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# A GROUP OF SEVEN:

# A CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE NOVELLAS

# OF PATRICK WHITE

# A GROUP OF SEVEN: A CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE NOVELLAS OF PATRICK WHITE

BY

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Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

W.B. Yeats

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Abstract

During his thirty years as a writer of fiction, the Australian writer, Patrick White, has attempted all three narrative forms available to him -- the novel, the novella and the short story. In 1973, on the publication of his most ambitious work, The Eye of the Storm, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The public and critical recognition he has received since has been based almost entirely on his major novels. The fact remains, however, that, though rather limited in volume, his shorter fiction is as much a part of the world of his imagination as are his novels. The two collections of shorter fiction, The Burnt Ones and The Cockatoos, deal with themes similar to those explored by White in his major works.

This thesis deals with the central themes of suffering and illumination in White's works, as these appear in the seven novellas studied here. The thesis is divided into three sections. The determining pattern of these sections is the difference in focus. In the first main section which deals with the novellas, The Dead Roses, The Night The Prowler and A Cheery Soul, the focus is on individual characters. The second main chapter, which studies A Woman's Hand, Sicilian Vespers and The Cockatoos, deals with groups of characters rather than the individual. A brief Interchapter that examines the novella, The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed To Keep Cats, which falls into neither of the two main groups, links the two sections together.

While the main focus of the study is on the novellas, attempt is also made to point out connections between these and White's major novels.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the supervisor of this thesis, Dr. Maqbool Aziz, for introducing me to the works of Patrick White and for his invaluable help in formulating the topic of this study.

CONTENTS

## A Note on References and Abbreviations

In preparing this study, the following editions of Patrick White's works have been used:

Happy Valley. London: Harrap, 1939

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

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

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

Voss. New York: Viking Press, 1957.

Riders in the Chariot. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961.

The Burnt Ones. New York: Viking Press, 1964.

Four Plays. New York: Viking Press, 1965.

The Solid Mandala. New York: Viking Press, 1966.

The Vivisector. New York: Viking Press, 1970.

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

The Cockatoos. London: Jonathan Cape, 1974.

A Fringe of Leaves. London: Jonathan Cape, 1976.

In all subsequent references to these works, only the titles and page numbers have been indicated. In the case of the two volumes of short fiction, the titles have been abbreviated -- T.B.O., for The Burnt Ones and T.C., for The Cockatoos -- and the abbreviations used to identify passages quoted in this study. All secondary references have been placed in the footnotes.

## A Chronological List of White's Short Fiction

1. Willy Wagtails by Moonlight. Australian Letters, Vol. 4, No. 3, March 1962.

2. A Cheery Soul. The London Magazine, II, vi, 1962.

3. Being Kind to Titina. Meanjin Quarterly, No. 88, Vol. xxi, No. 1, 1962.

4. The Letters. Quadrant, Vol. VI, No. 2, 1962.

5. The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats. Australian Letters, Vol. 5, No. 2, December 1962.

6. Clay. Overland, No. 26, April 1963. (Reprinted in The London Magazine).

7. Miss Slattery and Her Demon Lover. Australian Letters, Vol. 5, No. 3, April 1963 (Reprinted in The London Magazine, November 1963).

8. Down at the Dump. Meanjin Quarterly, No. 93, Vol. xxii, No. 2, 1963.

9. The Evening at Sissy Kamara's. The London Magazine, III, ii, 1963.

10. Dead Roses. Written specially for The Burnt Ones, 1964.

11. A Glass of Tea. Written specially for The Burnt Ones, 1964.

12. A Woman's Hand. Australian Letters, Vol. 7, No. 3. August, 1966

13. The Full Belly. Coast to Coast: Australian Short Stories, 1965-66, ed., Clement Semmler (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966).

14. Five-Twenty. Southerly, XXVII, 1968.

15. The Night the Prowler. Written specially for The Cockatoos, 1974.

16. Sicilian Vespers. Written specially for The Cockatoos, 1974.

17. The Cockatoos. Written specially for The Cockatoos, 1974.

18. Fete Gallante. Meanjin Quarterly, Vol. 36, No. 1, May.1977.

## Preface

Patrick White's accomplishment as a writer is quite remarkable. He is the author of ten novels, one volume of plays, a volume of verse and two collections of short fiction. Though the plays and the poetry are of an experimental nature, White's fiction represents a singularly major achievment. Yet, as Alan Lawson[1] points out, very little attention has been paid to White's works outside of Australia. Even within Australia, serious criticism of his works is restricted to literary periodicals and discussions in surveys of Australian Literature.[2] There are only a few book-length studies of White. Two of these, Barry Argyle's Patrick White[3] and Geoffrey Dutton's Patrick White,[4] are little more than exploratory studies. Two more recent ones, Peter Beatson's The Eye in the Mandala[5] and Patricia Morley's The Mystery of Unity[6], are attempts to examine the religious and mystical patterns underlying the novels. Indeed, in almost all the works mentioned above, attention is focussed on

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[1]Alan Lawson, "Unmerciful Dingoes? The Critical Reception of Patrick White", Meanjin Quarterly, 32, No. 4 (December 1973), 379-92.

[2]The important ones amongst these are -- Geoffrey Dutton, ed., The Literature of Australia (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1964); Graham Johnston ed., Australian Literary Criticism (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962); A. Wilkes, Australian Literature: A Conspectus (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970).

[3]Barry Argyle, Patrick White (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1967).

[4]Geoffrey Dutton, Patrick White (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1961).

[5]Peter Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala, Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God (London: Paul Elek, 1976).

[6]Patricia Morley, The Mystery of Unity (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972).

the major novels. Apart from a gathering of review articles, White's shorter fiction, the short stories and the novellas, which have an immediate bearing on the novels, have received no recognition at all. This study proposes to concentrate on the seven novellas of White; it is hoped that such a narrow focus will lead to a better initial understanding of White's achievment as a writer and thinker.

Thematically, the novellas are directly related to the longer works. White's central concern in both forms is the inner, secret life of the individual, the characteristic note of which is pain and suffering. His protagonists, though in many cases taken from ordinary run-of-the-mill humanity, are distinguished from those around them by their acutely perceptive natures and their ability to see 'inwards'. They are invariably outcasts from society, often misshapen or otherwise physically or mentally deformed. These characteristics predispose them to a life of extreme isolation which inevitably results in pain. Within this general framework, White's fiction is a study of various modes and forms of human suffering to which fragmented personalities are subjected. The immediate causes of this suffering may be thwarted attempts at receiving love and understanding; indifferent or destructive parent-child relationships, insecurity, of one kind or another; etc. The basic determinant, however, is a yearning for some kind of a 'religious' or 'spiritual' destiny.

For Patrick White, suffering is the "indispensable condition"[7] of human life. In The Eye of the Storm, Elizabeth Hunter, one of White's most discerning protagonists observes: "Somebody is always tinkering

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[7]Epigraph to Happy Valley.

with something. It is the linesman testing for the highest pitch of awfulness the human spirit can endure."[8] White's novels and tales present characters who, though initially indignant, accept this condition of suffering -- as contrasted with those who ignore it or oppose it. As Peter Beatson points out: "The most important distinction in White is not between 'the good' and 'the bad' but between those who have undertaken the pilgrimage and those who have stayed at home."[9] This implies, in turn, an acceptance of, or at least a reconciliation to, failure and defeat. A failure to live up to or realise one's own potential. Yet, this acceptance of failure is an affirmative gesture in the fictional world of White, and is achieved only by "those of extreme simplicity of soul, or else by one who was about to doff the outgrown garment of the body."[10] Thus, in White's terms, failure and its acceptance implies the possibility of redemption at a later time. As indicated above, this thesis attempts to study the portraits of suffering White evokes in his seven novellas -- as a starting point for a proposed longer discussion of this theme in White's novels. The novellas, in terms of length and scope, make a natural, manageable segment for a short study of this kind.

Of the seven novellas, three are published in the collection entitled, The Burnt Ones and four in the volume, The Cockatoos. However, in preparing this study, the chronology of these works has been disre-

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[8] The Eye of the Storm, p. 424.

[9] Peter Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala, p. 39.

[10] Riders in the Chariot, p. 480.

garded in the interest of greater thematic coherence and unity. Since the study does not concern itself with the development of White's theme or style, examining the novellas chronologically did not seem necessary. Chapter One of the thesis deals with White's analysis of the 'suffering woman' in three novellas: The Dead Roses, The Night The Prowler and A Cheery Soul. Though this motif occurs in other novellas as well, it is at the centre of the tales in these three. Chapter Two deals with three novellas from the collection, The Cockatoos, where White's primary concern is not the isolation of an individual, but the isolation that occurs in "togetherness", in the so-called successful marriages. From the single woman, he shifts his attention to couples who, though bound together in holy matrimony, do not escape the anguish of loneliness. A brief interchapter deals with the novella The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats, which stands apart on account of its setting and other reasons. While attempts are made to see the novellas -- though these are spread over a period of time -- as a coherent unit, the main emphasis is rather on an analysis of the works as individual pieces. The word 'commentary' in the title is used deliberately and consciously to convey this aspect of the work. Therefore, the main body of the thesis remains intentionally exploratory, as it tries to establish connections with the novels and within the novellas themselves. The epilogue with which the thesis closes is a brief and tentative statement about the relation of the novellas to the longer works.

Since White is primarily concerned with depicting emotional and mental states of being, the language of his works is extremely complex and charged with several levels of meaning, which do not easily lend

themselves to interpretation. It is this subtle but powerful imagistic language and intricate linguistic structure, that makes up the peculiar texture of White's fiction. White himself observes: "I find words frustrating as I sit year in year out reeling out an endless grey. I try to splurge a bit of colour -- perhaps to get a sudden impact -- as a painter squeezes a tube."[11] In an earlier essay that he wrote himself, the same sentiment is expressed:

> Always something of a frustrated painter and a composer manque, I wanted to give my book [Voss] the texture of music and the sensuousness of paint, to convey through the theme and the characters of Voss what Delacroix and Blake might have seen, what Mahler and Liszt might have heard.[12]

This tendency to create in fictional terms the effects of music and painting is what first strikes a reader of White's works. However, the approach adopted in this study forces me to neglect, for the time being, this and other important aspects of White's works, except in passing. White's style is so dense and intricate that it demands analysis of a kind that would not be possible in a study of limited length and scope.

Similarly, since the focus of the thesis is on the experience of suffering that the central characters of the novellas undergo, the religious implications of suffering are not treated in detail. Though Patricia Morley begins her discussion of White with the statement: "The view of man and his world which underlies White's novels is religious in its basic orientation"[13], the claim is not so easy to

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[11]"A Conversation with Patrick White", Southerly, No. 2 (1973), 138-39.

[12]Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son", Australian letters, 1, No. 3 (1958), 39.

[13]Patricia Morley, The Mystery of Unity, p. 1.

establish. Though Divine Providence figures prominently in his works, the particular character of his religion is difficult to pinpoint. The emphasis is on unexplainable mystery, rather than religion in its formal sense. This is not to question Patricia Morley's statement, but merely to point out the difficulties involved in calling White's work 'religious'. Although words such as 'Grace', 'redemption', and 'revelation' have been used throughout the study, the emphasis remains strictly on the nature of the characters' suffering and White's perceptive rendering of this theme.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Portraits of Suffering (1)

The epigraph to Happy Valley, White's first published novel which appeared in 1939, is a quotation from Mahatma Gandhi: "It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering which is the one indispensable condition of our being. Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone ... the purer the suffering the greater is the progress."[1] The novel itself embodies this perfectly in the character of Oliver Halliday, who emerges redeemed after having undergone a process of alienation and separation from his family and his mistress. This "indispensable condition" of suffering is a major preoccupation of White's, and he subjects every facet of it to an acute analysis in his various fictional works.

Apart from establishing this predominant theme, Happy Valley also presents, for the first time, certain characters that recur with astonishing frequency in White's later works. His protagonists, or 'elect', are always "the poor unfortunates"[2], condemned to suffer because of their intuitive ability to sense the mystery behind their daily existence. In The Tree of Man, White writes: "The purposes of God, are made clear to some old women, and nuns and idiots."[3] These chosen few are first presented to us in Happy Valley in the persons of Chuffy Chalmers and Alys Browne. The latter is the first of White's

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[1]The epigraph to Happy Valley.

[2]The epigraph to The Burnt Ones.

[3]The Tree of Man, p. 429.

lonely women who, to use the author's own phrase, are "born with inward-looking eyes."[4] The predicament of these women, and their particular responses to that predicament, are of immense concern to White. Theodora Goodman of The Aunt's Story is his most comprehensive analysis of this kind of feminine sensibility.

Indeed, the portrait of the suffering woman is developed almost like a motif in White's works. Not only is it present in most novels, in the novellas too it figures prominently. It is the central character in at least three of them. The protagonists of The Dead Roses, A Cheery Soul and The Night The Prowler, though different in many ways, are directly related to Theodora Goodman. Like her, they are burdened with 'the inner life', a condition that isolates them from others in the worlds that they inhabit. In these tales, White probes the various possibilities of response and reaction that such a condition can evoke.

A major part of The Dead Roses (1962) is set in Sarsaparilla, the fictitious middle-class suburb which a majority of White's characters inhabit. For readers familiar with White's fiction, Sarsaparilla is synonymous with the anguish, the isolation and the related tensions that lie dangerously close to the dull conformity of suburban middle-class life. The characters in the story fall into two distinct categories. There are the authentic Sarsaparillian inhabitants, the objects of White's scathing irony and the concrete representations of all that he is condemning. There are then the Tullochs and Barry Flegg, at first

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[4]The phrase is used in the story 'Clay' in The Burnt Ones, p. 112.

rather superior to the suburban lot, but ultimately as ineffectual. Caught in between these two groups, unsure of her identity, wary of her responses, is Anthea Scudamore, the protagonist of the novella.

Unlike Mrs. Scudamore, for whom life is "bright and unconcealed" (T.B.O., p.8), and Fanny Goodman, whose "emotions were either black or white"[5], Anthea is burdened with the ability to see inwards. This ability, despite her intense desire for integration, alienates her from people who form an essential part of that society, whose conformity she instinctively, though inadequately, rebels against. Conformity is the key word of Anthea Scudamore's existence. Her way of life is determined for her by Mrs. Scudamore, who, like most mothers in White's fiction, is an 'arranger', zealous in her determination to push her daughter in the right direction. The question of Anthea's happiness about such an arrangement is not even considered, for there is no reason why anyone should be unhappy:

> ... no one in Australia at least, if they were well provided for, and of a happy social level. After that if a person started complaining, she was morbid, or neurotic. Or something . . . . . Mrs. Scudamore would have been deeply hurt if anyone had suggested she had never paused to consider what her daughter might think. Why, it was too obvious. They were more like two sisters. So, as nobody had ever drawn her attention to the reality of the relationship, Mrs. Scudamore continued to think, for Anthea, and everyone. (T.B.O., pp. 4-5.)

