grateful not only to this unsavoury catalyst the steward, but to his absent wife, and the miracle of their unborn child. (p. 211)

Even the hitherto resigned Spurgeon begins to respond, indicating that spiritual, if not physical, healing is already underway:

The steward might have grown less inclined to humour an eccentric gentleman's whims, but time hung half<sup>15</sup> as heavy in a mate's company, however undesirable the mate in the eyes of ordinary men. Either anticipation of their disapproval, or friction by salt water, or the prospect of a soap-and-sugar poultice, or the tingling of an inadmissible affection, had brought the gooseflesh out on Spurgeon. (p. 212)

The extended "either-or" construction here is White's symbolic way of indicating the fecundity of life once commitment to it is embraced. The ambiguity in the passage suggests that Spurgeon's life at this point is an amalgam of a number of possibilities and choices, and consequently mani-

festes a positive potential in opposition to the negative determinism which he had earlier espoused.

White suggests just how broad the creative implications of this attitude to life are in the passage that closes the scene: "Austin Roxburgh tingled with his inspiration; in fact he was indebted to old Nurse Hayes for a method she had used in drawing pus out of Garnet after his brother had scratched his arm on a rusty nail" (p. 212). Initially we remark Austin's reliance on traditional knowledge and recognize that participation in a human world involves due consideration for a cultural community. More importantly, we see that the drawing of pus out of Garnet is a symbolic acceptance of sensuality, and we remember that when Ellen left "Dulcet" Garnet accused her of leaving him to his "festering". White deftly shows how a commitment to humanity is a prerequisite for human wholeness.

When we read Ellen's scene, however, which follows directly on Austin's, we see just how little White's recognition of the potential for human wholeness has led him into complacency. Ellen, like Austin, goes for a solitary walk, and, though ostensibly in search of her husband, "experience [s] a delicious pleasure in being alone". Where Austin's walk was initially the occasion for his encounter with the mean-

inglessness of the universe, Ellen finds her stroll to be evidence of a larger benevolence:

the sun flattered her as she strolled, and the wind, although gusty, was less vindictive than while they were at sea. Each warmed and dried, and in performing its act of charity, enclosed her in an envelope of evaporating moisture, so that she might have been walking through one of the balmy mornings she remembered on her native heath. . . . (p. 212)

As she approaches the weather side of the island, however, the sense of benevolence in nature disappears: "She was blasted by a gale. It took her hair and tossed it aloft, and filled her clothes, and spun her round amongst the quaking, but more inured bushes. She would have turned at once and made her way back had it not been for a bird's call becoming a human voice" (p. 213). White's narrowing of the focus to the human voice presents it almost in the guise of a fragile life-line sent out to pull her from the midst of the gale. But Oswald Dignam, the cabin boy, whose voice it is, is standing on the beach, in the gale, and to meet him Ellen must enter the force rather than escape it. She does so, feeling "waves of pleasure at the thought of a companionship so undemanding it could but add a benison to the solitude" (p. 213). White shows that the grace, or blessing, Ellen anticipates comes not from nature's benevolence, but from her human relationship with Oswald.

The momentary state of grace they enjoy, however, is jeopardized by the sententious role Ellen adopts when Oswald brings her some shellfish:

"They's for you, Mrs. Roxburgh," his almost girlish voice gasped.

"Oh, but we must share what we find, the captain tells us," she replied sententiously.

"Who's to know?" the boy asked. "If you hadn't come along I'd 'uv ate them meself--like anybody else."

His natural, milky skin grown fiery on the voyage made him look the more indignant for what she had only half-intended as an accusation. (p. 231)

After conceding weakness, which is a concession to humanity, Ellen allows herself to eat the shellfish. The irony with which White describes the respectable lady's doing so indicates her common humanity and presents her on a level which Oswald can reach:

Overcoming an initial nausea, she took the still quivering mess of mutilated shellfish from the palm on which it lay, and swallowed it at one gulp. To her consternation, some of the shell went down with the flesh; other fragments she arrested with her tongue, and spat them out. She could feel that some of her saliva was dribbled on her chin.

It was Oswald Dignam's turn to smile his pleasure and approval.

He was again in love . . . . (p. 214)

Again, as with Austin and Spurgeon, White shows how the stripping away of pretensions and abstract formalities that ignore the other person makes creative life possible. Just as Austin's gratitude for his relationship with Spurgeon extended to the "miracle of [his] unborn child", so Ellen, express-



ing her hope that Oswald will always be her friend, feels "the child inside her move as though in response to a relationship" (p. 214). As Oswald runs back to the water's edge to find more shellfish White again uses the ambiguous grammatical construct to symbolize a wholeness in Ellen's sensibility: "So she could not help but smile, whether from appeased vanity or tender fulfilment it was not the moment to consider" (p. 214).

It is at this point that White demonstrates the radical contingency that forms the context for the meaningful world that humans create:

On reaching the water's edge, Oswald began bashing at the coral with a stone. The sight of his small, crouching figure made her clutch her own more tightly. Had he really been her child instead of a diminutive lover, she would have called him back. In the circumstances she continued watching, lips parted between pleasure and anxiety. When the sea rose, and with a logic which had only been suspended, it seemed to her now, swept him off the ledge on which he had been precariously perched. (p. 214)

Having Oswald wrenched from her, Ellen is left in a meaningless void. She feels powerless, a "victim" and seeks for an explanation by imputing a malicious "logic" to nature. "More forcibly than ever, she was made to feel there was nothing she could do but submit" (p. 215). But White now, unlike in The Vivisector, refuses to justify human resigna-

tion by endorsing the view of God's cruelty. Just as he shows Ellen despairing he also shows her human nature striving to restore the only meaning it can, that to be found in a human community:

But in accordance with the convention human beings are bound to obey even when their rational minds tell them the odds are against them, she was already starting back for help, running, scrambling by uncertain footholds and handfuls of grass, lumbering on, stumbling and falling; limping the last stretch, down to where the crew were methodically repairing the boats. (p. 215)

Her failure in the attempt to save Oswald leaves Ellen desolated.

The implications of these scenes have their effect in the subsequent action. Austin's newfound awareness of a reality he had never known doesn't instantly dissolve his pretentious façade, to be sure, but there are occasions when a genuine love breaks through. After delivering his wife of their stillborn child, for example--an act, in itself, that indicates reserves of strength previously hidden--Austin places the body in Oswald Dignam's glory-bag: "his hands only fumbled as he tightened the draw-string at the canvas neck, and out of his throat came a hideous sound as of tearing" (p. 228). When Spurgeon eventually does die in the longboat Austin sheds tears "for his recently acquired, unsavoury friend. . . . That Mr. Roxburgh cared, nobody but

his wife guessed, and she must steel herself that her husband might survive" (p. 231).

Steeling herself is Ellen's response to the even greater desolation she experiences after her miscarriage. What her survival amounts to, at this point, is a shutting off of her humanity--which seeks meaning and value--and a reliance on basic animal strength. We see this coming about in the following passage:

Once in the days, weeks, years which followed [the stillbirth], she did rouse herself sufficiently to ask, "You are not going to leave me, are you?"