The invitation to the island is, therefore, in a sense, Anthea's ticket to escape a world where her only involvements are with a domineering mother and a father conspicious by his absence. These basic tensions in family relationships are apparent in the other tales and

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[5]The Aunt's Story, p. 4.

novels too. If Mrs. Goodman in The Aunt's Story and Mrs. Polkinghorne in "The Letters" are anything to go by, White's general treatment of mothers is severe. Whereas in both The Dead Roses and The Night The Prowler, the daughter's relationship with the father is at best hesitant and faltering, it is potentially good.[6] But the pervasive influence of the mother in either case is seen as life-denying and ultimately negating. Therefore, the Tullochs and "their aberrations of the mind " (T.B.O., p. 7), hold out to the suburban Anthea the only possibility of resuming her own life.

Like Theodora Goodman, Anthea is involved in a quest for her basic identity. Of Theodora, White tells us:

> She . . . took out objects of her own, to give the room her identity and justify her large talk of independence . . . All these acts, combined, gave to her some feeling of permanence . . . These did give some indication of continuity, of being. But even though more voluble, they were hardly more explanatory than the darning egg or moist sponge with which she invested each new room.[7]

For Anthea, the hope the island holds out cannot be denied, for as she

> suspected uneasily it might only be possible to come alive in secret positions, in other people's houses . . . After all, it was not what went on at other people's houses which invested those houses with peculiar life. It was what she herself brought into them. It was only the receptacle of which she was in desperate need, in which her uncommunicative nature might spill itself, if silently. So she was hungrily grateful for this stone cell, for the sound of the bent tea-tree as it sawed at iron and silence. And sawed. (T.B.O., p. 11.)

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[6]Though we barely catch glimpses of Bill Scudamore, he too is one of the 'burnt ones'. His daughter is aware of this: "If she had only been able to touch him, they might perhaps have pooled their secrets and discovered the reason for human confusion". (T.B.O., p. 42.)

[7]The Aunt's Story, pp. 132-133.

The idea of the island as a place of release is stressed by White's description of Anthea's physical movements. This cool 'spotless girl from the city' now 'flops', 'sprawls' and 'squats' and, as White points out, she had never indulged in gestures quite so free. This is only one instance of White's use of physical movements and details to render the state of mind of his characters.

Val Tulloch,[8] who alone in the story is aware of Anthea's predicament, has included Barry Flegg in her list of house guests, hoping for Anthea's sake that "Barry'll do his best by her." (T.B.O., p. 4.) Their initial encounter finds Anthea at a terrible disadvantage. Nervous, embarrased, indecisive and all too aware that Barry Flegg represents the kind of experience her life has hitherto lacked, Anthea cannot help but reveal her own inadequacy. Her small talk about shell and plant collections is only a façade for what

> She should have dared tell him: This afternoon I lay on the Indian counterpane, and my real, secret self was half-waiting for a door to open -- but quickly. It was exciting but perfectly ghastly at the same time. (Ibid., p. 14.)

The juxtaposition of 'exciting' and 'perfectly ghastly' in the last sentence is in keeping with the schoolgirlish Anthea who begins her letters with "It is all rather an adventure . . . " (Ibid., p. 8.) The adjectives 'exciting' and 'ghastly' also indicate what the total extent of her involvement with Flegg will be. Yet at this stage she is relieved to escape without having any actual demands made of her:

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[8]Val is contrasted with the other women in the novella. Her 'fulness' sets her apart. Her and her husband's comments on Anthea and Mrs. Scudamore function almost like a choric voice, occuring as they do at strategic places in the text.

> But most of all she was thankful for her own stone cell, in which she might flower again -- a full, distinct white. She was never unhappy, as Mummy liked to say. Tomorrow she would be shown, she was told, an estuary of black swans. She could not remember whether she had ever come close enough to hear the hissing, to watch the writhing of the black necks. Did she altogether want? Or touch the papery bark, flaking, down around the grey dunny, into opalescent scales. Sun and wind, to say nothing of moonlight, had worked upon the paper barks. Better to watch without becoming involved in any process of skin. She withdrew her hand, finally, out of reach of further experience. (Ibid., p. 16.)

However, Anthea cannot retreat too far from the experience Barry Flegg represents. Almost against her 'better' nature, she goes out to seek him. Her tentative attempts at trying to come to grips with this unknown facet of life climax in a situation that Anthea herself would describe as being 'exciting' if only for "the gulf in her experience [which] was now filling."(Ibid., p. 20.) But Flegg's verbal expression of his desire proves to be her undoing. Having managed to avoid the 'catastrophe', she works at trying to regain her normal composure. Her instinctive platitudes about 'love' and 'finer instincts' die away as she finds herself unable to meet Barry's eyes. However, she congratulates herself for "the prudence which had enabled her to handle the most difficult situation of her life"(Ibid., pp. 20-21.).

The importance of this incident does not lie in Anthea's mumbled rendering of learned clichés. This is in every sense predictable. What is significant, however, is her subsequent attempt at rationalising this experience. All too soon, she is ready to turn her back on the sensuality of Barry and his kind; a rejection that White describes in almost symbolic terms:

> Their [the Furfields'] plant lives showed too clearly in their faces as they leaned out towards each other from the past, entwined even now, across the table. Anthea could not look at them at last. She was afraid she might be able to offer to the lamp-light proof of

> even a plant existence . . . . She had already rejected the animal proofs too firmly to hope for a position in the animal world. If she had wanted it. Which she didn't. (Ibid., p. 21.)

Later on in the tale, Anthea will recall the incident as being "undesirable or absurd" (Ibid., p. 55), and her recollections "floated out of her grasp, together with the capsules of weed, as though almost is the most" (Ibid., p. 55 ). The last phrase is certainly revealing, for the experience with Barry is the closest Anthea will ever come to actual sexual fulfillment.

On her return from the island, she is almost catapulted into a marriage with Hessell Mortlock; a marriage where she longs for the sexuality that she has rejected earlier. The spiritual and sexual apathy of this marriage is anticipated by the dead roses of the title, that dominate this section of the story. The rose is a recurrent image in White's works and is used in various ways. For the most part, it denotes a sensuality that is usually beyond the reach of White's characters. A passage from The Eye of the Storm makes this aspect of the image clear:

> When she [ Mary ] stooped to cut into the stems, more than the perfume, the pointed buds themselves could have been shooting up her greedy nostrils, while blown heads, colliding with her flanks, crumbled away, to be on the neutral earth in clots of cream, splashes of crimson, gentle heart shaped rose ... [9]

The young Theodora Goodman also responds to the compulsive attraction of the roses:

> She ran, slowed, walking now alone, where she could hear a golden murmur of roses. Above her she could see the red thorns, and sometimes she reached to touch. She felt on her cheek the smooth flesh

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[9] The Eye of the Storm, p. 209.

> of roses. This was smoother than faces. And more compelling. The roses drowsed and drifted under her skin.

At the same time, Theodora is also aware of the "small pale grub curled in the heart of the rose."[10] By the time we come to the title story of The Burnt Ones, the sick rose has withered and died.

Hessell Mortlock and Anthea come together while replacing "brown rose-petals" (T.B.O., p. 23) into a Chinese bowl. Mortlock grows roses, but doesn't exhibit them. His present of crimson roses when he leaves Anthea is ironic, for as a token of love it signifies nothing. His house is a mausoleum of neglected roses: "There they were the brown roses, in some cases almost turned to metal, to bronze." (Ibid., p. 34.) Almost imperceptibly, the dead roses gather emphasis and signify that denial of sexuality that first led Anthea into a marriage with Mortlock. Her husband's 'reasonable' behaviour reminds Anthea of:

> how she had escaped, by that same grace of reason, the brutality of sand. Mrs. Mortlock cried very briefly and furtively for the happiness she was experiencing. As she fell asleep she was holding in her arms a world in abstraction. Or slack gas balloon. And soon

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[10] The Aunt's Story, pp. 13-14. White uses the image of the rose in The Tree of Man also. The rose and its sickness is similar to Blake's use of the sick rose, in the poem of that title. Blake writes:

> O Rose thou art sick.
> The invisible worm,
> That flies in the night
> In the howling storm:
>
> Has found out thy bed
> Of crimson joy:
> And his dark secret love
> Does thy life destroy.

> the gulls were lashing at the metal petals of Egyptian roses. While she was sunk in safety. The creaking of roses, their knife-edged wings, grew silenter for distance. (Ibid., pp. 35-36.)

The marriage brings a temporary halt to Anthea's quest for her identity. From now on, she is only referred to as Mrs. Mortlock. Her ability to create separate existences for herself is also gone: "And whereas in the past she had brought into other peoples' houses a whole secret life, a mystery of girlhood, in this one she failed to conjure, perhaps because she was a married woman." (Ibid., p. 36.) Her resemblance to her mother, which was barely commented upon earlier, is quite marked in this section of the story. Gradually Anthea merges into Mrs. Mortlock, a younger version of Mrs. Scudamore. Though marriage leaves her unfulfilled, she

> had learnt the way of happiness which her mother had practised before her. She ordered her life -- dared it perhaps, in any case kept a firm hand on any of the loose bits which might fly out and hit her in the eye. (Ibid., p. 46.)

The "loose bits", the recollections of her night on the island, still torment Anthea and while praying she is horrified to receive visions of "the bodies of Barry Flegg and Cherie Smith lashed together by ropes of hair." (Ibid., p. 39.) Her childlessness bothers her, for, like Theodora Goodman, her potential for love is thwarted. However, like her mother before her, Anthea convinces herself that marriage with Mortlock is her chosen existence and that the burden must be borne. Her attempts at creating some sort of permanency out of her marriage are defenses against the insecurity and fear that continually plague her:[11]

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[11]White treats the question of permanence in more detail in The Tree of Man.

> Seeing how he stooped, and his blotchy hand with its several patches of new skin taut against the table, the anger which was rising in her became pity for this old man she had promised to cherish. While the dusk flowed down amongst the well-established evergreens, she was softly crying, she realized, for them both.
>
> But at least she would breed a virtue with him, she decided, fiercely, remembering certain of her own mother's attitudes. (Ibid., p. 44.)

Though White depicts Anthea as a martyr, particularly when she yokes herself to Hessell's wagon, hers is not a deliberate martyrdom. As Peter Beatson points out, few of White's characters "deliberately seek suffering, . . . Most have a healthy sense of outrage at the lot that destiny has cast for them, and fight to retain their right to personal happiness."[12] Anthea, too, asserts her right when she learns of Mortlock's second marriage. Her own sense of betrayal is assuaged by this counter-betrayal and in a final moment of decision she leaves Sarsaparilla to go back to Mrs. Scudamore. The final part of the tripartite structure of The Dead Roses reveals a changed Anthea. She takes over completely from her mother, relegating the latter to the position of a child. In her subsequent visit to the island 'of her youth', she again attempts to discover the self she has lost along the way. Illumination, however, is witheld from her until the climactic moment of her encounter with Barry Flegg and his children, on a beach outside Athens.

Both structurally and thematically, the novella comes full circle here. Anthea is still obsessed by her memories of Barry Flegg,

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[12]Peter Beatson, The Eye In The Mandala, Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God (London: Paul Elek, 1976), p. 26.

whose "youth's body" is now "hardened, scored, and already grizzled, by participation." (T.B.O., p. 59.) Flegg's 'participation' and involvement in life, his wife and family, acutely emphasize Anthea's separation and isolation. Her reply to Barry's question as to whether she has found everything she expected to is an ironic: "I have everything. I am very happy." (Ibid., p. 60.) But it is Flegg who has "everything" and Anthea is exceedingly conscious of this. The roses that figured so prominently in the main section of the story and the stain on Anthea's dress during her first encounter with Barry are brought together here. That first stain is reechoed in: "The stains of carelessness and haste [that] had superimposed their own more abstract pattern over the formal leopard spots of Cherie Flegg's fabric pants" (Ibid., p. 62 ). Anthea's final vision of Barry Flegg's wife is of "the crimson roses, glowing and spilling from her stained lap" (Ibid., p. 63 ).

The 'glowing roses' and the"stained lap" are also to be the final vision of the novella itself. For as Anthea leaves the Fleggs behind, she has reached as far as she can possibly go on the road to suffering. Completely shattered, she runs from an imagined assault by a Greek youth[13] into the security of her hotel room. By immersing herself in elaborate ritualistic preparations for bed, she keeps at bay her doubts and feelings of complete inadequacy and failure:

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[13]I feel the assault is imagined, as it occurs immediately after her encounter with Barry Flegg; it is a reminder of the earlier incident on the island and Anthea's flight from experience.

> But at some point in that incalculable night she awoke to her own face. The glass was overflowing with it. The grey face, emerging from the wastes of sleep, had been mutilated unmercifully. Extinct terrors caked her lips, choked her long, dusty throat. But it was not the isolation of her own reflected and reflective face of which Mrs. Mortlock was chiefly conscious. She began, with a slow distaste, to accept that she had been dreaming of Cherie Flegg, of her stained leopard-skin matador pants. (T.B.O., pp. 65-66.)

This is certainly not the kind of revelation that, according to Patricia Morley,[14] all White characters experience at the end of the process of suffering. There is no suggestion of Grace in Anthea's vision. It embodies, above all, a powerful sense of her isolation and failure and it is in regard to this perceptive awareness of her own condition that we can talk about Anthea's 'progress'.

The Gandhian epigraph to Happy Valley discusses 'progress' as a direct consequence of the process of suffering. However, in White's fiction, the progress is not measured by any definite achievments. His protagonists are not accepted or reintegrated into their worlds. Sometimes this progress coincides with death, as in the cases of Stan Parker in The Tree of Man and Hurtle Duffield in The Vivisector. But, more often the progress achieved implies an acceptance of what Oliver Halliday in Happy Valley calls "a mystery of unity about the world".[15] This confession and acceptance of failure is integral also to the philosophical sub-structure of Voss, where White writes: "The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but by failure . . . "[16]

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[14]Patricia Morley, The Mystery of Unity (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972).

[15]Happy Valley, p. 166.

[16]Voss, p. 289.

Therefore, a mark of Anthea's progress is her acceptance of her failure to participate in life. There are no suggestions that Anthea's lot will improve, and one is led to conclude that her suffering will continue. Yet, in her perception of "the two irreconcilable halves"[17] of joy and sorrow, she, like Theodora Goodman, is accepted into the ranks of White's 'elect'.

Apart from mere physical resemblance,[18] Felicity Bannister, the protagonist of The Night The Prowler (1974) has a lot in common with Anthea Scudamore. Though a period of more than ten years separates it from The Dead Roses, The Night The Prowler is a variation on the themes and concerns of the previous novella. The Bannisters approximate the Scudamores in almost every major detail. Humphrey Bannister is as weak and ineffective as is Bill Scudamore. His relationship with Felicity is even less definitely defined than is Scudamore's with Anthea. In the Bannister house, again, it is the mother who reigns supreme. Of Mrs. Bannister, we are told that "she had always secretly believed that, with the exception of cancer, air disasters and war, she had circumstances under control." (T.C., p. 120.) There is about her an air of what Anthony Hassall calls "anesthetized self-sufficiency",[19] and the rubber gloves she wears as "protection against the nastier details of domestic

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[17]The Aunt's Story, p. 272.