"How could I?" Austin answered. "Even if I wanted to."

Such an indisputable reason and barely modified rebuke might have hurt if strength were not returning to her sodden limbs, not through divine forbearance, as some might have seen it, but because, she realized, she was born a Gluyas. The rain had stopped; life is to be lived. She would have got to her feet like any other beast of nature, steadying herself in the mud and trampled grass, had it been a field and not a waterlogged boat. (pp. 229-230)

Ellen avoids the emotional hurt Austin's statement might have caused by cutting off her emotional connections with the human world. It is in this cut-off condition that she witnesses her husband's death, in which the final fruits of Austin's relationship with Spurgeon--his facing of reality--are realized. In his death scene on the beach Austin's frail dignity and noble sentiments are finally transformed from literary conceits into a genuinely courageous human act:

She, the practical one, and a woman, should tear herself free and rush back into life--to do something.

But it was Mr. Roxburgh who ran forward, to do what only God could know. Here he was, bestirring himself at least, in the manner expected of the male sex. Into action! He felt elated, as well as frightened, and full of disbelief in his undertaking. (It was not, however, an uncommon reaction to his own unlikelihood.) (p. 239)

Naturally the shock of seeing her husband dying forces Ellen back into life: "it was too piteous, as though all the children she had failed to rear were gesticulating for her help" (p. 240); but once there she is, again, as after Oswald's death, faced with meaninglessness:

She fell on her knees.

"I forgot," he said, rising for a moment above the tide in which he was drowning. "Pray for me, Ellen."

She could not, would never pray again. "Oh, no, Lord! Why are we born then?" (p. 240)

Though Ellen can see no overall purpose for human existence, her very attempt to respond to Austin's need is a purposeful act--the purpose being to preserve a valued human life. The meaning of her humanity is contained in this loving gesture made toward another person. Ellen, however, is an eminently normal person--unlike many of White's protagonists--and desires the kind of surety human life doesn't offer. Her railing at God is one example of this, and so is the fringe of leaves she fashions for herself, and in which she conceals her wedding ring. These become symbols of the

civilization she has been torn from and Ellen places her hope for a preservation of her humanity in them.

While in one sense the fringe and ring are authentic symbols of humanity and the central place that the marriage relationship holds in it, in another sense the symbols are impediments to true relationship; they can contribute to a façade of civilization which is hollow--like Austin's platitudes. Both these senses are at work in Ellen's use of her symbols. Initially they are a lifeline for her:

If she sustained physical wounds from swooping branches, and half-rotted stumps or broken roots concealed in the humus underfoot, she neither whinged or limped: the self which had withdrawn was scarcely conscious of them. What she did feel was the wedding ring bumping against her as she walked, a continual source of modest reassurance. (p. 245)

Her faith in her symbols enables her to refuse to acknowledge the harsh reality she has entered. She vests her hope in her fringe and turns herself off, becoming an "automaton. . . in order to survive" (p. 247).

But, of course, it is not possible for her to remain an automaton. She is used as beast of burden, certainly, but she also must play nurse to a sickly child, forage for food with the other women, and generally become part of the life of the tribe. Ghose thinks that from the moment Ellen dons her fringe and allows her "self" to withdraw, "until

her re-entry into the 'civilized' world, she will have only her body."<sup>16</sup> This is simply not the case. It is not long before Ellen begins responding to the human gestures the natives make, both positive--as when a little girl shows her where to find the hidden spring of water and induces "unhoped-for happiness" (p. 250) in Ellen--and negative--as when the females savagely cut her hair and ritually adorn her, in a scene reminiscent of her indoctrination into the rituals of Mr. Roxburgh's Cheltenham home.

Ellen's conscious acknowledgement of her need of the tribe is the natural outcome of the interaction she engages in. But making that acknowledgement is virtually a confession that the symbols she keeps at her waist are no longer necessary. Exploring the bush and beach near the camp one morning, Ellen is suddenly terror-stricken at the thought of losing the tribe:

She positively panted after the tribe to which she now belonged. What if she never found it, and spent the rest of her days on earth (if not in hell) circling through the scrub till her bones gave up? She longed for even the most resentful company of whatever colour. She might have bartered her body, she thought, to one of the scornful male blacks in return for his protection.

To indulge in such an unlikely fancy could not be regarded in any degree as a betrayal, but while she walked, her already withered fringe of leaves began deriding her shrunken thighs, and daylight struck an ironic glint out of the concealed wedding-ring.

So her lunging and plunging through the forest was as much an attempt to elude her thoughts as to find the camp she had unwisely deserted. (p. 256)

Ellen's "attempt to elude her thoughts" is a response to the guilt she feels at the possibility that she has betrayed civilization. What we are seeing, however, is that, far from betraying humanity, she is joining it again, forging a new human world around her in which her symbols are superfluous. The savagery the fringe was ostensibly to protect her from is still very much a reality but the humanity of the tribe, when she reciprocates, is a far more creative defence. As she searches for the tribe, for example, she comes to a "hollow where she halted, indefinitely it seemed, by the horror which paralysed her" (p. 256). She discovers the cannibalized remains of the first officer, Ned Courtney:

She might have forgotten her intention of finding her way back to the vindictive but necessary blacks, and lost herself deeper in the forest, if two children had not appeared, full of admonishment and anger which could only have been inspired by their elders. . . . They first beat her about the shoulders with switches, which in the circumstances she felt, then of their own free will offered her their moist, childish hands, a gesture she accepted gratefully.

During the journey back the children found a crop of berries, some of which they forced into her mouth. The berries were watery, insipid, but not unpleasant. Shortly after, halfway down a slope, she caught her foot in a vine which had escaped her notice, and tumbled like a pack off a cart. Imitating her fall, the children rolled downhill and landed in the same heap. They all lay laughing awhile. The young children might have been hers.

She was so extravagantly content she wished it could have lasted forever, the two little black bodies united in the sun with her own blackened skin-and-bones. (p. 257)

The wholeness Ellen feels with the children conveys clearly how little the symbols she carries round her waist truly matter. She and the children form a community of value which opposes the savagery Ellen has just witnessed.

Of course, the most explicit symbol of savagery is the cannibalism. Presenting it, however, also gives White the opportunity to explore the most primal human need for a community in which meaning can grow. By pointed reference he compares the cannibal feast to the Christian eucharist<sup>17</sup>, both satirizing complacent Christianity by bringing the ritual to life, so to speak, and, at the same time, intimating that the eucharist can represent man's genuine acknowledgement of his weakness and need of another being beyond himself to life him above bestiality:

She realized she had blundered upon the performance of rites she was not intended to witness. There was not immediate indication of what these were; most likely the ceremony was over, for she sensed something akin to the atmosphere surrounding communicants coming out of church looking bland and forgiven after the early service.