[18]Both Felicity and Anthea are described in nearly similar terms. Both are "fairly large" and "healthy rather than pretty" (T.C., p. 128.).

[19]Hassall uses this phrase in connection with another character from The Cockatoos. Hassall's short article, "Patrick White's 'The Cockatoos'," Southerly, 1975, Vol. I, is the only full-length essay that deals with this collection of tales. There are, of course, several reviews of the volume.

martyrdom" (T.C., p. 144) signify her lack of emotional contact with her family. Her marriage to Bannister, like a majority of the marriages in these tales, is a failure: "There was so much they had failed to make together: not even a child; this one was less than ever theirs." (Ibid., p. 129.)

The mother-daughter relationship, which is as important in this novella, as it was in The Dead Roses, is more graphically delineated here. Convinced that Felicity will always be hers, Mrs. Bannister generously allows her husband some time with the child, making sure, however, that the two are never intimate. Like Mrs. Scudamore, she has little doubt her daughter is happy enough: "'Why ever not? She's got everything a girl could wish for.'"(Ibid., p. 134.) Both women expect complete filial devotion and will brook no denial on any account. The similarities between the two mothers, however, end here. For whereas Mrs. Scudamore's repugnance from 'physical' things implies frigidity, there is about Mrs. Bannister a carnality that she tries to suppress, but which surfaces occasionally. There is no doubt she is attracted to her daughter's fiancé:

> Doris Bannister's own sensibility was charmed by the erect young man in charcoal flannel; his wrist watch made her feel quite drunk; his receding hair saddened her as she realized how history repeats itself.
> . . . She would venture anything for her child. Or for this intolerably desirable young man. (Ibid., pp. 136-37.)

Also, the sight of her daughter's breasts exercise extreme sensual fascination over her:

> . . . the mother mumbled to disguise the fascination her daughter's breasts were exercising.
> She had hardly caught sight of them since they were formed, and now these were not only Felicity's breasts, they were also

> what 'that man' must have done to them; even more fascinating than the flesh of her flesh were the shadows on it, or could they be horrid bruises? (Ibid., p. 129.)

Contrasted with this obvious sexuality of the mother is the premium that Bannister places on virginity during his lectures to his adolescent daughter. Given this kind of a situation, it is not surprising that Felicity wants release as much as Anthea did. Felicity's freedom from dull conformity is effected through the prowler of the title, who breaks into the house and 'rapes' her. The rape is later discovered to be initiated by Felicity herself; it acquires special significance in the novella as White uses it for several purposes.

The reaction of the Bannisters to the experience their daughter has undergone is predictable. The father is embarrased and self-effacing, while the mother so completely identifies herself with Felicity that

> for one bleeding moment Mrs. Bannister almost underwent the shocking act of violation to which her daughter had been subjected. Though a fairly solid woman she tottered at the telephone, but recovered enough of her balance and voice to cough and grunt farther through the moral labyrinth in which she found herself astray.[20] (T.C., p. 124.)

White also uses the supposed 'rape' to lay bare, with devastating irony, the evil mentality lurking beneath solicitious, smiling faces in Sarsaparilla and other urban suburbs. When the news of Felicity Bannister's rape becomes public, 'decent people' are

> so upset they couldn't eat a mouthful for several days for participating in the night the prowler tore apart the long white perfect

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[20]This passage is reminiscent of Gudrun Brangwen's identification with the bleeding mare in Lawrence's Women in Love. Both Mrs. Bannister and Gudrun feel violated themselves.

> thighs as though they had been a boiler's flesh only luck it wasn't your own Trish or Wendy or yes it might have been yourself in Tchitchy Bannister's bed while as for the elderly prostrate-stricken gentlemen they drove it home as never before and certainly never after.
>
> So it was very terrible for everyone. (Ibid., p. 138.)

The pleasure with which the neighbours 'participate' in the violation is also evident in their fantasies of Felicity "wrestling in bed with a randy stranger" (Ibid., p. 138).

As for Felicity herself, the 'rape' affords her with an opportunity to break away from her inhibiting and frustrating environment. Unlike Anthea, she does not believe in compromises; rid of her "old virginity" (Ibid., p. 131), she can begin her quest for true identity and real experience. Her first step is to break off all existing ties, including her engagement with the young man in "The Department of External Affairs". Though various types of love and sexuality occur prominently in these tales, White is not concerned with the fulfillment of love. His attitude towards conventional love and marriage is clear from the ensuing dialogue between Felicity and her fiancé:

> 'Surely the thing about marriage is that two people do take part in it?'
>
> 'They can -- and sometimes they don't. As in a rape.'
>
> 'I can't see the analogy.'
>
> She must persist. 'So I had to break the engagement. Incidentally, how can love be "engaged"?' She laughed because she had just that moment thought of it. 'And how can an engagement be "broken"? Anything big enough ought to be "shattered"!'
>
> . . . '"Break" is a miserable little verb!' (Ibid., p. 143.)

By 'breaking' her engagement Felicity acknowledges its inadequacy as a source of fulfillment. Her determination to resolve the "unanswerable question"[21] that Anthea throughout avoids forces her to create a new and

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[21]The Burnt Ones, p. 52.

changed identity for herself. Like Anthea, who schools herself to relax and sprawl on the island, Felicity consciously moulds herself into a complete antithesis of middle-class respectability.

We learn of Felicity's transformation from Mrs. Bannister's conversations with Madge Hopkirk.[22] Despite her attempts to imitate her 'liberated' contemporaries, Felicity remains acutely conscious of her inability to merge with them:

> She longed to conform, at the same time to illuminate their rather sleazy faces with some revelation of the love they believed in but could't discover. Once or twice she had gone so far as to turn on with them, and take part in their childlike, almost sexless rituals. She must have been the only one who remained distinct: a menace in fact; some of them, on recognising an outline which refused to melt into their common blur, started abusing her. There was nothing she could do about it. She was incapable of laying down her will in their field of flowers, or of calming their fear that she might engulf them in a flow of lava which would petrify their bliss. (T.C., p. 148.)

Indeed, nearly all of White's protagonists retain this awareness of their own distinction. Clay, in the story of that title, cries a "bit for the difference to which he had been born."[23] Hurtle Duffield, in The Vivisector, even as a very young child realises: "There was so much of him that didn't belong to his family."[24]

The story of Felicity's search for an identity is one of violence, bordering almost on depravity -- a mood one does not at all experience in The Dead Roses. Her first target is "a house not unlike their own in its ugly splendour and convinced inviolacy." (T.C., p. 148.)

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[22]Madge Hopkirk, though she never actually appears in the tale, is an intriguing character. White uses Mrs. Bannister's conversations with her to reveal in minute details the concerns of middle-class suburbia.

[23]The Burnt Ones, p. 107.

[24]The Vivisector, p. 8.

It is this 'convinced inviolacy', a reminder of the 'rape' she has undergone, that Felicity is out to shatter. In fact, White's description of her destroying the house is rendered in sexual terms. She expects to experience "all kinds of guiltily voluptuous embraces" (Ibid., p. 150), and, after her final act of destruction, she lies there "only half-credulous of what was after its fashion a consummation" (Ibid., p. 152). In the midst of the wreckage that she has carried out Felicity recalls the events of the night the prowler had attacked her. We are led back to the events with which the tale opens and gradually see the incident not as an assault, but as an experience that Felicity desires:

> She was ready to grapple with him in the glorious but exacting game in which she had never taken part, only rehearsed move by move in the most secret reaches of her mind, knuckles cracking, their legs plaited together into a single, strong rope. Then, according to the rules, she would dare him with her wordless mouth to plunge deeper. She would feel his strength depending on her, and whenever it hesitated, she would urge him on with her most pervasive kiss to scale other peaks of her choosing. It was she who would ordain the death thrust. (Ibid., p. 152.)

However, the prowler's impotence evokes in Felicity a feeling of betrayal so powerful that it is only outdone by her rage at being thwarted. She forces the man to drink with her in an effort to create an atmosphere for her accusations of the next morning. She lets him out later to find "Only on returning to the dining-room, the slopped brandy and smouldering cigar emphasized her failed intention: to destroy perhaps in one violent burst the nothing she was, to live, to be, to know." (Ibid., p. 156.) All of Felicity's subsequent acts of rebellion are attempts 'to be' and 'to know'. However, like the prowler's attack, they arouse in her a growing sense of betrayal against a world

that not only fails to understand her predicament, but is also incapable of meeting her demands and expectations. Yet, she still

> continued in her efforts to expend, by acts of violence, the passive self others had created for her; though this behaviour too, she suspected, was ending in conformity. Nor did she ever find fulfillment, or establish her supremacy, in the defenceless houses she entered and wrecked. There remained the possibility, finally the hope, that she might be caught. She never was.. Over and over, she demonstrated the stupidity of those who were out to catch her: men of course. (Ibid., pp. 158-59.)

Felicity snatches at every possible opportunity, however "abysmal and degrading" (Ibid., p. 160), in an effort to arrive at real experience. As each successive attempt meets with failure, her desperation increases. Illumination is withheld, each time leaving her more agonised.

The cause of her suffering is never made explicit, though one is convinced the key to it lies in her frustrated endeavours to find love of a particular kind. As suggested earlier, Patrick White's attitude to love is difficult to define. His ambivalent view, the tension between the spiritual and the sensual aspects of this emotion, is revealed in the marriage of Stan and Amy Parker in The Tree of Man. Whereas Stan finds love in nature, Amy needs the physical presence of people. The incompatibility and the unspoken conflicts between the two arise from this basic difference. Here, and in other works, for the most part, White sees sexual love as the first stage to what, for want of a better word, might be called a 'higher' love. His protagonists are aware of this 'other' love, and very often this is the purpose behind their more sexual experiences. Elizabeth Hunter understands this very clearly in her conversations with the nurse in The Eye of the Storm:

> Mrs. Hunter suddenly looked angry and suspicious. 'What do you understand by love?'
>
> 'Well, perhaps -- sometimes I've thought it's like this: love is a kind of supernatural state to which I must give myself entirely, and be used up, particularly my imperfections -- till I am nothing.'
>
> Mrs. Hunter seemed agitated: she had got up and was trailing her long fleecy stole. 'Whatever they tell you, I loved my husband. My children wouldn't allow me to love them . . . . '
>
> 'Oh, I know I am not selfless enough! . . . '
>
> 'There is this other love, I know. Haven't I been shown? And I still can't reach it. But I shall! I shall!'[25]

Hurtle Duffield's dilemma in The Vivisector, in fact, stems from what Beatson calls "the displacement of spiritual need into sexuality",[26] and it is only when he successfully combines both these aspects through Rhoda and Kathy Volkov that he is 'stroked' by God.

This partly explains Felicity Bannister's aversion to the lovers she sees in the park. She perceives death and corruption in the faces "which had no more than guessed at love expressing a virtuosity of hate and fear." (T.C., p. 162.) The incident with the prowler not only liberates her from the confines of her environment, but also makes her realise her potential for the 'other' love. Thus, her suffering is a natural consequence of her previous failures in this direction. It is to the young singers in the park that she finally unburdens herself, revealing for the first time "the heart of a moral predicament" which the world "couldn't possibly understand." (Ibid., p. 156.) The passage is central to an understanding of the novella:

> She fell on her knees in the sand beside the group of singers. 'That isn't true! Nobody is born without [a heart]. Those are just the silly words of a song. You'd recognise that if you were

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[25]The Eye of the Storm, p. 162.

[26]Peter Beatson, p. 45.

> more than a bunch of milk-bar kids getting a kick out of false pathos. You'd know the heart was in anybody -- only waiting to be torn into -- by somebody big enough to perform the bloody act. See?'
>
> She had never made such a reasoned appeal. She should have felt ashamed . . . .
>
> The white light increased. Because there was nobody left to accuse, she could only rage against that radiance which had begun to rise and overflow with the magnificence of perfect equanimity. Standing beneath the remnants of a moon she was thrashing with helpless, wooden arms, throwing back her pumpkin of a head, ejaculating, 'I fuck you, God, for holding out on me!' (Ibid., pp. 163-64.)

Whereas Anthea Scudamore's defense is to conform, Felicity's is to rage against the complacency of a world that has proved totally inadequate. As the last agonised cry reveals, even God has failed to tear into her heart. Not only is Felicity isolated from her fellow-men, she has also realised her separation from God. However, as in The Dead Roses, it is at this moment of extreme suffering that Felicity's revelation (if it can be called one) occurs. In fact, the novella itself has been progressing towards this vision of extreme decay and desolation, very Beckettian[27] in its utter nihilism. White's description of the house in which Felicity finds the aged sick man is, in symbolic terms, a rendering of the human condition itself. The 'crumpled', 'warped', 'derelict' and 'rotten' house is aptly inhabited by a man who bears remote resemblance to "aged human flesh." (T.C., p. 165.) Even Felicity, who lay down with the drunks and the derelicts in the park, who breathed the

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[27]There are other Beckettian touches in this story. Felicity's desire to spread excrement over the desk is not only a reminder of Hurtle Duffield's smearing of his portrait in The Vivisector, but also of Beckett's poem Whoroscope (Paris: Hours Press, 1930).

stench from their breaths, is appalled by this picture of filth and putrescence. But she realises that "she musn't allow him [the man] to drag her down to his own level of negation and squalor; she needed him more than any of the others who eluded her." (Ibid., p. 166.)

Like Holstius in The Aunt's Story, the dying man offers Felicity the only possible consolation:

> 'I can honestly say I never believed in or expected anything of anyone. I never loved, not even myself -- which is more than can be said of most people.' . . . 'I always saw myself as a shit. I am nothing. I believe in nothing. And nothing's a noble faith. Nobody can hurt nothing. So you've no reason for being afraid.' (Ibid., pp. 166-67.)

However, there is no principle of affirmation in this advice, as there is in Holstius's last words to Theodora Goodman. Though Felicity clings to any possibility of contact, for love has "already been proved far too arrogant a word" (Ibid., p. 167), realisation gradually dawns on her. The man's death is for both of them "a release from the myths to which they had been enslaved" (Ibid., p. 168), and Felicity is left to carry on her life "in solitariness, in desolation, as well as in what would seem to be the dizzy course of perpetual becoming." (Ibid., p. 168.) Like Anthea, illumination for Felicity does not result in release; it only leads to a heightened awareness of her own condition.

Both Felicity Bannister and Anthea Scudamore, though much younger, have in them the makings of Miss Docker -- the compulsive do-gooder of A Cheery Soul (1962).[28] When Felicity discovers the sick man

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[28] The tale was first published in The London Magazine II, vi (1962), pp. 30-57.

in the derelict house, she becomes the 'bright nurse', baring "her teeth in a professionally encouraging smile." (T.C., p. 166.) In Anthea's case, the similarity is more distinct. When Barry Flegg questions her about her vocation, "A voluptuousness of self-sacrifice" overcomes her, as she indulges in a fantasy of herself, "self-indulgent in her act of service, as she bent above the bed-sores of old, flaccid men?" (T.B.O., p. 19.) Perhaps it would not be misleading to say that Felicity and Anthea will eventually find themselves in the same final predicament as the protagonist of A Cheery Soul.