The morning air, the moisture dripping from frond and leaf disposed Ellen Roxburgh, naked and battered though she was, to share with these innocent savages an unexpectedly spiritual experience. . . . (p. 271)



It is at this point that she begins to realize just what the rites are. The ironic undercutting of Ellen's quasi-Romantic mood is White's way of indicating that complacency has no place in religious experience. Our potential for savagery, and thus our need for forgiveness and grace, is still very much a reality, though the sacraments can become hollow, and the statements of faith mere platitudes. Within the folds of Austin's Christianity, characterized by the riband in Garnet's church, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts", Ellen had assured herself that she did not need to worry, that she was "on the winning side". She still felt, however, a "presentiment of evil" which qualified her contentment.

The natives, on the other hand, practicing a cannibalism which--given that the "whole of life by now revolved around the search for food" (p. 253)--is not simply ritual, live with the evil of which they are capable. They know that the cannibalism is wrong,<sup>18</sup> though necessary to survival given the circumstances, and it is this knowledge which makes them human. White is careful to include their sense of guilt and their unwillingness to let Ellen witness the rites:

The party moved off, driving the offender before them. As it seemed their urgent aim was to leave the scene of their rites as quickly and as far behind them as possible, they hurried past the culprit after a while, and soon forgot, or did not bother to look back, to insult and

remonstrate. (p. 272)

Realizing their savagery, the natives consciously distance themselves from it. Their ritualizing of the act is, itself, an act of distancing. To do this is not to enter falsity or hypocrisy but to move toward humanity. The Christian eucharist is at base a cannibalistic ritual, but it is more human in that the literalness, the savagery, has vanished, while the recognition of the need for sustenance from beyond one's self is still present--at least potentially.<sup>19</sup>

White shows how primal this need is, but also shows that it is not purely savage, that it extends out of savagery into a human world and on, as the symbolism implies, into the religious realm. The operative element in this movement is to be outward directed rather than self-directed, to want to live in a world of value rather than the natural, bestial realm, and, finally, to love rather than merely survive. We see it at work in Ellen's relinquishing her automatism to join the tribe. She feels compassion for the natives once she comes to know them: "As she went [from the scene of the cannibalism], she tried to disentangle her emotions, fear from amazement, disgust from a certain pity she felt for these starving and ignorant savages, her masters. . . ." (p. 272).

Ellen can't fully know the natives, however, until she

can recognize herself in them. The recognition comes after she has eaten of the human thigh-bone: "Her stiffened body and almost audibly twangling nerves were warning her against what she was about to do, what she was, in fact, already doing . . . She was less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed by the fact that she had been moved to do it" (p. 272). She is tempted to believe that she has "partaken of a sacrament" (p. 248), and can't explain "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" (p. 249). Though she can't explain her feeling, White suggests she has "come to terms with darkness" (p. 274). Coming to terms with darkness, for Ellen, means acknowledging and accepting the potential for savagery which is in her. As David Tacey says: "She is now forced to bear her own darkness. This, White argues, is what is required before we can become whole. By accepting her own evil Ellen arrives at a new ethical situation, one which takes into account the totality of the personality. . . ." <sup>20</sup> This acceptance in no way insures her against further savagery, either as perpetrator or as victim, but enables her to understand and harbour the possibility of forgiveness when it occurs.

It means she has truly joined the tribe and receives the grace that full membership in a human community can bestow: "If her hands trembled as she grubbed the clay surrounded by peace and chastened sunlight, her exertions could not have accounted for it" (p. 276).

When Jack Chance appears, offering her the opportunity to return to her original tribe, the equanimity Ellen has gained is undermined. Conflict begins to emerge between the human reality she has recognized, and which draws her toward genuine relationship with Jack, and her cultivated façade which is reactivated by meeting a white man and convict, and which threatens to separate them. White shows this conflict developing out of their first sexual encounter. She is initially drawn to him as an equal:

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

She was not entirely won because, according to her knowledge of herself, she was not entirely trustworthy.

At the same time she longed for a tenderness his hand had begun to offer as she lay moaning for her own shortcomings.

She allowed him to free her of her girdle of vines, her fringe of shed and withered leaves, which had been until now the only disguise for her nakedness. (pp. 298-299)

Following the encounter, however, her reawakened sensuality threatens to let her reduce him to an object for her own gratification:

She lay stropping a cheek against an arm, hoping to arrive at layers of experience deeper still, which he alone knew how to induce.

She shuddered for the goose walking over her grave. She sat up. She must dress herself. (p. 300)

She realizes just how integral a part he plays in any sensual experience she can have and catches herself before undertaking his vivisection. The goose walking over her grave refers back to the two geese which frame her relationship with Garnet Roxburgh. Both were cooked and both made her sick. She remembers her sensual vivisection of Garnet and rejects the temptation to do the same again.

Her decision to dress herself, though, moves Ellen in the direction of moral vivisection to some degree. By putting on the fringe of leaves again she is establishing a moral distance between herself and Jack. This is indicated by both his response to her action, and her tone of voice, which belongs distinctly to the cultivated world of Ellen Roxburgh's Cheltenham: "Noticing his sullen glance at her renewed girdle she said as nicely as she knew how, 'You must not be angry. I had to make some preparations. And did not keep you waiting long'" (p. 301). This passage throws an ironic light on Ellen's desire for unconditional love, which she voices soon after:

Could she love him? She believed she could; she had

never fully realized how much she had desired to love without reserve and for her love to be unconditionally accepted. But would this man of lean, disdainful buttocks love her in return? (p. 302)

Jack, suspicious of the conditions she unconsciously places on her own love--her fringe and ring--finally will not be able to trust her enough to make the return to civilization.

The civilization, as we have seen, perpetuates the dissociated state which Ellen finally overcomes in the bush. As the possibility of return approaches she begins to be pulled apart again, once more investing her symbols with a power that she has learned belongs to human relationships. When Jack comments on her wedding ring her response reveals the dissociation: "'If I lose it I am lost!'" Whereas she knew it was this man on whom she depended to save her" (p. 299). That she does know that her reality lies with the human being and not in the symbols is clear from the larger part of her journey with Chance. In fact, after her just-quoted exclamation on the possibility of losing the ring, there is virtually no mention made of the fringe or ring until she realizes she has lost them, after sighting the Oakes's farm. In the interim Ellen and Jack depend on each other to build a reality in which their humanity can approach wholeness. She is able to offer him an understanding he has been denied

as a felon. Her experience allows her to feel compassion for him:

His demands became more peremptory, the wet hands more positively determined on remission.

She thought, and said, "I believe many have murdered those they love--for less reason."

At once he removed his hand from her throat, and began plastering her with kisses, wet from rain as well as slobbery with relief.

"There, Ellen! There! I knew we'd understand each other." (p. 324)

He is able to offer her a love she has longed for to fill "the vast emptiness of darkness" (p. 307). She acknowledges that "she loved this man, even if she had also pitied and needed him. She did still love him" (p. 316), and recognizes the healing power of **this** love:

It was love, whether selfless or sensual, which had restored the youthful skin to her breasts, the hollow in a smooth, leaf-patterned flank; the tendrils of hair singed off ritually by her black mentors were again stirring in her armpits.