A Cheery Soul is certainly one of the most complex studies of the theme of suffering attempted by White in the shorter form. It is also the only one to have received some sort of extended treatment from Patrick White's critics. However, the essential ambiguity of the tale has been simplified by these critics. By neatly categorizing the various characters under the labels of 'vice' and 'virtue' they ignore the polarity that White achieves, particularly in moulding our response to his heroine. Heseltine's comment that "The fullest study of Sarsaparilla vice disguised as virtue is, of course, Miss Docker in A Cheery Soul"[29] distorts the focus of the tale; while Burrows's argument that it is for the first time in this novella that White sees "virtue in Sarsaparilla and vice in the rebellious individual"[30]

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29 H.P. Heseltine, "Writer and Reader: 'The Burnt Ones'", in Southerly (1965), Vol. 25, p. 70.

30 J.F. Burrows, "The Short Stories of Patrick White", in Southerly (1964), Vol. 24, p. 124.

is not substantiated by a close reading of the text. It is true that the high level of authorial sympathy that one sensed in The Dead Roses and The Night The Prowler is rather subdued in A Cheery Soul. Also, whereas Anthea and Felicity are given a mildly ironic perspective, Miss Docker is exposed to a large dose of White's bitter satire. Yet, to dismiss her suffering as a "mask for hypocrisy and evil"[31] is to ignore the finer and subtle perceptions that White brings to his treatment of this theme.

The novella is divided into three sections, each evolving in a similar fashion. All begin with Miss Docker's attempts to integrate herself with people, her destructive influence on those she wishes to be-friend, and the rejection that she ultimately meets with. However, the 'suffering-woman motif' is given a different dimension in this novella. White invites us to sympathise not only with 'the burnt' Miss Docker, but also with the victims of her charity, who too are "the poor unfortunates' of the title. It is in this tension, this refusal to take sides, that the distinctive merit of the story lies.

The story is once again set in Sarsaparilla, and White's comments on the Custances in the first section are oblique references to the death-in-life quality of existence in this suburb:

> Their [the Custances] lives. Hitherto they had remained intact. No children, thanks to an absent-minded surgeon. Could have sued, I expect, said Ted. But they hadn't. They were too decent. Besides, all the embarrassment. The reporters. They had continued to live, in the one envelope, as it were, which nobody had bothered to tear, because no one was sufficiently interested. (T.B.O, p. 146.)

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[31] H.P. Heseltine, "Writer and Reader: 'The Burnt Ones'", p. 70.

Like other married couples in these tales, the Custances are sexually dead. As also with the Furfields in The Dead Roses, White describes the love between Mr. and Mrs. Custance in terms of plant imagery: "They were both splotched with patches of green, both cool people. Not that this precluded passion. It meant, rather, that each needed identical, cool, greenish flesh to twine around. Their leaves opened only to silence." (Ibid., p. 155.) The stage version of A Cheery Soul[32] emphasizes this vegetative quality of the Custances' life together. The stage-directions call for colossal tomato vines that dominate the exterior of the Custances' house. This state of being is White's main focus in the novellas and stories that make up The Cockatoos. Here it is the individual that is his primary concern; and it is Miss Docker's interaction with the Custances that forms the high-point of this section of A Cheery Soul.

Despite their many differences, Mrs. Custance and Miss Docker have one thing in common. They both believe in the Christian virtue of Charity. This is what motivates Mrs. Custance's invitation to the other woman, "for it was her secret wish to justify herself in the eyes of God, and this, she suspected, promised to be her greatest opportunity." (T.B.O., p. 146.) As for Miss Docker, her dedication to Charity is seen by the vicar later on in the novella as "the sin of goodness." (Ibid., p. 177.) White stresses, almost to the point of exaggeration, her compulsion to help others. Such speeches as the one reproduced below occur at frequent intervals throughout the text:

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[32]The play was first produced by the Union Theatre Repertory Company, Melbourne, November 19, 1963.

> 'When you only want to help a person. When there are so many people waiting to be helped. So much Christian love waiting to be poured out on those who are unwilling to accept it. The world would be a wonderful place!...
> 'There are so many professing Christians. Mind you, I think a lot of things just don't cross their poor minds. If only they could be awakened.' (Ibid., p. 153.)

In her desire to 'awaken' others, Miss Docker only manages to alienate herself from them. The Custances are at first dismayed by her attempts to take over their life completely. Her camaraderie, with which their limited experience cannot cope, forces them to withdraw. The more Miss Docker attempts to come closer, the more the Custances retreat until they lie

> in rigid alignment in their bed. He would pinch up the skin along her arm with the tips of his rather rough fingers....The Custances lay and listened to the surf roaring into the caverns of sleep.
> Then to synchronize with the time pips, Ted Custance would nip the skin of his wife's arm with precise, but quite brutal bravado.
> Till Mrs. Custance dragged away her arm. The Presence would have allowed her very little respite from guilt.

Our sympathetic responses in this section of the story, as in the others, are carefully controlled by White. Any feelings of empathy for Miss Docker are delicately balanced by a vision of her insensitivity towards the Custances and the narrator's consciously grotesque descriptions of her: "Miss Docker had taken out her teeth before coming to table. She sat munching, breathing, holding up her jaw, as though to resist death by drowning." (Ibid., p. 152.) In fact, if anything, the narrative almost urges us to sympathize with the Custances, who are increasingly revealed as Miss Docker's victims. And though they are compelled to get rid of her, their feelings of guilt make it impossible for us to withold our sympathy from them. However, despite this, we cannot immediately dismiss Miss Docker as being 'evil' and an agent of

"the powers of darkness" (Ibid., p. 178), as Mrs. Wakeman would later call her.

Not all of White's protagonists are like Ruth Godbold of the Riders in the Chariot, "the most positive evidence of good."[33] As Peter Beatson explains: "Most of White's central characters find themselves actually or potentially inflicting suffering on others."[34] Beatson cites, amongst others, the case of Theodora Goodman in The Aunt's Story, who contemplates the murder of her mother which, though never committed, leaves her with acute feelings of guilt. But it is Hurtle Duffield in The Vivisector and Mrs. Elizabeth Hunter in The Eye Of The Storm who remain White's most vivid realizations of this combination of good and evil in man. Even towards her end, a certain destructive quality is present in Mrs. Hunter, as she makes a bid for Lal Wyburd:

> 'Will you kiss me Lal?' She asked. ...
> Mrs. Hunter was raising her blind head on the edge of its ringed neck: the effect was ancient and repitilian. Lal Wyburd felt herself contained in what might have been an envelope of vapour, or sentimental pity, inside which, again, her mind was reared in horror, not for the decayed humanity she had at her mercy, but beyond the mask, still the legend of Elizabeth Hunter's beauty.
> ...Quickly Mrs. Wyburd stooped: she kissed the air just short of the older woman's face....
> It might have been another conquest, not so much of an individual as of the abstract: in any case she would chalk it up along with the others.[35]

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[33] Riders In The Chariot, p. 66.

[34] Peter Beatson, The Eye In The Mandala, Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God, p. 36.

[35] The Eye Of The Storm, p. 536.

In Hurtle Duffield's case, the description of him wielding the knife recurs as a motif throughout The Vivisector -- and he does not hesitate to use it; particularly on people he is closely involved with. Nance Lightfoot, his prostitute mistress, sums up this aspect of him very aptly:

> "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!"[36]

Yet to assume that both Hurtle and Mrs. Hunter are incarnations of 'evil' would be a gross simplification. Hurtle's impulse to destroy is the natural consequence of his greater urge as an artist to 'reach the unknown'. While beneath Elizabeth Hunter's desire for conquest is another deeper quest:

> Another idealist, but a realistic one; in your own case, your idealism was too abstract, improbable under cover of the dinner parties, the jewels, the lovers, some of them real, but more often only suspected; or else a few individuals, sensitive up to a point, had guessed at some mysterious, not religious or intellectual, some kind of spiritual aspiration, and labelled you a fraud when you couldn't confront them with not spiritual but material evidence.[37]

In very much the same way, there is a great deal more to Miss Docker than her inadvertent talent for destruction born out of her compulsive acts of charity. Mrs. Custance is perhaps the only one in the novella who recognises that "somewhere in the distance, ... lurked the other, dark-brown woman, under everything else like the truth."

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[36] The Vivisector, p. 203.

[37] The Eye Of The Storm, p. 90.

(T.B.O., p. 148.) The truth is that Miss Docker's compulsive acts of charity are defenses against a suffering born out of extreme isolation. Other characters in White's fiction erect similar defenses against pain and anguish. We have already seen the complementary nature of the defenses set up by the protagonists in The Dead Roses and The Night The Prowler. This notion of a protective layer required for survival in certain situations is more explicitly expressed by White in another novella, The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed To Keep Cats.

> Some of her acquaintances laughed at Kyria Alexiou's cats But everyone is in need of something in addition to another human being. For she had her husband, of course. Some people kept their religion, or collected gold sovereigns, or cultivated sensuality, but Kyria Alexiou needed cats. (Ibid., p. 246.)

Just as Amy Parker in The Tree of Man "cultivates sensuality", Miss Docker uses her religion to counteract her isolation. Her 'sin' is not that of goodness, but, like that of T.S. Eliot's Beckett, one of arrogance in her own virtue:

> 'I once read the Bible from cover to cover. That was when I was at the end of me tether. A whole fortnight it took me. I lay in bed, and read, and read. It was raining cats and dogs. Never stopped. Before that I was a pagan. But suddenly I saw.'
>
> 'What did you see?'
>
> Ted Custance was looking at her now.
>
> 'Don't be silly!' she said, 'You can't say what you see. But see!' (Ibid., p. 152.)

However, as in similar other cases, Miss Docker's charity is no barrier against suffering. The remaining sections of the novella delicately balance her potential for destruction with her increased suffering, which results from her final failure to adequately integrate with other people.

The inhabitants of the Sundown Home for the aged in Sarsaparilla are no match for the driving energy of Miss Docker. Against their inclination, she manages to involve them in her own reveries of the past, thereby tearing the protective cloak that Millicent Lillie, one of the inhabitants, has erected around her self. These recollections reveal another aspect of Miss Docker, one that was barely sensed in the first section. Though dependence 'rattles' her, she prefers to have men, particularly invalids, dependent upon her. Being a professional nurse, is a satisfaction of her sensuality, if only vicariously. Through these recollections we see Miss Docker as Mrs. Lillie's rival for the affections of her husband, Tom. The snapshots too suggest this:

> It was Miss Docker's potato shape which dominated the photograph. Protecting the sick man from what?... In age it had been Miss Docker who put out an arm to Tom. She herself, Mrs. Lillie saw, was an old head blurred on its shoulders by perpetual motion.

Miss Docker does not hesitate to point out the rivalry even after Tom Lillie's death:

> 'You dear,' she said to his wife, 'are the kind that dispenses passive charm. I am the practical one. Perhaps there should be two women,' here she turned to laugh at her friend, 'in the life of every man.'
> But Mrs. Lillie only smiled.
> 'One to bear the brunt', Miss Docker shouted.
> ...'The other to radiate!' Miss Docker laughed.

However, like those others on whom she has decided to bestow her kindness and affection, Tom Lillie escapes Miss Docker -- this time through death. White's description of Lillie's funeral is extremely fine as a piece of comic-ironic prose; yet it has serious undertones which accentuate Miss Docker's essential loneliness. As the funeral cortège leaves her behind (whether deliberately or accidentally, is

never made clear), despite the humour in the situation, Miss Docker appears as a tragic figure, alone against a sterile landscape, the hostility of which White makes patently obvious. The "jags of bottle" and the "equally vicious stone" (Ibid., p. 169), the dust and the silence that surround her, form an ironic contrast to the hoarding that dominates the landscape: "2 MILES TO SARSAPARILLA, THE FRIENDLY SUBURB". (Ibid., p. 169.) The stage version of the novella emphasizes Miss Docker's isolation, by the use of a chorus:

> First Chorus: For a moment she stood
> Second Chorus: ...alone
> Third Chorus The empty sky...
> Fourth Chorus ...distorted...
> Fifth Chorus ...inflated her.
> All Huge...
> Mrs. Mibble ...but not huge enough.[38]

The immediate situation itself fades into the background as White projects the portrait of a desperate woman, despairingly attempting to capture something that constantly eludes her: "Running and running as they sped, she held her hands out -- stretched to catch -- no longer care, no longer people -- something which was escaping her." (T.B.O., p. 168.) Miss Docker is certainly 'huge', but not huge enough to withstand the terrors of alienation, to which she succumbs occasionally, despite her 'cheery soul'. White has elaborated upon this note of ambivalence in the play A Cheery Soul. The speech of the chorus that ends this section of the play prophetically suggests this dual nature of Miss Docker:

> Chorus: Was it necessary? Was it kind? She did so want to watch Tom Lillie's polished casket stagger down the ramp towards the curtain.

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[38] A Cheery Soul in Four Plays, pp. 227-28.

> She would have wrung the widow's hands. She would have cried professionally. So was it necessary? Was it kind? Who can say? Or what is kindness? At least she has her pension. She has her health. She has her cup of Ovaltine at bedtime. She has her awfully cheery nature -- her goodness which can only be escaped by car. So what is good? What is kind? Is it fair to answer questions? Who knows? Why, she does, of course. She knows. She knows the distances and heights. She knows who went, who came, who stayed. She knows what is good for you. She knows what is good. Then what is wrong? Or bad? (Suddenly oracular) Ask the piebald cat![39]

The final section of the novella is a brilliant culmination of all that has gone before. White has been gradually approaching this ultimate scene of destruction, and a suffering so extreme we can barely understand it. Miss Docker has now reached a point where she is rejected by her fellow-men almost completely. There is a conspiracy on to deny her very existence. From the girls at the Bible class to the Reverend Wakeman's dwindling congregation, everyone ignores her. Her last resource is to devote herself to the rector, whose lawn she mows as "a labour of love". (T.B.O., p. 172.) However, it is clear that all Miss Docker's endeavours at establishing relationships are doomed to fail. Her inclination "to introduce the naked truth" (Ibid., p. 173) spells the end of this one. The Reverend Wakeman, another of those ineffectual men that abound in White's fictional world, is no match for the energetic Miss Docker. Her accusation that he is failing his duty as a preacher shatters him, and the destruction is completed during the course of his Sunday sermon. The prose in the remaining pages is extremely complex. By bringing together motifs and images

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[39] Ibid., pp. 230-31.

that he used earlier and by effective counter-pointing, White presents various implications about the nature of failure and the consequent suffering.