Her face she was unable to see, unless when she turned it towards him, and it became reflected in his. (p. 316)

The wholeness they achieve together is presented beautifully in a scene that parallels Ellen's trip to St. Hya's well in her youth. Instead of a solipsistic, and, finally, illusory exorcism of morbid and sensual thoughts, however, Jack's and Ellen's scene at the lily-pool is a celebration of life, a genuine baptism into human wholeness:

she plunged in, and began diving, groping for the roots as she had seen the native women. However clumsy and inexperienced, she was determined to make a contribution by bringing him a meal of lilyroots.

This was how he found her, breathless, goggle-eyed and half-blinded as she surfaced, hair plastered, shoulders gleaming and rustling with water.

He squatted at the water's edge beside her heap of lilyroots. "When I rescued a lady," he shouted, "I didn't bargain for a lubra."

"Wouldn't go hungry, would ee?" she called. "Even if tha was a gentleman."

After which he slipped in, and was wading towards her as she retreated. It was sad they should destroy such a sheet of lilies, but so it must be if they were to become reunited, and this after all was the purpose of the lake: that they might grasp or reject each other at last, bumping, laughing, falling and rising, swallowing mouthfuls of the muddy water.

In the gaps between mangled lily-flesh he made the water fly in her face by cutting at it with the fist of his hand. She could not imitate the boy's trick, but followed suit after a fashion by thumping the surface and throwing clumsy handfuls at him.

He caught her by the slippery wrists, and they kissed, and clung, and released each other, and stumbled out. Their aches were perhaps returning. He stooped and stripped a leech off her. (pp. 316-317)

The wholeness they have found is threatened, as I said earlier, the closer they come to civilization. Once Oakes's farm is sighted from the tall tree Jack's physical strength begins to wane and their progress becomes more and more reliant on Ellen's moral stamina:

Of course he had the strength, the physical strength, until this late stage in their journey he seemed to be making demands on her for that moral strength she had rashly promised in the beginning.

Now while she stood in the grey morning, chafing her arms and shoulders, it was not the convict she despised;



it was her wobbling, moral self, upon which he so much depended. Alarm mixed with exhilaration to cause the shivers, as she contemplated the landscape and the power given to an individual soul to exercise over another.  
(p. 328)

Ellen's wobbling moral self finally collapses when, preoccupied with how she will look on her return to civilization, she realizes she has lost her ring. Although he accuses her of "carryin' on like a imbecile" (p. 330), she ignores him and lets herself go on a flood of self-pity: "If she were, she ~~was~~ also too tired, battered, ugly before her time, frivolous even at her best moments, or perhaps but the one against whom circumstance bears a grudge" (p. 330). In this mood her Roxburgh self reappears and drives a rift between them, making her feel "she hated this convicted murderer", and labelling as "insolence" his truthful observation that her being "ringless didn't prevent [them] becomin' what [they] are to each other" (p. 330). Though she soon recovers herself, the wholeness they shared in their relationship has suffered a real setback. Jack has seen in her an aspect of the authority he had suffered under in the penal colony. Despite her repeated assurances that she will secure his pardon, he is unable to find the necessary faith and after leading her to the edge of civilization he turns back. Ellen of course, is guilt-ridden at her inability to impress on Jack "that

loving-kindness which inspires trust" (p. 367). She has learned a graphic lesson: that "wholeness" between human beings does not mean permanence; that it carries no guarantee of surety but must be maintained and extended through conscious, intentional, collaboration.

The remainder of the novel shows Ellen gradually re-entering the civilized world and overcoming the self-disgust that her surroundings cause her to feel. She had come to terms with the darkness in the bush when she had acknowledged her kinship with the blacks. Now she must undergo a similar process again, recognize that her weakness is a human characteristic and allow herself a measure of forgiveness. Though she is aware that the colony people are vivisecting her in their minds, she has to avoid the temptation to do so herself. Again, as in the forest, the children provide her with a way out of the moral vivisection that is developing:

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 umpy with a "miscreant". To the children, she was of 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 thigh-bone in the depths of the forest. Finally these children might, by their innocence and candour, help her transcend her self-disgust. (p. 357)

The children, not so entrenched in rigid systems and codes of behaviour, can, by accepting her, teach her to accept herself.

In Ellen's brief relationship with the eldest Lovell child, Kate, we can see this healing process at work. Walking in the Commandant's garden one morning Ellen is obsessively considering her worthlessness:

I am unworthy, it recurred to her, of anybody's faith, least of all the trust of the children who confide in me.

She looked to see whether someone might have discovered her secret, and there was the barefoot Kate, her hair and gown transformed by light, walking entranced it appeared, her gaze concentrating on whatever she was holding in her hands.

"Kate?" Mrs. Roxburgh called, the exquisite child's purity rousing in her the sense of guilt which was only too ready to plague her.

Kate might have taken fright; in any case her trance was broken.

Upon reaching her Mrs. Roxburgh asked, "What is it you're holding?"

"Nothing!"

The child was carrying the corpse of a fluffy chick, the head lolling at the end of a no longer effectual neck, the extinct eyes reduced to crimson cavities.

"Nothing!" Kate screamed again, and flung the thing away from her.

And ran. (pp. 380-381)

Kate is undergoing the inevitable human movement from innocence to experience, as the mention of the "transforming light", "entranced" walking, and her "exquisite purity" make clear. Her anguished cry over the dead bird is reminiscent of Ellen's at both Oswald's and Austin's death. The world has become meaningless for Kate; she holds "nothing" in her hands. But

the meaninglessness is only temporary. A short while later,

Kate Lovell slipped out of the classroom, and she and Mrs. Roxburgh clung together for a short space.

"Yes," Mrs. Roxburgh whispered, "yes. I understand. And so will you." (p. 382)

Though the contingency of life is ever-present, so also is the human potential for love, which can fashion a world of meaning in the face of despair. This Ellen had learned in the forest, and in comforting Kate she is learning it again.

This scene is similar to that between Theodora Goodman and The Man who was Given his Dinner.<sup>21</sup> In The Aunt's Story, however, the relationship between Theodora and the prospector is only an endorsement of Theodora's solipsistic route to significant reality. In Fringe Ellen is in the prospector's role, but what she has learned is her need of other people, of human society. The solipsism she feels is something she knows she has to fight. Her relationship with Kate, far from endorsing solipsism as a route to reality, is an example of the loving reality human beings can experience.

In The Aunt's Story there was a strong sense that accepting society and offering love was a compromising of one's spiritual integrity, which must remain spare and cold to be true. In Fringe White demonstrates that the only genuine spiritual reality human beings can know is the grace which

can be apprehended in the human world. As we have seen, this world is brought into being by people who remain open to others, aware of their need for human relationship. Austin and Spurgeon, Ellen and Oswald, or the black children, or Jack Chance, or Kate Lovell--all of these relationships attest to the meaning and value man can find if he remains accessible.

The central place relationship holds in human wholeness does not imply that White is advocating secular humanism. The movement of White's fiction, from The Aunt's Story to A Fringe of Leaves, evinces a gradual overcoming of the split between such things as faith in God and secular humanism. The dissociation of these things is surmounted in the wholeness that relationship can bestow. Relationship entails one's remaining accessible, it involves responsibility. Creative, responsible relationship in the human realm suggests accessibility to the religious realm. Human wholeness is not locked within the boundaries of the flesh (though without the flesh it could not be), but partakes of the spiritual realm. Conversely, just because the spiritual realm can only be known to us in our condition as human beings, doesn't mean spirituality is reduced to secular humanism. Accessibility, according to White, will finally grant one an awareness of God. In Ellen's experience at Pilcher's chapel White presents this

awareness of a divine grace in a wholly convincing fashion. The "beatitude" that Ellen feels is not an arbitrary imposition of an extrinsic symbolic system but the religious end of a continuum that began in her relationship with other human beings. The scene is a whole and warrants lengthy quotation:

to set foot upon the whitewashed threshold was in some sense for Mrs. Roxburgh a regrettable action. Ellurnnnn, she heard her name tolled, not by one, but by several voices. Yet nobody barred her entry into the primitive chapel. The interior was bare, except for a log bench and a rough attempt at what in an orthodox church would have been the communion table, on it none of the conventional ornaments or trappings, but an empty bird's-nest which may or may not have reached there by accident. Above the altar a sky-blue riband painted on the wall provided a background to the legend GOD IS LOVE, in the wretchedest lettering, in dribbled ochre. Nothing more; but the doorless doorway through which she had entered, and two narrow, unglazed windows piercing the side windows of the chapel.

Mrs. Roxburgh felt so weak at the knees she plumped down on the uneven bench, so helpless in herself that the tears were running down her cheeks, her own name again mumbled, or rather, tolled, through her numbed ears.

All this by bright sunlight in the white chapel. Birds flew, first one, then a second, in at a window and out the opposite. There was little to obstruct, whether flight, thought, or vision. If she could have stayed her tears, but over those she had no control, as she sat re-living the betrayal of her earthly loves, while the Roxburgh's LORD GOD OF HOSTS continued charging in apparent triumph, trampling the words she was contemplating.

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 a peace of mind which had descended on her (she would not have been able to attribute it to prayer or reason) but let silence enclose her like a beatitude. Then, when she had blown her nose,

and re-arranged her veil, she went outside, to return to the settlement in which it seemed at times she might remain permanently imprisoned. (pp. 390-391)

The empty bird's nest links back naturally to Kate Lovell's dead chick and also to the children Ellen has lost. In this way it becomes a symbol of the nothingness, emptiness, and meaninglessness that life often appears to be. The nest, however, by being on the communion table, has its symbolic meaning placed in a religious context that counters it. The two birds that fly through the open windows symbolise the creativity this context engenders. Similarly, Ellen's sense of guilt, of worthlessness and loss are countered by the environment of value she has entered.

The value is that of a love that includes forgiveness, and is summed up in the riband "GOD IS LOVE". Ellen cries for the "betrayal of her earthly loves" but judgement is withheld. Instead a peace of mind "descends" on her, and she lets the "silence enclose her like a beatitude." This sense of beatitude suggests the encompassing power of love, which can make itself known when everything else seems to point the other way. This, I take it, is the point of the adjective in the following: "the Roxburgh's LORD GOD OF HOSTS continued charging in apparent triumph, trampling the words she was

contemplating" [my emphasis]. Though the various forms of vivisection--Pilcher's "will"; Austin's reason; Scrimshaw's moral legalism--seem to be triumphing, the spirit of love is present, building a human world, whenever people express concern and respect for those with whom they live.

Manly Johnson has a different view: "Peace of mind settles on [Ellen] with the realization . . . that the Roxburgh's LORD GOD OF HOSTS and Pilcher's GOD IS LOVE are the same God."<sup>22</sup> Johnson is not sufficiently aware of the irony that surrounds the mentions of the God of Hosts. He is depicted as a vivisector, a cruel tyrant who plays people like hooked fish.<sup>23</sup> Johnson needs to recognize that this conception is invariably given to characters who are desperately grasping for a reason (outside of themselves) for their suffering. The movement of the novel, however, repeatedly shows that meaning is only found in a human world--a world based on love. This is not an absolute meaning; it is subject to the contingencies of nature and human experience. As well as demonstrating the power of love White is presenting its risks. Though it can contribute to human wholeness, love does not offer surety. For a semblance of that one must go to the God of Hosts, who is, as White discovered in The Vivisector, a Divine Destroyer. The surety is to be found in det-



erminism, and comes at a terrible cost to human life. It involves acceptance of responsibility and real choice at every step. It entails commitment.

This commitment can take the form of a conscious attempt to change a specific situation--as in Ellen's successful plea for Jack Chance's pardon--or it can be simply a responsive openness to the creative potential in human relationships. With Mr. Jevons Ellen demonstrates this latter attitude. As David Tacey says, "the suggestion that Ellen will remarry [sic] an English gentleman does not indicate a regression but is the very proof of her accommodating ability which is the mark of a true redeemer."<sup>24</sup> Having spilled tea on her garnet dress (her choice of this one over her more usual black indicates her acceptance of her own sensuality), Jevons attempts to wipe it up. Ellen, in both voices we have come to know, helps him out of his momentary wretchedness and back into a human world:

Sitting forward, she charged him, "Dun't! 'Tis nothing."  
 "But I spoiled yer dress!" the bull-frog croaked wretchedly.

"Tisn't mine, and tishn't spoiled," she insisted.

She may have touched his hand an instant, for the trembling was stilled, more by surprise than by command.

"It is nothing, I do assure you, Mr. Jevons," she repeated in what passed for her normal voice. (p. 404)

The two voices, the garnet dress, Ellen's position

flanked by the woolly Mrs. Lovell and the crypto-eagle Miss Scrimshaw, and her gestures toward Jevons, are all indicative of a wholeness unparalleled in White's work except by, possibly, Mrs. Godbold in Riders. But there, as I have argued, the wholeness is arbitrarily imposed and, consequently, often seems contrived. Ellen Roxburgh is no Magna Mater, and there is no possibility of taking her for one. White never loses his perspective with Ellen--she is a human being, not a sainted member of an elect. In fact, one of the most authenticating elements in A Fringe of Leaves is that all the characters--from Ellen to Pilcher, from Austin to Garnet--are redeemable; there is no arbitrary split between significance and banality. That creative possibility is no longer the province of those who are tapped into a transcendent realm, but is available to all who choose it, allows for a more satisfactory relationship--the word comes inevitably--between novel and reader. These two partners in the collaborative construction of a human world are no longer thwarted by the inner contradiction--the dissociation--that resulted from White's earlier desire for a kind of surety not available to human beings. In A Fringe of Leaves he takes the risks, accepts his human responsibility, and commits himself to life.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup>Herman Melville, Moby-Dick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. 163.