The theme of the rector's sermon, 'the sin of goodness', is ironically appropriate. The irony is more effective in the dramatic rendering of the tale:

> Mr. Wakeman: I am going to speak to you this morning about sin...
> ... no ordinary sin however. But the sin of goodness. That is to say, of ... of ... of militant virtue.
> ... How often do we pride ourselves on virtue? How often do we luxuriate in our own good deeds until they turn grotesque and ugly in other people's eyes? You might liken us to a penful of pigs, wallowing in the mud of ... of our own deception, the stink ... stench of which enters every nostril but our own.[40]

As the rector begins to explain his argument, using the 'humble pumpkin' as an example, Miss Docker takes over. Her merciless verbal assault is too much for the vicar, who suffers a stroke. Never one to let an opportunity pass by, Miss Docker dominates the scene, her strident and emphatic voice coinciding with Mr. Wakeman's fall:

> 'It is all personal. Everything personal. For and against. Take prayer, for instance. Or sin. And God. What I mean is: I am God if I think I am. Only I would not be so bold. And sin. Sin is what you make it. On the cold winter evenings, I am knit up, knit, yes, knit, in my warm jacket. That, that is prayer. Don't you see prayer is protection?'
> But nothing could save the rector now.
> 'Oh, I could tell, if I could tell!' Miss Docker shouted. 'But failure is not failure if it is sent to humble. The only failure is not to know.'
> Illuminated at last, the rector fell forward in a blaze of pumpkins. (T.B.O., p. 178)

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[40] Ibid., pp. 257-58.

Both Miss Docker and the rector have failed in their lives. One has failed his duty and the other has failed to find an object for "the love she still had it in her to give." (Ibid., p. 179.) The rector, however, acknowledges his failure and submits to it, dying "Illuminated at last." Miss Docker on the other hand, in spite of being the cause of the rector's enlightenment, has yet to experience the completely epiphanic moment. For her, both the realisation and the acceptance of failure are held off, as she leaves the church still convinced of her righteousness: "'So much thanks', Miss Docker said, 'for those of us who act in all good faith.'" (Ibid., p. 179.) Still exultant, she claims: "My thoughts could light a fire! I could breathe love into the dead ... if they were only willing."[41] Though she has, at the time of Tom Lillie's funeral, intuitively sensed her isolation, Miss Docker has not as yet reconciled herself completely to failure. The blue-cattle-dog that she noticed at Tom Lillie's funeral now appears again and she turns to it for the understanding she craves. But in a final ironic gesture: "the dog turned, and lifted his leg on the suppliant, and walked stiffly off." (T.B.O., p. 180.) As Miss Docker perceives that dog is "God turned around" (Ibid., p. 180), her revelation is completed. Not only has she been rejected by men, she has been rejected by God too.

This kind of rejection, and the failure that it implies, is one of the extremest forms of suffering that White subjects his protagonists to. Like Mr. Wakeman, Miss Docker is illuminated. But for her, enlightenment does not bring death or release. Rather, her acceptance of failure: "Then the tears gushed out of Miss Docker's eyes.... She

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[41] Ibid., p. 260.

must not let on, though, She was not the kind to spread despondency, encourage grief. Never ever ever ever." (Ibid., p. 180.) implies, in a sense, her redemption. For, as all of White's works make it clear, it is those who accept failure, rather than those who ignore its existence, who have hope of redemption. Although this epiphany has been negative, like Anthea Scudamore and Felicity Bannister, Miss Docker is no longer a failure because, at last, 'she knows' -- now.

## Interchapter: To Keep or Not to Keep Cats!

With The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats (1962), we move out of Sarsaparilla into the Athens of nineteen forty-nine. This change in setting allows White to represent an alternative way of life that is only implied in the other novellas, never really shown. While it is true that something of the complex counterpointing of two ways of life that one sees in The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats can also be discerned in A Woman's Hand, it is not the central concern in the latter novella. Moreover, although The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats presents portraits of two suffering women, the tale deals with the theme of isolation in marriage, hence anticipating in many ways A Woman's Hand, Sicilian Vespers and The Cockatoos. It is thus an earlier variation of a theme White was to deal with exhaustively later in the collection, The Cockatoos. Therefore, since it contains elements of the novellas already discussed, as well as of those to be studied in Chapter Two, it was decided to deal with this tale separately, in this brief interchapter.

Thematically, The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats develops according to the Laurentian formula of those who actively engage in life (and hence reach outside their immediate circle of experience), as contrasted with those who are deadened by convention and the 'civilised' way of life. This is an extremely effective structural device. By juxtaposing two essentially contradictory marriages, and two equally contradictory sociological settings, White portrays here,

as he does in his other works, two opposing attitudes to life and its problems. Once again, the moral issue raised is not of 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', but a distinction between the ability to immerse one's self in life and accept the subsequent suffering, as opposed to the tendency to retreat and therefore limit one's experience. These attitudes are developed by White through the portraits of Maro Hajistavrou and Kikitsa Alexiou. Both women 'suffer' in their relationships with their husbands, but whereas one compromises with her destiny and withdraws; the other accepts it and endures the consequences.

The antithetical nature of the two women is first suggested by their physical descriptions. White frequently uses physical appearances to indicate states of mind beyond the externals. The image of "innocent hands" occurs often in White's works, as do images of flesh and skin. The latter is particularly important in distinguishing White's 'elect' from others around them. In Riders in the Chariot, we know immediately in which category to place the malignant Blue, from White's initial description of him: "dry and scabby [skin], wherever it was not drawn too tight or shiny, giving an impression of postage stamps."[1] Indeed, Riders in the Chariot abounds with images of different skin textures. In The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats, White depicts the first encounter of the two friends in the following terms:

> Momentarily the twenty years' fastidious aridity to which hair dressers, manicurists, couturiers and milliners had reduced Maro Mauroleondos was clasped to the steamy body of her friend.
>
> Maro made the little, dry, gasping mouths of neat, middle-aged gentlewomen. To express what is, technically their pleasure. (T.B.O., p. 239.)

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[1] Riders in the Chariot, p. 249.

While Maro is dry, brittle and arid, her friend Kikitsa is 'steamy'. Immediately, Kikitsa is identified as White's portagonist in this novella.

Maro's marriage to Spiro, like her physical appearance, is dry and arid. As in the other novellas, its sterile quality is depicted through the consistent motif of plant life:

> In their progress through a series of increasingly desirable apartments the Hajistavri had grown together like two luxurious indoor plants. Different in habit and variety they relied upon each other for support; he for the thorny traditions of her class which she brought to bear on daily life, she for the succulence on which her parasitic nature fed. (Ibid., p. 234.)

This marriage, like that of the Custances in A Cheery Soul and of the Furfields in The Dead Roses, is not based on love or understanding. Its predominant feature is a clinging dependence that is almost parasitic. As Maro herself admits: "She thought she hated what she saw [Spiro]. It was what she needed, though, and married, and even loved at times." (Ibid., p. 234.) These admissions are, however, made only when Maro comes face to face with her friend Kikitsa in Greece. Though she has always sensed the inadequacy of her marriage, it takes her confrontation with Greece, as depicted by Kikitsa, to reveal its utter sterility.

Both Maro and her husband are wary of returning to Greece. Their fear is much more than the natural fear of an expatriate. By leaving Greece to settle in North America, they have essentially cut themselves off from a tradition White sees as vital and essential. White shares Lawrence's concern for the principle of cultural

continuity[2], as well as his contempt for modern civilization. In the other novellas these attitudes are revealed by White's devastatingly ironic treatment of Sarsaparilla and its inhabitants. The characteristics of Sarsaparilla, the devitalising trappings of middle-class life, are represented through the Hajistavri in The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed To Keep Cats. White reveals their newly acquired wealth and middle-class respectability as compensations for what is essentially a hollow and an inane life:

> And so they ascended. And as they did, careful of their American hearts, the excellent materials of their French and English clothes seemed to be slipping from them, together with Mrs. Hajistavrou's breeding and Mr. Mr. Hajistavros' seven restaurants, the two Cadillacs, the apartment in New York, all eventually superfluous, as the victims were reduced again to Maro and Spiro, a couple of Greeks ... If the stairs had not been so narrow, the visitants might once again have taken each other by the arm, to reconcile themselves to the thought that over all these years, in spite of the plans and discussions, it had perhaps been fear of the Alexious which had prevented a return to their native land. (T.B.O., p. 238)

This fear of the Alexious' is essentially the fear that Greece will undermine the complacency that the Hajistavri have adopted as a way

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[2] As Kiernan points out, in Images of Society and Nature: Seven essays on Australian novels (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), the title of Tree of Man is taken from Housman's A Shropshire Lad. The poem reads thus:

> Then, 'twas before my time the Roman
> At yonder heaving hill would stare:
> The blood that warms an English yeoman,
> The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.
>
> There, like the wind through woods in riot,
> Through him the gale of life blew high;
> The tree of man was never quiet:
> Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

of life. It is Maro, more than her husband, who is aware of these subtle tensions and fears.

The reductive quality of what by extension may be called the 'American' or 'civilized' way of life of the Hajistavri is further depicted by the narrator through their conversations with Kikitsa and, by contrast, with Kikitsa herself. Kikitsa's sharply ironic observation: "Aren't you fascinated the way so much -ette has crept into life?" (Ibid., p. 240), indicates the insignificance of the lives of the ex-patriates. A fuller presentment of the issue comes through Kikitsa's responses, and her own distinct way of existence. Kikitsa is a native Greek, close to her roots and, in Laurentian terms, possesses a healthy sensuality. Her relationship with her own husband is not ideal -- and is not intended to be so. Its very ambiguity is its mark of distinction, and this, in turn, distinguishes it from the clearly barren relationship of the Hajistavri. This solidly Greek or, in the context of the novella, more 'natural' way of life temporarily works its magic even on the Hajistavri.

> Each had realized what it is to be Greek. A gentle timeless melancholy, lapping and flowing between their islands, had reached one of the more easily accessible shores. Maro remembered certain dusty courtyards aching through the vines with exquisite silence. Spiro's lips had grown glutinous. The immense warm stone with which sleep had so often erased him in summer was again weighing on him, and he would have accepted forever, if waking had not promised a scent of crushed pine-needles. As for the Alexious, they had never been expected to forget. They were lolling against each other with professional luxuriance. They were smiling at the Hajistavri from under benevolent lids. In each of four material envelopes, whether the buttered Athenian pastry cases, or the oiled, the meticulously serviced, American machines, a tormented soul was temporarily blessed. Each of the bodies was wearing for a moment the same, brown Byzantine face. (Ibid., pp. 243-44.)

Yet this 'blessed' moment is short lived as Spiro begins to unstrap his Hasselblad and proclaim "'I guess I might take a picture'" (Ibid., p. 244). From the languorous atmosphere of the vines and the 'warm' stone, he is back again in his smug, materialistic world. So, indeed, is Maro, who begins making plans for drives in their motor car.

Nothing highlights the difference between the worlds of Kikitsa and Maro better than the former's cats. Kikitsa's obsession with these animals is particularly emphasized:

> Some people kept their religion, or collected gold sovereigns, or cultivated sensuality, but Kyria Alexiou needed cats: there was Hairy, who had never appeared interested, and Ronron -- was she beginning again? -- and the arrogant Apricock. Sometimes the latter would turn and scratch, quite lightly, though unmistakably, as she held him in her arms, as she made yet another attempt to possess. Then Kyria Alexiou would have found it difficult to explain to any third person the efficacy, or even the reality, of possession. (Ibid., p. 246.)

White uses cats as a significant motif also in The Vivisector. In this novel, as in The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats, the animals are a symbol for humanity itself. As Hero Pavloussi indignantly tells Hurtle Duffield: "'Who is cruel? Greeks? Turks? Man is cruel!' She shouted back. 'God -- God is cruel! We are his bagful of cats aren't we?'"[3] The identification with the struggling cats in the bag is specifically extended to Hero and Hurtle as White describes "their indecently resigned struggles inside the bag [which] must have been observed and judged from a distance by the shaggy god from under his black, heavy eyelids."[4] However, an attitude of protection by this 'shaggy god'

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[3]The Vivisector, p. 320.

[4]Ibid., pp. 320-21.

towards cat-like humanity is also suggested in The Vivisector. Rhoda Courtney is seen as the preserver of "all spawned and spawning cats."[5]

This quality of protection is what marks Kikitsa Alexiou's attitude to her cats. As she claims: "'One must cherish one's cats,' . . . 'They are almost, . . . human beings.'" (T.B.O., pp., 251-52.) Like Hurtle and Hero in The Vivisector, Kikitsa is identified with her cats. Like them, she 'prowls' about the roof, 'hisses', 'spits' and 'laps'. However, the cats do not portray a struggling and helpless humanity in the novella. Rather, they represent a particular kind of sensuality that the Hajistavri lack and which Kikitsa is searching for in her relationship with her husband:

> They lay in bed. The Kyrios Alexiou would sweat quite desperately on being touched by the tips of his wife's abandoned hair. . . .
> Then, when they were extinguished, she would encircle him instead as though he had been a cat. Her moist skin would lap at his. But after she had fallen into sleep, and the bottomless depths of her affection, he would extricate himself from the cat's-cradle of anatomy to which he had been subjected. It was only that he felt so tired, not that he did not love her. In fact, gratitude would carry him so far as to free her from the suffocating curtain of her own hair, as she lay sleeping, while there was no possibility that his gratitude might be returned. (Ibid., p. 248.)

This marriage is treated by White in extremely ambiguous terms. Alexiou lacks his wife's intuitive awareness and understanding of a 'feline' sensuality that is sharp and positive, as compared to the parasitic dependence that is characteristic of the Hajistavri marriage. This, in turn, puts into its proper ironic perspective the ecstatic statements of Kikitsa regarding her marriage. Her "joy and thankfulness for the almost miraculous fact of their union" (Ibid., p. 247.) are, in

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[5] Ibid., p. 442.

fact, the agonised feelings of a perceptive woman, who is aware of an actual lack of union, and of her husband's incapacity to fulfil her yearnings for love. Maro, too, is frustrated in her desire for love; but whereas Kikitsa accepts her destiny, particularly the suffering that it evokes, Maro ignores the pain, even convinces herself of its non-existence.

The crucial distinction between the two women is most evident during their drive to Sounion. This little interlude almost becomes a study in manners, as White reveals the forced, unspontaneous and heavy mannerisms of the Hajistavri and contrasts them with the vital spontaneity of Kikitsa who announces "'What do you say if I dance?'" (Ibid., p. 254.) While Kikitsa can dance or stalk cats in her natural setting, Maro is uneasy and Spiro consciously absorbs himself in setting up his camera. They are both out of tune with their setting, and do not know how to react except in gestures that are reminders of their more 'civilized' mode of existence. Both Maro and her husband see the Alexious as an "ominous situation". Maro, who realises that it is the vitality and the endurance of Kikitsa she fears, however escapes into "all that material superfluity which had become her substitute for life." (Ibid., p. 258.)