<sup>2</sup>Marjorie Grene, The Knower and the Known, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>Veronica Brady, "A Fringe of Leaves: Civilization by the Skin of Our Own Teeth", Southerly, XXXVII, 2 (1977), 134.

<sup>4</sup>Marjorie Grene, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>In many ways Miss Scrimshaw is a grown up version of Violet Adams from The Aunt's Story. Ellen's love for Miss Scrimshaw at the end of Fringe is usefully compared to Theodora's rejection of Violet.

<sup>6</sup>Our sense that White is in control of his perspective releases us, so to speak, to laugh at the comic characters without feeling guilty about what otherwise often became a rather nasty indulgence.

<sup>7</sup>For a more detailed study of White's use of both Virgil and Ibsen in A Fringe of Leaves see Manly Johnson's articles: "Patrick White: A Fringe of Leaves" in Ron Shepherd and Kirpal Singh, eds., Patrick White: A Critical Symposium, pp. 87-98; and "A Fringe of Leaves: White's Genethlicon", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, XXI, 2 (Summer 1979), 226-239.

<sup>8</sup>George Eliot, Middlemarch (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 314.

<sup>9</sup>Brady, p. 134.

<sup>10</sup>In connection with this metamorphosis here is Manly Johnson: "In [Virgil's] sixth Eclogue, for example, [White]

found, or made it up if he did not find it (out of Vergilian possibility) the warning against entering too intimately into nature, what Vergil called (if White happened to read it) 'the changing of human beings into trees, birds, and monsters' which can occur with the consequent loss of human identity." ("Patrick White: A Fringe of Leaves", in Patrick White: A Critical Symposium, p. 94.)

<sup>11</sup>Zulfikar Ghose, "The One Comprehensive Vision", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, XXI, 2 (Summer 1979), 267.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>This is also the case with those scenes at "Dulcet" which Ghose feels are "cheap melodrama" which belong "to the world of the popular novelist". The scenes include, among others, Garnet's seduction of Ellen and his rescue of her from a convict who has attacked her while she is walking around Hobart. I grant that these scenes are clichés; but they are consciously done and serve a purpose. They evoke the falsity of Austin's Victorian world which has been artificially imposed on a penal colony. When we read these scenes the incongruity--the dissociation--between façade and reality is driven home. They contribute to the mood of the chapter; helping us to share Ellen's "presentiment of evil" more effectively. We realize it is only a matter of time before this world, of which Austin is the prime representative, is toppled. The toppling occurs when the Bristol Maid hits the reef and "the sequence of events [is] wrenched out of [Austin's] control" (p. 167).

<sup>14</sup>". . . one is alive, and there is an apprehension in one that puts it beyond all question that one fights in a positive spirit, with all one's perception and all one's powers, on behalf of life--one fights in the strength of something that asks to be called 'faith' rather than 'duty'." F.R. Leavis, "Believing in the University", The Human World, 15-16 (May-August 1974), p. 103.

<sup>15</sup>In the Avon edition of the novel, the word "half" at this point is missing. The meaning, of course, is confused by this omission, if not changed utterly.

<sup>16</sup>Ghose, p. 269.

<sup>17</sup>Austin's dream in the longboat, in which Captain Purdew uses Spurgeon's body as the eucharistic host--"give thanks for a boil which was spiritual matter" (p. 231)--prepares us for the Christian reference in Ellen's experience. Michael Cotter quotes Geoffrey Blainey's remarks supporting the "authenticity of White's fictional ritual: 'In fact, many aboriginals ate human flesh in the same spirit [as that involved in the celebration of the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist], believing that they thus acquired some of the strength of those who had died. . . . Cannibalism probably was more often the ritual aftermath of a death than a motive of murder.'" ("Fragmentation, Reconstitution and the Colonial Experience: The Aborigine in White's Fiction", in Chris Tiffin, ed., South Pacific Images [Brisbane: South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 1978], p. 185.)

<sup>18</sup>Michael Cotter, committed to resolving the crisis of European and Aborigine, misses this completely: "Given the circumstances of which it is a part, Ellen's cannibalism is not so much an abandonment of ethical, or moral--or even acceptably human--behaviour, as much as it is the relocation of the values of one culture into the symbolic forms of the other other." (p. 176)

<sup>19</sup>To anticipate any possible misunderstandings I should make clear here that I am aware that the natives are human beings. I am not covertly advocating white supremacy. In the terms of my argument, however, the "human" is something we must strive to defend and extend by acknowledging our need for relationship--our need for that which is beyond our selves. The natives show their humanity, in these terms, by ritualizing the cannibalism and so distancing themselves from their own savagery, which is the bestial response to the same need. Conversely, Ellen forfeits her humanity and approaches savagery--vivisection--by treating Garnet as an object. (See p. 228).

<sup>20</sup>David Tacey, "A Search for a New Ethic: White's A Fringe of Leaves" in Chris Tiffin, ed., South Pacific Images (Brisbane: South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 1978), p. 193.

<sup>21</sup>See chapter one above, pp. 56-58 especially.

<sup>22</sup>Manly Johnson, "Patrick White: A Fringe of Leaves",  
p. 96.

<sup>23</sup>See especially pp. 203 and 224.

<sup>24</sup>Tacey, p. 195.

## EPILOGUE

White's commitment to life in Fringe by no means suggests he has purged himself of the tendencies or indulgences we have seen earlier. The Twyborn Affair is the best evidence of this. White's latest novel seems to be a compendium of everything that we have seen to be questionable in his work: from the misanthropic "lack of sympathy for the characters"<sup>1</sup> (with the possible exception of the protagonist), to the solipsistic questing for a transcendent wholeness. Despite this, however, White has not, finally, lost sight of the truth he acknowledged in A Fringe of Leaves: that the wholeness possible to human beings is to be found only in relationship and carries no guarantee of permanence.