While both women suffer because of the inadequacies of their relationships, Maro continues to uphold hers; whereas Kikitsa bemoans:

> 'The trouble with Greeks,' . . . [is] 'they are not cat lovers. They are themselves too egotistical, quarrelsome, lazy, and gluttonous to understand the force of love. That love is something more than pouncing in the dark, or waiting to be pounced on.'

> She [Kikitsa] had laid her arms across her breasts. She might have been preparing to recite some love poems she had composed, of such poignancy she would never be able to get it all out. (Ibid., p. 257.)

Like other discerning women in White's fiction, Kikitsa wants to go beyond mere sexuality. Beyond being 'pounced on' to an ideal union, also symbolised by the cats in the novella. As we have seen earlier in The Night The Prowler, White's characters who understand their essential sensuality always seek to go beyond its confines. In The Vivisector, Nance Lightfoot confesses: "'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.'"[6] Elizabeth Hunter reaches the same conclusion in The Eye of the Storm:

> . . . Oh yes bestiality is familiar didn't you chose to rut with that politician Athol Thingummy you know it down to the last bristle the final spurt of lust and renounce menanyway for tonight.
>
> Now surely, at the end of your life, you can expect to be shown the inconceivable something you have always, it seems, been looking for.[7]

This curiously ambivalent attitude to the body -- the need for sexuality coupled with the desire to transcend it -- complicates Kikitsa's marriage, making it (if that is possible) a complex of ambiguities. Burdened with her unfulfilled yearnings, she begins to "rock and hobble down the slope, carrying her unborn poem, and the form of the escaped, unwanting cat." (T.B.O., p. 258.)

Kikitsa's sufferings and thwarted desires are made more explicit in the second half of the novella, which takes place two years later in

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[6] Ibid., p. 205.

[7] The Eye of the Storm, p. 544.

time. The Hajistavri are back again in Greece, unchanged and, if anything, more complacent. This time, Maro finds Kikitsa alone, for, like Cosmas Pavaloussis in The Vivisector, Alexiou has done away with the cats. From the roof of her new apartment, Kikitsa, now identified as "the poor burnt one, who was herself dry of tears", watches "the life which had slipped away from her. She watched her cats coming and going, coming and going. Or going. Or going." (Ibid., p. 263.) Without her cats, who are identified as her life, Kikitsa is thinner and lacks the vitality and exuberance that characterised her in the first section of the story. The cats, with whom she had made believe in the "efficacy of possession" (Ibid., p. 246), are gone and Kikitsa has nothing to lavish her affection on. It is interesting to notice that this change appears after the Alexious have acquired money, higher social status, a better apartment and a telephone. With their new, more 'civilised' way of life, the distance between Kikitsa and her husband has grown wider. She has now reached the highest pitch of suffering and Maro understands something of this, as both women muse on their failed relationships.

It is at this point that a key episode of the novella occurs -- the recollection of an earlier sexual intimacy between the two women. White's description of this girlhood incident at Hymettus[8] emphasizes the sensusal responses of both women by an elaborate structure of references to cats:

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[8]This explains Maro's almost obsessive dislike of Hymettus. This dislike represents her withdrawal from her experience there with Kikitsa.

> 'Take love,' Kikitsa Andragora had begun, drawing in the air with a blade of grass. 'I could put a ring around it. But would you, too, accept what I had enclosed?'
>
> Maro had been impressed, but terrified by what she only partly understood. ...
>
> Then Kikitsa had started laughing.
>
> 'Don't worry' -- she laughed -- 'I shall not make any attempt on infinity today! Today is a day of little cats' tongues!'
>
> After that Kikitsa did something so extraordinary it was difficult to recall in detail, only as a scurry of bronze, of furred light, and the crackle of dried heather twigs.
>
> 'See?' Kikitsa breathed as soon as she had withdrawn. 'A little, thin, cat's tongue!'
>
> Maro's mouth had melted for a moment in the sun.
>
> 'And you chrysoula', murmured Kikitsa through her teeth, 'are a kind of little, thin cat.'
>
> For a second locked together, their thighs had something of the duplicity, the elasticity, of softest cat-flesh bundled together in the sun. (T.B.O., pp. 265-66)

We have all along been prepared for this revelation of an overtly sexual intimacy between the two women. Maro's initial, almost devoted attitude to her childhood friend, her frequent nostalgic references to the other woman, and the fact that it is the news of Kikitsa's marriage that sends her practically into the arms of Hajistavros, are all hints that White has deliberately planted in the earlier sections of the novella.

The recollections of this incident and Maro's partial re-enactment of it, as she draws blood from Kikitsa's arm, shatter her totally. For a brief moment, the cocoon of deliberate ignorance and self-complacency that she has taken refuge in, breaks. She is plunged into an awareness of her own sensuality that she has so far denied. The "identifiably sensuous waves" (Ibid., p. 268) of the episode threaten to engulf her as do the "scintillating, fragmentary eyes" (Ibid., p. 267) of her friend. Like Hero Pavaloussi in The Vivisector, Maro is unable to accept her own extreme sensuality and, as has been her response to every demanding situation, she retreats. This time because of the

nature of the experience, her recoil and withdrawal is complete.

However, this very experience which 'burns' Maro appears to rejuvenate Kikitsa. Her husband Alexiou observes that: "Kikitsa's face had undergone a change, the way faces will, by joy, or suffering." (Ibid., p. 268.) The change is wrought by the different attitude that Kikitsa displays to the experience. Even though she suffers, she is always out "to discover some still-to-be experienced sensation." (Ibid., p. 268.) She has learned to reconcile herself to the fact that her yearnings for an ideal union will not be fulfilled, and so, instead of turning her back on sensuality altogether, like Maro does, she accepts it as a natural part of her life. Despite her improved social status, she is still in touch with the mysticism of life and does not oppose its "two irreconcilable halves"[9] of joy and sorrow. It is this acceptance of the duality of life that ultimately distinguishes her from Maro Hajistavrou. Kikitsa's subsequent sexual encounter with her husband bears evidence to this. This incident is a recreation in human terms of the earlier cat episode:

> Then it was the Kyrios Alexious who sprang. The scents, the cold draughts of air were quite intoxicating. The Kyrios sprang as though he had been wound up for it. How his trouser legs streamed black in his wake. As the Kyria Kikitsa leaped away, as white by moonlight as the stump from which the resin had run, Anthoula did not exactly see, but knew he had fastened his teeth in the nape of the white neck.
>
> Beyond, where the moonlight was dappled with darkness, all was a wrestling of light with dark. (Ibid., p. 272.)

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9 The Aunt's Story, p. 272.

The passage is possibly the most ambiguous in the entire novella. But in the context of the peculiar relationship of the Alexious, the ambiguity is necessary. By being identified with Apricock, Kikitsa's 'mystery cat,'[10] White implies the possibility of Alexiou also apprehending the "mystery of unity".[11] Yet, the language also suggests the possibility of Kikitsa being "pounced on", rather than loved. But, it is precisely in this tension that the validity of this relationship really lies; to suggest a resolution would have been clear contrivance.

What is significant, however, is the contrast that this passage suggests with the marriage of the Hajistavri. The implication is that they are incapable of reaching even this stage of precarious tension. Because Maro recognises the meaninglessness of her existence and marriage, and yet continues to uphold them, thereby constantly deluding herself, White condemns her. She has denied herself the opportunity to develop fully, by rejecting active involvement in life and by accepting the consequent suffering. She has chosen instead the so-called 'privileges of civilisation' and shields herself from real life with these, even though she is aware of their destructive potential.[12] By allowing herself to become alienated from her roots, she has lost touch with the

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[10] In an earlier passage, on p. 264, it is the orange cat that stands on the stump and springs on the white cat. He too "fastens his teeth in the nape of the white fur." (T.B.O., p. 264.)

[11] Happy Valley, p. 166.

[12] A similar polarity between withdrawal from experience, and acceptance of it is suggested by Henry James in The Golden Bowl, through Maggie Verver and Charlotte. Of course James' attitude to suffering is very different from that of White's.

roots of life. In later life, she and her husband will develop into stereotypes of the couples who fill the pages of White's second volume of stories, The Cockatoos.

## Chapter Two

### Portraits of Suffering (II)

Except for The Night The Prowler, which has been discussed in Chapter One, the protagonists of the novellas that make up the collection, The Cockatoos, are all elderly couples, set in their way of life and well past the age of rebellion, even that of questioning their destiny. They are 'the burnt ones' grown older and married. However, marriage has not assuaged their loneliness or their painful search for ultimate love and understanding. Within their marital relationships, they are as isolated as any of White's earlier protagonists. In fact, this feeling of 'isolation in togetherness' adds more poignancy to their situation. Though their desperation is quiet and mostly undramatised, its intensity is in no degree less than that of an Anthea Scudamore or a Felicity Bannister. Beneath the respectable, suburban façade of these couples, lurk emotions and desires that a lifetime of conformity has not been able to extinguish, nor have social institutions, such as marriage, been able to sustain. With acute insight, White probes into the 'inner', secret lives of these extraordinarily 'ordinary' individuals, revealing the profound suffering that a lifetime of loneliness can bring in its wake. The novellas A Woman's Hand, Sicilian Vespers, The Cockatoos, represent three variations on this theme of loneliness in marriage.

The first of these, A Woman's Hand (1966), is structurally similar to The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed To Keep Cats. It employs the same technique of juxtaposing two couples against each other, to reveal two ways of life. One 'normal' in the conventional sense, and one different,

as it observes life with a mystical insight. Of the latter couple, however, we only catch glimpses in this novella, for Clem Dowson and Nesta Pine who embody this attitude are revealed to us through the eyes of the Fazackerleys, the 'normal' couple. In fact, the focus of the tale is on the Fazackerleys, whose mutual relationship White subjects to a minute analysis.

Despite his concern for the inner lives of his characters, White, in this novella, as also in the others, is equally concerned about their sociological setting. In A Woman's Hand, he provides detailed social frameworks for all his characters, moving deftly from the aristocratic setting of the Burds in Egypt with their "rose marble" staircase, to dreary Australian suburbs. The latter are exposed to more than their usual share of pungent satire in this novella, which opens with:

> The wind was tearing into the rock-plants, slashing reflections out of the leaves of the mirror-bush, torturing those professional martyrs the native trees. What must originally have appeared an austere landscape, one long rush of rock and scrub towards the sea, was prevented from wearing its natural expression by the parasite houses clinging to it as obstinately as wax on diseased orange branches. Not that the houses weren't, nearly all of them, technically desirable, some of them even Lovely Homes worth breaking into. Although the owners of the latter were surely aware of this, they had almost completely exposed their possessions behind unbroken plate-glass. To view the view might have been their confessable intention, but they had ended, seemingly, overwhelmed by it. Or bored. The owners of the lovely seaside homes sat in their worldly cells playing bridge, licking the chocolate off their fingers, in one case copulating, on pink chenille, on the master bed. (T.C., p. 9.)

The passage reveals the parasitic, materialistic and bored inhabitants of suburbia, pre-occupied with the display of their possessions.

It is in this life-denying setting that White places the Fazackerleys, who at first appear remarkably similar to dozens of other

couples who fill the pages of White's fiction. They are a barren (both physically and spiritually) elderly couple and, as Mrs. Haggarth exclaims, "such mates". (Ibid., p. 93.) The last phrase exactly evokes the kind of superficiality with which both the Fazackerleys have managed to surround their marriage. They seek to escape the dreary prison of their lives by frequent tours around the country. As White remarks in Riders in the Chariot, such people, "drive and look for something to look at. Until motion became an expression of truth, the only true permanence --".[1] However, as we see more of the Fazackerleys, we realise what this constant motion is a cover-up for. Beneath their social veneer lurk dangerous emotions caused by an acute sense of betrayal on the part of both husband and wife. Marriage has scarred both Evelyn and Harold. But whereas Harold has accepted it and made his compromises with life, Evelyn's suffering turns into a potential for destruction, almost evil, which eventually destroys her.

Anthony Hassall choses to call Evelyn Fazackerley "a thin-blooded, genteel descendent of Mrs. Flack",[2] from Riders in the Chariot. The comparison is no doubt suggested by the potential for destruction that is present in both women, and certainly White treats them with

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[1]Riders in the Chariot, p. 546.

[2]Anthony Hassall, "Patrick White's 'The Cockatoos'", Southerly, 1975, 4.

equally savage satire. He also stresses the difference between Evelyn and her husband. Like most men in White's fiction, Harold is weak, ineffectual and prone to dreaming. His wife, on the other hand, is domineering, scornful and possesses an acute sense of social conformity. This distinction emerges at the very beginning of the novella, particularly through the response of the Fazackerleys to Clem Dowson's shack:

> Certainly the wooden house couldn't pretend to be much more. Clamped to what was practically a cliff, there was nothing to suggest ease or skill in its execution. It was the defenceless amateurishness of the house which roused Evelyn's dark-red scorn. It was a kind of honesty in its painfully achieved proportions, in its out-of-plumb match-stick stairway and exposed seaward balcony which moved Harold and filled him with a longing for something he could never accomplish. Perhaps it was just as well to see the house as a hutch, to imagine large soft animals turning on straw or enormous satiny birds contemplating the ocean from behind wooden bars. Although he would never have confessed it to Evelyn, his imagination had often helped him out. (T.C., p. 14.)

The house suggests a comparison with the 'Lovely Homes' of the opening passage, and the soft animals and satiny birds that Harold visualises here become dominant motifs throughout the rest of the novella. However, what is more important is that, though there are many such passages where White indulges in bitter satire at the expense of Evelyn Fazackerley, she is quite unlike Mrs. Flack or Mrs. Jolley, two portraits of evil incarnate (Riders in the Chariot). Through the use of two different time sequences in the novella, White presents us with two portraits of Evelyn: the destructive, evil woman of the present and the lonely, repressed and suffering individual of the past.

It is difficult to comprehend the Evelyn Fazackerley of the present and her motives for bringing together Clem Dowson and Nesta Pine.

On the surface, she is concerned about the loneliness of both individuals and: "'Because,' she said, 'well -- it [Dowson's house] lacks a woman's hand.'" (Ibid., p. 23.) Regardless of the fact that this union is her own scheme, Evelyn's response to the growing relationship between Dowson and Pine is complex in the extreme. On hearing of Nesta's visit to Dowson's house, she conjures up

> a vision of the elderly Nesta in one of the more convulsive attitudes of love: a great jack-knife of spring flesh, the saucered rump, breasts heaving and plopping like a pot of porridge come to the boil.
>
> 'How revolting!' Evelyn said out loud.
>
> And her breath snapped back elastically. (Ibid., p. 62.)

Even more ambiguous than this image of grotesque sexuality is the response of both Evelyn and Harold to the actual marriage of Nesta Pine and Clem Dowson. Evelyn's reaction is totally out of proportion to her self-confessed 'charitable' desire to bring together two lonely people:

> It was grotesque. If she did not say 'obscene', that would have been going too far. When she herself was, however innocently involved. For Evelyn Fazackerley affection meant something, not exactly material, but demonstratable. And Nesta Pine of cloudy features and brooding breasts, had begun to demonstrate. She was reaching out a shade further, from under the giant trees, offering the frill of grey knitting. Evelyn wondered, poundingly, how she felt about it. But she would not allow herself for long, or not after her skin begain to prickle. As in childhood she was running away, over the slippery needles, back into the living room. (Ibid., p. 65.)