This is illustrated, though somewhat tenuously, in the last fifteen or so pages of the novel, beginning with the story E.\* remembers an Australian captain telling him during the first war. The captain, whose nerves will not let him rest, goes nosing about a French farm. The woman at the

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\*To avoid confusion I will use "E." and "him" to designate Eudoxia/Eddie/Eádhith except where the context makes the gender obvious.

window allows him in and without speaking a word they proceed to bed:

"You could hear the kids playin' in the yard. Where 'er husband was I couldn't ask. P'raps down the paddock diggin' up turnips. Otherwise, I reckoned, she wouldn't 'av been so foolish. There was nothun foolish about 'er --it--US. Except that I was pretty feeble. I don't mind saying I was tremblin' all over from what we'd been through up the line. But I mounted, and she let me in. An' then this funny thing happened.... It was like as if a pair of open wings was spreading round the pair of us.... You'll think I'm a shingle short! Don't know what the woman thought or felt. There was this language difficulty, see? When suddenly she let out a yell.... But she only lay there, poor cow, sort of smiling and crying --arm across 'er eyes.... An' don't think I'm religious!" The captain had followed him as far as the door. "Be-cause I believe in nothun!" he shouted after one he regretted taking for a temporary mate. "NOTHUN!" he screamed. (pp. 418-419)

The captain's screams of "nothing" are a direct reminder of Kate Lovell's cries over the dead chick in Fringe. There the incident expressed Kate's awareness of the meaninglessness of life and was a prelude to her renewing a sense of meaning and value with Mrs. Roxburgh. Here the captain strangely uses meaninglessness as a shield against the momentary security he had felt with the woman, but cannot understand. Though the episode is very short the captain and the narrator, between them, make four references to his appearing out of his reason's depth. He is seen as "a funny sort of bloke", "looking almost demented", and as



being "a shingle short" or a "nut case". His clinging to reason as the sole index of reality, White suggests, cuts him off from more than isolated moments of significance. This is not quite the same situation as that found in The Aunt's Story. There even Theodora could only have sporadic epiphanies--significance could not be sustained; it inhabited a transcendent realm. Theodora's approach to this "reality" entailed her literal madness. By the time White wrote Fringe, however, the pressures against this solipsistic view were overpowering. He finally acknowledged that significance could be sustained--but only through commitment to a collaboratively created human reality. And even then there was no surety.

In The Twyborn Affair White has not gone back on this development, despite the appearances to the contrary. If the captain's reason denies him more than sporadic moments of significance, the letter Gravenor sends Eadith near the end of the novel shows the possibility of a sustained meaningful life, if the courage to defy twentieth-century sceptical reason is embraced:

My dearest Eadith:

How I miss our unsatisfactory encounters. Unfulfilling though they were, they would fill the void of wherever I am, surrounded by anonymous automata. 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 can also lay claim to belong.

I can see your reproving face, your explosive jaw rejecting my assertion. If I can't persuade you, I shall continue to accept you in whatever form your puritan decides you should appear, if we can survive the holocaust which is preparing.

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

R. (p. 426)

A loving relationship as the proof that God exists: this is the conclusion White reached in Fringe. Love can overcome the scepticism of "those who know better", and can transform "automata" (we remember Ellen Roxburgh's unsuccessful escape into automatism; see above pp. 277-278) complete human beings. It can also render purely sexual distinctions irrelevant. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, White suggests, we are all "members of the human hierarchy" and capable of the wholeness a creative, loving relationship can bestow. The use of the word "bestow" is deliberate, for the significance that comes with relationship is not something which is purely ours, that we "possess" but a gift, a grace, which is the result of--and response to --our "basic living deference towards that to which, opening as it does into the unknown and itself immeasurable, we know

we belong."<sup>2</sup> In this way the human world is on a continuum with the spiritual realm.

The power of love can only be released, however, through "courage". Without that courage we remain "each in his prison/Thinking of the key"<sup>3</sup>, locked in our solipsistic cells waiting for revelation, or apocalypse.<sup>4</sup> Upon receipt of Gravenor's letter elliptically offering to accept even his homosexuality, Eddie finds the courage to make the commitment to life he has largely evaded throughout his life. Donning male clothing once again he informs Ada, his deputy in the brothel, that his "frivolous self will now go in search of some occupation in keeping with the times" (p. 427). Given the context of a world at war he realizes that "Whatever his partially conscious plan for positive action, it could hardly take place in Eadith Trist's whore-house" (p. 428). On the way to his mother's hotel-room--"a short but painful visit to his mother's womb" (p. 428) which is intended as a symbolic acceptance of both the past and the reality he has tried to escape--he is blown to bits in the bombing of London. White witholds the wholeness he had granted Ellen Roxburgh. Although he understands the issues involved and has Eddie make a tentative commitment, White won't follow it through.

White's fear of facing the issues squarely, even though he understands them, is seen in his resorting to the letter as a way out, as he had done in The Vivisector. Gravenor's letter tells what White won't enact. The episode of the Australian captain and the French woman also keeps the issues at arm's length. By couching the issues in anecdotal form, White assumes the stance of the confident observer. But the stance is a ruse, the confidence a figment. This may be due to the closeness of his material to his own situation. If Eddie were to meet Gravenor after the war and show his hand, the relationship they could potentially establish would be very similar to White's with Manoly Lascaris, whom he met while stationed in Egypt as an R.A.F. Intelligence Officer. The secrecy of Gravenor's war-time mission suggests some sort of intelligence work. In fact, Manly Johnson believes that Eddie's death in 1940 symbolically signals the beginning of White's career as a novelist; that the potential for creativity and wholeness embodied in Eddie's final commitment is not lost with his death but carries on to become White's canon.<sup>5</sup> This does not seem a particularly productive route of inquiry, but Johnson's observation that "The Twyborn Affair is a fictionalized retrospective over [Patrick White's] life"<sup>6</sup> helps us

to justify our conclusion that in all but its last fifteen or so pages--where an approach to the issues is made, however tenuous--the novel is a mode of self-indulgence in which White languishes in all the dead ends he had worked through and been able to judge by A Fringe of Leaves.

White's predilection, as we have seen from The Aunt's Story on, is for a solipsism combined with varying degrees of misanthropy. But from the beginning also, we have seen another aspect of his sensibility opposing this negative one. In The Aunt's Story this dissociation resulted in ambivalence toward Theodora's quest and interpretative obscurity for the reader. In Riders in the Chariot White dealt with the problem arbitrarily by imposing an extrinsic symbolic system on the novel. The grid ostensibly represented lovingkindness flowing from a transcendent realm of wholeness, but actually it provided a veneer behind which the solipsism and misanthropy flourished. The dualism between the significant elect and the banal mass was never so complete. The Vivisector removed the veneer and justified misanthropy, solipsism, sexual nausea, and an interpretation of the world as Dreck, through the artist's vision. Again the elect was a prominent feature. The positive, moral aspect of White, the part of him which saw the importance

and necessity of creative relationship to human wholeness, was not silent, however. Though finally powerless the indictments of Hurtle Duffield's life were clearly manifestations of White's lack of ease with the state of his world-view. In A Fringe of Leaves White is writing out of a unified sensibility. Ellen Roxburgh's story becomes a study in dissociation rather than an example of it, as the previous novels have been. Rather than being entangled with his protagonist White sustains a critical, though not unsympathetic, distance.