What is interesting in this reaction is Evelyn's immediate leap into her past. The thought of Nesta beginning to demonstrate her affection reminds her of an earlier childhood incident under the pine trees in Mount Palmerston.[3] On both occasions, Evelyn's neck begins 'to prickle'

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[3] The incident is quoted on pages 48-49. Though Evelyn withdraws here, she is to recollect the episode at several points in the novella.

and she retreats immediately, refusing to think about the implications of her response. Harold's reaction, though not in keeping with his disinterested stance, also evokes associations with the past:

> But Harold Fazackerley had become a sieve through which the words ran like water, and experience, or more specifically, that which has not been experienced. The little boy crying in the fetor of disinfected latrines. What's up, young Fazack? The square warty hand gently thumping his sorrows. Nothing. Then the exquisite bliss even of maggots seething through the dusk and urine-sodden sawdust. The wind at sea, scouring the skin, sweeping out all but the farthest corners of the mind. The burning-glass of a blue eye. The stationary question-mark of a white ibis amongst the papyrus. Dreams and prophecies beating on jerry-built pitch-pine doors. (Ibid., pp. 65-66.)

The 'square warty' hand and the 'blue eye' of the above passage most certainly belong to Clem Dowson.

The possible clues to these ambiguous responses and to the sterile life of the Fazackerleys lie most certainly in their past. Through an elaborate recreation of their early lives, particularly in connection with Clem Dowson, White hints at certain possibilities that are picked up again later in the novella. From the moment of Evelyn's meeting with Clem Dowson, on the beach outside his shack, we are aware of underlying tensions between these two characters. It is only when Evelyn begins to recollect their earlier encounters in Egypt that we begin to understand the nature of these tensions.

In his depiction of the younger Evelyn, White portrays a nervous young woman, acutely conscious of social norms and attitudes, yet unable to come to terms with her own sexuality:

> Love was exchanged on terms she knew existed in theory, and which now in the half-light of poetry were too palpably fleshed, too suffocatingly scented. She remembered hearing of an Englishwoman raped by an Arab in Nouzha Gardens. Evelyn put the book down. There was no rape, she felt, which could not be avoided.

> But the perfume persisted, of overblown words, sweat, and the dark red roses growing out of Delta silt the other side of the shutters. (Ibid., p. 34.)

Marriage itself has not fulfilled any of Evelyn Fazackerley's expectations from life and she senses that Clem Dowson is aware of the inadequacy of her marital relationship. In a dream she comes across Dowson:

> ...seated at a round, iron, slanted table. Dowson was stuffing his mouth with a mouse-trap variety of cheese. Why must you eat like that? she asked. Because, he mumbled through his bread, you are starving, aren't you, Mrs. Fazackerley? She resented hearing her name as much as she disapproved of the steadily falling crumbs (Ibid., p. 35.)

Evelyn is certainly starving, for the child she cannot bear, and for the love and sensuality that marriage to Harold has denied her. Her overt advances to Dowson, at the Delta residence, are attempts to prove her own sexuality, but have other connotations too.

Throughout White hints at the possibility of a homosexual alliance between Harold and Clem Dowson. While this is never made explicit, there are subtle allusions to it, and the relationship between the two men is seen as a tender, affectionate one. Harold's own protestations about this possibility are worth considering:

> There was nothing between Clem and Harold, nothing you could be ashamed of. Harold had never done anything like that, or not that you could count. Nothing reprehensible, as he might have expressed it later, in his report-writing days. Not with Clem, anyway.
>
> Sometimes they mucked around the paddocks looking for nests. How Clem shone, blowing a maggie's egg for Harold on a clear morning of spring, ankle deep in dead grass against the huge stringy bark. Held to his more-than-friends lips the speckled egg-shell increased in transparency, and reddish, palpitating light. (Ibid., p. 20.)

The language of the above paragraph is extremely suggestive. Each phrase undercuts the previous one, implying several possibilities. Also, Harold's attitude to Clem, as more than a friend, recalls Maro

Hajistavrou's description of Kikitsa as her "shining friend", in The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats. Both Maro and Harold display similar feelings of devotion towards their respective friends. Other passages in the text[4] further support this reading.

Evelyn is dimly aware of this and hence her decision to put Clem Dowson to the 'test'. Under the mango tree, which is to haunt her for the rest of her life, she betrays herself to Dowson. Later when Harold accuses her of having killed Dowson, she recalls the incident and retorts:

> On one occasion we [Evelyn and Dowson] were strolling, I remember -- one evening -- through that mango-grove -- I can never see, let alone smell the beastly fruit, without getting the horrors -- Dowson was not exactly telling but hinting. (Ibid., p. 88.)

There is also the question of Evelyn's own ambiguous sexual response to Nesta Pine. The latter's breasts both disgust and fascinate Evelyn, who often entertains the idea of Nesta being a lesbian. Her one moment of intimacy with Nesta in their childhood is recollected at several points in the novella, as we have already seen. Against this context, then, the relationship of the Fazackerleys becomes easier to understand. Harold, we realise, has accepted his marriage as a substitute for other desired relationships. Evelyn on the other hand is revealed as an intensely lonely woman, unsure of her own sexuality, who feels betrayed because of the sexual inadequacy of her husband. Her

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[4]There is Dowson's letter to Harold, which is very ambiguous in tone, and of course Harold's admission at the end of the novella.

cruelty towards Clem Dowson and Nesta is a form of revenge against Harold and his suspected relationship with Clem. It is almost a self-defense against the suffering that Evelyn has had to endure throughout her married life.

Evelyn, however, is not the only one that suffers in the novella. Harold does in his own way, as do Dowson and Nesta Pine. Nesta and Clem "have too much in common to need one another."[5] Their marriage, though ostensibly a defense against loneliness, destroys them both. Nesta, one of White's 'elect'[6], bears a striking resemblance, to Miss Docker of A Cheery Soul. Like Miss Docker, Nesta passes through a variety of homes, hoping to find someone who will need her. Yet, like Miss Docker again, she is incapable of forming relationships that endure. Her marriage to Dowson is a mistake as Harold Fazackerley clearly realises: "Fur and feather never lie together". (Ibid., p. 81.)

As was the case with Maro and Kikitsa in The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed To Keep Cats, the suffering Nesta is intended as a contrast to Evelyn Fazackerley. Both women yearn for love and both fail to acquire it through their marriages. However, White endorses Nesta's suffering, because she is aware of it and accepts it. She is seen as the 'satiny bird' throughout the novella and is particularly identified with the peacock.

Birds are almost always symbols of hope and redemption in White's fiction and carry with them the promise of Divine Grace. The

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[5] Anthony Hassall, p. 4.

[6] She is described as having the "inward-looking eyes" of White's 'elect'.

formal expression of this is to be found in the concluding passage of The Eye of the Storm:

> The birds already clutching the terracotta rim, scattered as she [Sister de Santis] blundered amongst them, then wheeled back, clashing, curving, descending and ascending, shaking the tassels of light or seed suspended from the dish. She could feel claws snatching for a hold in her hair..
>
> She ducked, to escape from this prison of dew and light, this tumult of wings and her own unmanageable joy. Once she raised an arm to brush aside a blue wedge of pigeons' feathers. The light she could not ward off: it was by now too solid, too possessive; herself possessed.[7]

Nesta's redemption is evident from her letter to Evelyn: "I have lived with peacocks all my life! Most people do not know that the peacock also redeems." (Ibid., p. 70.)

For Evelyn who has hidden her suffering under social graces and attitudes and let it fester, there is no question of redemption. In her response to Nesta's letter, White emphasizes the fear and terror that takes such a strong hold on her. She realises perhaps that Grace will be withheld from her. The destructive qualities in her that have, in a sense, led to Nesta's redemption (since she is the scapegoat) work insiduously upon Evelyn herself. As Peter Beatson points out:

> The retroactive effect that, evil has upon the evil-doer is basic to White's thoughts on the subject. Cruelty can inflict superficial harm to its object but its real destructive potential works inwardly upon the subject. Evil destroys itself, whether it be an evil passion or a person dominated by an evil passion.[8]

White expresses this idea in fiction through Mary Hare in Riders in the Chariot: "'Oh yes, there is evil!' She [Mary] hesitated. 'People

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[7] The Eye of the Storm, p. 608.

[8] Peter Beatson, p. 35.

are possessed with it. Some more than others!' She added with force. 'But it burns itself out. Some are even destroyed as it does.'"[9]

The moment of Evelyn's destruction occurs when Harold accuses her of having killed Dowson. Through a gesture the violence of which is totally uncharacteristic Harold registers his protest:

> He took hold of the string of pearls, which, in the beginning, when it had been one of several strands wound into a rope, had given joy out of proportion. To both of them. He took the pearls, and twisted and jerked. And jerked. The string broke easily enough. He listened to the pearls scamper skittishly away against and behind lacquered veneer.
>
> Evelyn didn't resist. She was too terrified. Not to recognise her husband. She had never known Harold. Was there also, possibly, ultimately, something hiterto unsuspected to recognize in herself? That was far more terrifying. (T.C., p. 89.)

Though Harold almost immediately relapses back into 'normalcy', the superficial complacency of both has been shattered. For one brief moment, Evelyn comes face to face with her own capacity for evil and destruction, the 'hitherto unsuspected' part of herself. Harold's epiphany occurs outside, in the congested shrubberies, where he finally admits to himself his love and desire for Clem Dowson:

> As he stumbled through the mists, they were beginning, he saw, as though for his special benefit, to give up the moon. He was standing on the edge of a great gorge, into which there was no need to throw himself because he had experienced every stone of it already. He was the black water trickling, trickling, at the bottom of it. He was the cliffside pocked with hidden caves. He was the deformed elbows of stalwart trees.
>
> And all the time in the gorge, the mists were lying together, dreaming together, fur and feather gently touching, on which the healing moon rode. It was not that any of them had abandoned their material forms, but that night and mist had melted those broad faces, making more accessible the soothingly similar features to which he had never dared demonstrate his love. (Ibid., pp. 91-92.)

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[9] Riders in the Chariot, p. 172.

However, these realisations, particularly Evelyn's, are too late. As usual, the Fazackerleys cloak them in their superficial concern for each other, and their perpetual tours -- this time, very appropriately, the tour is to take them to the Dead Heart of Australia. The flickerings of life that Harold revealed are as quickly suppressed. The essential Evelyn is dead, as she tells Harold: "'if you wanted to kill me, you couldn't have done it more effectively.'" (Ibid., p. 89.) Yet the charade of marriage carries on.

The couples in The Cockatoos subscribe to this deception, this charade of marriage, until death puts an end to it. For even the most violent of betrayals, or the acutest feelings of guilt and frustration, fails to smash that habitual self-sufficiency which has become their substitute for actual life. Though they are aware of their sterile condition, and for brief moments attempt to break out of it, a lifetime of restraint and control forces them back on the resources which have sheltered them through years. Sicilian Vespers (1974), through a minute analysis of the relationship between Charles and Ivy Simpson, reveals the insecurities which the two have tried to camouflage through a 'balanced' marriage, and the inevitable apathy that this compromise results in. In their persistent withdrawal from life, the Simpsons are denied any insight into it, though they, particularly Ivy, desire it.

The socially and materially successful Simpsons are proud of the restraint which is their chief accomplishment: "Prudence was a virtue normally present in both of them. What had made their marriage such an exceptionally happy one was its balance." (T.C., p. 198.)

Their relationship is 'kind' and 'considerate' rather than 'sensual', and they are inclined to see themselves as:

> ... two mature individuals who had survived the tests of time, who had agreed from the beginning to depend on their faith in each other rather than the man-concocted fallacies believers bunch together and label Faith. (Ibid., p. 201.)

The apathy of this marriage which Ivy prefers to interpret as 'trust', is evident from the start. Though the setting of this novella is not Sarsaparilla or any of the other Australian suburbs, the inertia of the Simpsons' lives is once again evoked by White through a description of their surroundings. It is not the romantic, Mediterranean Sicily that White presents here, but a dry, dusty land where

> Human or even animal activity hardly belonged, though there were clues to both in the stubble recurring patterns, geometrical to the point where they suggested rites; the neat architecture of a haystack, a slice carved out of its pediment; cow-pats in an olive grove; a hovel teetering against the sky. (Ibid., p. 209.)

A 'languid squalor' is the dominant mood of this Sicilian landscape, which even the soft light of night cannot help but reveal. The Sicily of this story is used to determine the attitude of the characters as is Greece in The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed To Keep Cats.

The barrenness of the countryside finds its counterpart in the Simpsons, who are, if such a thing is possible, even more sterile than the Fazackerleys of A Woman's Hand. In the earlier novella, there are constant dialogues between Evelyn and Harold, on a variety of subjects. In Sicilian Vespers, very few attempts at communication occur between Charles and Ivy, who merely content and assure themselves by the presence of each other. The rare occasions where we do 'hear' them, the conversation centres around Charles's toothache,

or the laundry they have forgotten to collect. It is interesting to notice that in the title story, The Cockatoos, (which immediately follows Sicilian Vespers in the collection), there is a complete breakdown of communication between the Davorens, who have actually not spoken to each other for seven years. The Simpsons do not even answer each other's questions, for

> ... wasn't it a privilege of their kind of marriage to be able to ask the questions for which you neither expect nor require an answer? The better you knew each other the thicker these questions piled up, agreeably, acceptably, passionlessly. And would she [Ivy] imagined, thicker and thicker, till the end. (Ibid., p. 203.)

The irony of the above passage is obvious at once: the Simpsons barely recognise, let alone 'know', each other. Throughout their married life they have succeeded in hiding their essential natures from even themselves. They are both plagued by insecurities which they have tried to counteract by mutual dependence. Charles admits these insecurities to himself:

> What if all the patients who had brought him their forebodings as well as their actual cancers -- what if Ivy were to realize that inside the responsible man there had always lurked this diffident, whimpering boy?
>
> He must concentrate on Ivy the immaculate. A plain woman, she had given him the courage to propose. Infinite trustworthiness as a wife had even inspired in him what passed for faith in himself. It was a fake, however. While he was parading this impersonation of what she and others expected of him, Ivy had never cheated. Or would he recognize it if she were to cheat, when she had never been aware of his true self inside the man she took for granted? (Ibid., p. 199.)

Since the focus of the tale is on Ivy Simpson, we are not afforded an opportunity to know more about the 'true self' of Charles Simpson. We can only surmise that his half-confessed desire to murder Ivy (Ibid., p. 234) indicates a sub-conscious need to be free of the

prison they have created for themselves. However, at no other point in the text, is this idea elaborated upon, for "Only in dreams or half sleep, or spasms of pain, did Charles Simpson experience doubts." (Ibid., p. 234.) The waking, conscious Charles has become completely immune to his half-dead, half-alive condition. There is no other thought for him besides concern for his own toothache.