The Twyborn Affair presents a return to many familiar configurations. There is a splenetic, nasty quality in most of the characterizations, reminiscent of Riders in the Chariot and The Vivisector. Both Joanie and Curly Golson and M. Pelletier are made to suspect that there is no real reason why they should exist. M. Pelletier's masturbating while watching Eudoxia's solitary dawn swim is a direct echo of Cecil Cutbush's masturbating at the lantana in The Vivisector and, if anything, is more diminishing. There is, again, an arbitrary split between banality and awareness. The former is characterized by human "vegetables", while the latter produces "potential suicides". The only exemptions from this stratification are--by now a sentimen-

tal automatic reaction--the simple-minded and the deformed. The hare-lipped Helen Winterbotham recognizes an affinity with Eddie, just as Muriel Devereux shared an understanding with Hurtle Duffield at a very similar party in The Vivisector. The Quigleys from The Tree of Man reappear in the half-wit Denny Allen and his wife Dot (who is also a reincarnation of Rhoda Courtney--physically at any rate). Even the sympathy that Eddie feels for Greg Lushington is qualified and sentimentalized by a context in which White categorizes Greg as a vegetable. The dignity that White found in Austin Roxburgh, in spite of his manifest limitations, is no more than an unsubstantiated assertion in relation to Greg.

The attitudes expressed here are not, directly, White's point of view. White has given the perspective largely to E. and has him comment over and over on his fear of life and love. These introspective statements occasionally assume the function of subjecting to irony both E.'s "passionate regret" (p. 405) for the condition of his life, and the various sentimental escapes he indulges in. For example, Eddie's decision to go jackerooing is similar to the embracing of nature we have seen so often in earlier books: "As he continued thumping automatically at his whol-

ly unresponsive mount, loss of faith in himself was replaced by an affinity with the landscape surrounding him" (p. 194). But the proper perspective on this "affinity", one which indicates that this novel comes after the discoveries of Fringe, is presented when Eddie tells his father of his decision to work on the land: "[Eddie] was too surprised at the improbable idea which had come to him the moment before. His morality must have appeared admirable, if stark, to the one in whom he was confiding. His more innocent confidant would not have seen it as Eddie Twyborn escaping from himself into a landscape" (p. 161).

However, though the questionable attitudes E. holds through the majority of the novel can't finally be pinned to White, they were his earlier and he still feels drawn to them. The occasional ironic set-statements (they assume the pattern of a refrain) virtually act as a reminder to the reader that this indulgent character is not, after all, White. And having reminded, White can indulge once more.

Although this sounds vaguely reminiscent of The Vivisector's replaying of essentially the same situation over and over there is a major difference. In The Vivisector White swung obsessively between the two sides of his sensibility, each of which claimed his allegiance. In Fringe



he literally pulled himself together. The obsessive quality disappeared and the repetition along with it. Consequently when these phenomena return in The Twyborn Affair all we can say, finally, is that White knows better.

A.P. Riemer tries to justify these phenomena by pointing to an elaborate Manichean system of dualism which does seem to underlie the novel's hatred of human life. Working from Angelos Vatatzes's references to the Bogomil heresy and other Byzantine elements, and from the sexual variety and even perversion to be found in the novel, he concludes that the work is an "exploration of the basic tenet of all dualist creeds--the absolute gulf between the soul and the created matter it is forced to inhabit"<sup>7</sup>, that it, therefore, is "dedicated to the notion that the body, the flesh and the senses are utterly worthless"<sup>8</sup>, and that consequently we shouldn't expect anything else because "A dualist frame of mind cannot but find the world absurd and bathetic, discontinuous and deceptive."<sup>9</sup> But, as the last fifteen pages of the novel, already discussed, show, White knows that this does not have to be the settled condition of human life; courage to commit oneself to life, which means people, can transform worthlessness into value.

The most obvious justification for E.'s reticence and

obsessive introspection, of course, is his sexual ambivalence.<sup>10</sup> As Eadith accompanies Gravenor to his country home we get the problem encapsulated in one of the recurring set-statements: "Because she sensed she was causing him pain she was racked by her personal dishonesty. If she had been true to her deepest feelings she would have stopped the car, dragged him behind a hedge--and demolished their relationship" (p. 408). Riemer, rightly feeling "that such explanations are inadequate",<sup>11</sup> goes on to turn the novel into a Manichean tract in order to procure an adequate explanation. (Of course he never attempts to forestall the central criticism of this scheme: if the novelist sees the world and human life as "utterly worthless" then why did he write the novel at all?) We don't just feel the explanation of sexual ambivalence is inadequate, we know it is, because the final pages of the novel show us the alternative possibility. As I said above, White knows better. And, to risk encroaching too deeply on White's personal life, his forty-year relationship with Manoly Lascaris is proof of this.

One can only hope that White's next novel, if there is one, displays more of the courage Eddie found at the end of

The Twyborn Affair; the courage which made Ellen Roxburgh's story the most unequivocal example of White's major status in twentieth-century fiction. For White is a major writer, despite the criticism I have brought to his door. That I have not lavished praise, but have spent the majority of this study raising an opposing voice, I see as a testament to the seriousness of the challenge White's work presents. The challenge, as I said at the outset of this dissertation, is two-fold: first, to respond steadily and critically to the "doctrine of alienation"<sup>12</sup> which White shares, to some degree, with the "advanced" literary world and which, to quote Saul Bellow, promulgates the view that "modern society is frightful, brutal, hostile to whatever is pure in the human spirit, a waste land and a horror."<sup>13</sup> Second, (because, of itself, the first challenge would not distinguish White as a major figure), to register, within the subtly detailed renderings of human experience that White is capable of when his subject absorbs him fully, the hints or promptings of a way out of the doctrine of alienation and toward a human world of value.

NOTES TO EPILOGUE

<sup>1</sup>John Beston, "Patrick White, The Twyborn Affair", World Literature Written in English, XIX, 2, (August 1980), 201.

<sup>2</sup>F.R. Leavis in Two Cultures?; quoted in John Fraser's "Leavis, Winters and 'Tradition'", Southern Review, VII, 4 (1971), 985; cf. also Martin Buber: "He who takes his stand in relation shares in a reality, that is, in a being that neither merely belongs to him nor merely lies outside him. All reality is an activity in which I share without being able to appropriate for myself. Where there is no sharing, there is no reality. Where there is self-appropriation there is no reality. The more direct the contact with the Thou, the fuller is the sharing." (I and Thou, 2nd ed., [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958], p. 63.)

<sup>3</sup>T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land", ll. 414-415.

<sup>4</sup>The description of the brothel in increasingly conventual terms, with the nuns in their cells living and providing fantasies of fulfilment, answers perfectly to the Eliotian picture of "Waste Land" solipsism.

<sup>5</sup>Manly Johnson, "Twyborn: The Abbess, the Bulbul, and the Bawdy House", Modern Fiction Studies, XXVII, 1 (Spring 1981), 161.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>A.P. Riemer, "Eddie and the Bogomils--Some Observations on The Twyborn Affair", Southerly, XL (1980), 19.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>"Ambivalence" is White's word: "ambivalence has given me insights into human nature, denied, I believe, to

those who are unequivocally male or female . . .". (FG, p. 154).

<sup>11</sup>Riemer, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup>Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1965 [Uniform Edition, 1978]), p. 199.

<sup>13</sup>Saul Bellow; quoted in Trilling's Beyond Culture, p. 199.

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