As far as Ivy is concerned, there is ample evidence in the novella, that the 'real' Ivy is not the deliberate, controlled woman Charles makes her out to be. Whereas Charles only doubts when he is asleep, she questions constantly, but convinces herself of the desirability of her relationship with her husband:

> Standing on the verge of the horrid little modernistic balcony and the baroque nightscape beyond, Ivy Simpson nursed the perfect lifetime relationship. None of the minor stresses had hitherto threatened it. What should have been the major tragedy of childlessness had only increased the kindness with which they treated each other. As far back as their youth they had been considerate rather than sensual lovers. As Father's daughter she was grateful for it. (Ibid., p. 201.)

As in A Woman's Hand, the key to the fragile relationship of the Simpsons lies in the past, particularly in what we come to notice is the deprived childhood of Ivy Simpson. Unlike the other novellas, The Dead Roses and The Night The Prowler, where the protagonist's relationship with her father is seen as potentially good, it is in the estrangement between Ivy and her father, that White locates the failure of her future relationships. Gradually, we see Ivy as the plain daughter of a flamboyant man, whose approval she has always secretly yearned for. Her capacity for love, which her father has denied her, finds expression in her luke-warm affection for her husband:

> If you withheld love it was because a parent's behaviour encourages miserliness in children. Even Mother was greedy. Everything was left unsaid and undone, there was all the more reason for pouring it into Charles. To love my husband: his honest, un-Sicilian eyes. Might never have known reason for nursing, disgust, shame, despair. All all dissolved in love. Or the sober affection which is better than. (Ibid., p. 204.)

Yet, there are clear indications in the novella that, despite her efforts to drown her carnality in the 'kindness' of her marriage, Ivy cannot entirely suppress it. Intensely sexual visions constantly threaten the composure it has taken her years to cultivate. On the drive with the Shacklocks, Ivy is alarmed to find herself visualising: "Imelda's white body spread-eagled in a patch of grass, her fleshy necklaces quite distinct, and still more startling, the black tuft where her thighs forked." (Ibid., p. 210.) The most frightening vision of all is, of course, her hallucinatory nightmare, where she confuses her husband and her father,[10] and visualises Charles trying to put a sword through her stomach.

> What is too precious breaks or spills it is I who spit at Charles Swimson my hus my lover it swings for ever between us a chain hanging from his chin...
> from its chaste scabbard the Arabs brought from Africa the sword is only to expect he has sharpened
> oh why God you will save me Mr. Cutlack there's no other reason for your being between us oh oh Clark save me from Aubrey my frightening husband. (T.C., p. 205.)

The inadequacies of Ivy's relationship with both her father and her husband are evident. What is interesting is that subconsciously she is looking to Clark Shacklock for release and for

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[10]Anthea Scudamore in The Dead Roses also confuses her husband with her father.

satisfaction of her own sexuality. Though it is with Charles that Ivy associates Aubrey in this dream, White hints at similarities between Clark Shacklock and Aubrey as well. They are both flamboyant men; and while one is an artist, the other is an art collector. Clark Shacklock, who is "of the animal kingdom: too compulsive by far" (Ibid., p. 208), is characterised by the same kind of arrogance that distinguishes Aubrey, as we see him through Ivy Simpson's recollections. All her life neglected by Aubrey, who lavishes more attention on Emma, his whippet, Ivy literally 'arranges' to commit adultery with Clark, his prototype.

Many of the women in White's fiction commit adultery for a variety of reasons. Hero Pavaloussi in The Vivisector is torn between her love for her husband, whom she sees as a 'pure' soul, and hence the need to degrade herself because she is not his equal. Amy Parker in The Tree of Man needs the casual affair with the commercial salesman to convince her of her own existence. White's description of the episode in The Tree of Man bears remarkable resemblance to the incident in San Fabrizio in Sicilian Vespers:

> They [Amy and Leo] had gone into that straight bed on which Amy Parker had slept out the sum of her life. She saw intermittently those possessions she had given up to the holocaust. She closed her eyes. The man drew from out of her lovely ribbons of appeased flesh. But when she took his skull and tried to enter it, she could not, but bruised her mouth against the sockets. It was her husband's head. Then she put her tongue, crying, against the mouth. It was as if she had spat into the face of her husband, or still further into the mystery of her husband's God, that she saw by glimpses but could not reach deeper to. So that she was fighting her disgust and crying for her own destruction before she had destroyed, as she must destroy. Long waves

> of exquisite pleasure were carrying her condemned body towards that point.[11]

Ivy's reason for commiting adultery, like Amy's, is her need to convince herself of her own entity. It is also an assertion of the sexuality that she has been denied so far. Yet, like Hero, she is torn between her sexual yearnings and her need to "climb a ladder of prayer." (T.C., p. 239.) Her spiritual aspirations are briefly hinted at through her recollection of a visit to a church with Aubrey, where she leaves behind "something of herself which Aubrey -- nobody could ever touch, but which on the other hand, she might never dare redeem." (Ibid., p. 256.) In this context, the setting of Ivy's adultery is as significant as the act itself.

The blasphemous connotations of this incident indicate a suffering as extreme as any of the others that we have seen. Like Felicity Bannister, who screams: "I fuck you God for holding out on me " (Ibid., p. 104), Ivy registers her protest against the "black-browed vivisector";[12] by her frenzied, Dionysiac union with Clark Shacklock in the side chapel of San Fabrizio. The act represents, simultaneously, two ways of 'redemption' for Ivy. One through her fulfilled sexuality and the other through that quest which unleashes the sexuality in White's characters. Ivy is conscious of this duality even before she enters the church: "She could now face the duomo, and whatever might be in store for her in the way of illumination or damnation." (Ibid., p. 231.) Her attitude to the act itself reveals

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[11] The Tree of Man, pp. 310-11.

[12] The Vivisector, p. 322.

this characterist ambivalence in White:

> At dust level she could smell his [Clark's] words, those of a frightened man. Like two landed fish, they were lunging together, snout bruising snout, on the rucked-up Cosmati paving. She wrapped herself around him, her slimy thighs, the veils of her fins, as it had been planned, seemingly from the beginning, while the enormous tear swelled to overflowing in the glass eye focused on them from the golden dome.
>
> So we float conjoined long after the lights are doused at times it is I who sit astride this giant porpoise at others my fragile bones are supporting an intolerable weight strength comes with degradation it appears the lower you sink the easier to survive while actually floating high expelled into an outer darkness which does not obstruct vision since I have become vision itself gaining height through the sooty masses of leaves above the only slightly abrasive towers and dome I can look down always floating I can see inside the box in which He my Dearly Beloved Husband has thrown off the sheet is rising from amongst the limp grey wrinkles on the yellow bed offering Himself afresh for sacrifice under the extinct acryllic object.[13] (T.C., p. 243.)

Like Amy Parker, the movement of Ivy's consciousness is from grotesque images of intense sensual experience to a vision of my 'Dearly Beloved Husband' who is 'my [Amy's] husband's God' in the earlier passage. Amy despairs of reaching the God, whom she catches glimpses of, and Ivy feels herself 'expelled into an outer darkness' which, though not obstructing her vision, does not take her anywhere in time of her essential quest. In fact, as realisation creeps

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[13]Similar sea imagery is used in The Eye of the Storm, where Elizabeth Hunter identifies herself with the 'skiapod', a mythical marine creature. The imagery is used to convey the greedy sexuality of Elizabeth Hunter. Sea imagery in this novel however, has a redemptive function too. Elizabeth Hunter's experience on the island culminates in the vision.

> Interspersed between the marbled pyramids
> of waves, thousands of sea birds were at rest;
> or the birds would rise and dive, or
> peacefully scrabble at the surface for food. (p. 424.)

into her, her first concern is for Charles and his dinner. The sordidness of the entire episode is conveyed to her by Shacklock's careless comment: "'But it was fine, baby, wasn't it? San Fabrizio -- in any circumstance.'" (Ibid., p. 246.)

Her 'bizarre' Sicilian reaction is how Ivy prefers to think of the incident later. Though she is conscious of her failure both sexually and spiritually, she resigns herself to life with Charles. However, it is not a resignation born out of the acceptance of failure. Rather, it results from the inability to accept suffering. Since Ivy retreats from the trauma of life, her insight into it, the motivating quest of her adultery, is also withheld from her. She has to fall back onto the resources of her 'affectionate', 'considerate' husband, and their 'balanced' life together:

> They [the Simpsons] were silent after that, seated in a continuum, however short or protracted the rest of their life together might be, sorting discoloured snapshots, listening to uneven tape-recordings of each other's voice, briefly touching hands to convey what the average deaf-and-dumb fail to express by other means, occasionally allowing the sheer weight of recollected experience to carry them out of the familiar shallows into the sunless, breathless depths -- when they felt brave enough not to resist. (Ibid., p. 258.)

Starting with the estranged couple in A Woman's Hand, marital discord as a condition increases in intensity in The Cockatoos, culminating in the complete fragmentation of relationships in the title story of this collection. Any affirmations of touch and dialogue, which were at least possible in both A Woman's Hand and Sicilian Vespers, are completely negated by the time we come to the tale, The Cockatoos. The couple in this novella have not spoken or touched

each other for seven years. They communicate through messages scribbled on a pad. The rupture in the relationship is so complete that time in the novella is measured in terms of 'before' and 'after' they "introduced the pad" (T.C., p. 279 ). However, having reached this nearly final, and completely dark statement on marital relationships, the novella almost appears to turn back upon itself, to suggest very briefly the possibilities of reconciliation and other alternatives through its double plot structure.

Structurally, The Cockatoos differs from the other two novellas in this collection. Now, White does not juxtapose two couples but concentrates on a triangle of two women and one man. All three main characters in the story are essentially dead, until a flock of cockatoos "introduces life, and death, into this long-standing deadlock".[14] Into this pattern, another thread is woven: the story of the nine-year old Tim Goodenough, another of White's visionary children, who, unlike the adults, is given the opportunity to apprehend the mystery and essence of things. The final vision of the novella, with its ambiguous implications, is conveyed to us through Tim Goodenough.

In The Cockatoos, the discord and the breakdown of personal relationships is seen at various levels. This is emphasized at the very outset:

> Like most people in the neighbourhood, Mrs. Davoren and Mr. Goodenough had lived there many years without addressing each other more than ritually and in the street; though nobody held anything against anybody else, excepting Figgis, who had been an undertaker, and was still a nark. (T.C., p. 259.)

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[14] Anthony Hassall, p. 6.

The neighbours hardly talk to each other. Miss Le Cornu, who lives in a 'silent' house, cannot remember an occasion when she talked "so much at one go." (Ibid., p. 272.) This is after she has addressed a few sentences to Mick Davoren. Tim Goodenough, who doesn't play with other children in the neighbourhood, and who realises the distinction between 'speaking' and 'saying', despairs of communicating with his parents. This breakdown is, of course, given its primary focus in the relationship of Mick and Olive Davoren, who, because of the death of Olive's 'boodgie', have not, as mentioned earlier, communicated with each other in seven years.

It soon becomes evident that even otherwise the Davorens have little to say to each other. Any recollections of their 'pre-pad' existence does not indicate a strong or even adequate relationship. They are both outsiders, unable to find a secure foothold in life. Mick Davoren's isolation and insecurity is suggested by his tendency to change jobs so often. The only time in the entire novella that we are allowed to catch a glimpse of his inner self, it is this quality that is highlighted:

> he was the boy outside, who stood looking in through this great window to where the company was seated, in knots on gilded chairs, as well as a wider circle round a curved settee, the meeker, sleeker girls all of them in docile white, their harsher elders ablaze with a white fire of diamonds, as they picked at the words they chose to offer in conversation. When a certain elderly lady shrieked, for some secret perhaps, that she was making in public . . . . Then the gentlemen were coming in, laughing too, some of them stumbling, some arguing, others full of ostentatious consideration for their neighbours. While he, the boy standing in the dark the wrong side of this stately window, retreated backwards into the drizzle, all but tumbling over a giant hound that was lying on the lawn pointing her nose at a watery moon. (Ibid., pp. 282-83.)

The 'boy outside' quality of Davoren is emphasized by his 'foreign' Irish background.

Olive, though of better social standing than Mick (whose background is obscure), is no more integrated into her world than he is. We see her as the rather pampered daughter of a middle class family, who set great store by her artistic inclinations and accomplishments. Though her talent is dubious, the life-denying and meaningless nature of her life with Mick Davoren is suggested by the violin she has ceased to play, and which now lies submerged under the linen in her wardrobe. Throughout the novella she appears as a shadowy woman, peering out on the world that ignores her existence and consoling herself for her failure with the vision of the cockatoos. Like other women in these stories, her inability to bear children is a deep wound that bleeds constantly:

> (She had asked to see what they had taken from her -- you couldn't have called it a child. She had even touched it. And wouldn't ever let herself remember . . . . )
> . . . In her case, there was a wound left over, from which all the blood hadn't flowed; some remained to suppurate. When at the secret burial -- she would have died if anyone had seen -- she had cried everything out of her, she thought, at the roots of Mrs. Herbert Stevens. (Ibid., pp. 264-65.)

One cannot talk of Olive's relationship with Mick, because no such thing exists. They are not even Olive and Mick to each other but just an anonymous 'him' or 'her'. The only contact (if it can be called such) that they have is with each other's movements, as they hear them behind the thin partitions of the house.

Olive Davoren's interest in music is shared by the 'other' woman in the novella, Miss Busby Le Cornu, who of the two is the more interesting character. Like Mick, she is an outsider too. She dresses differently from the other women in the neighbourhood and is credited with

eccentricities of manner and behaviour. Unlike Kikitsa Alexiou in The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed To Keep Cats, who desires for the 'efficacy of possession', Miss Le Cornu

> . . . had never felt the need for possessions. What she needed was a habit. Father died too soon to become one. And Mother, her great, her consuming habit, had left her without warning, over a cup of hot milk, the milk skin hanging from her lower lip . . . .
> He [Mick] had become her habit. (Ibid., pp. 273-75.)

Like Beckett's characters who immerse themselves in dull routine as a defense against the helplessness of their existence, Miss Le Cornu uses her habits as a wall between herself and the world. The notion of 'habit' as escape is best conveyed by Beckett in his essay on Proust, where he writes:

> Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightening conductor of existence. Habit is the ballast that chains a dog to his vomit.[15]

Like White, Beckett, in Proust, implies that suffering is preferable to boredom -- indeed, ought to be sought for. Yet, most of Beckett's characters, like Miss Le Cornu and the couples of The Cockatoos, deliberately seek the 'dull inviolability' that immersion in a life of habit guarantees.

What Busby Le Cornu is escaping from is not explicit enough in the novella. Her relationship with Mick Davoren is a casual liaison and her air of inviolability shields her not only against "the exigencies of love", but also "against the attacks of lust":[16]

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[15]Samuel Beckett, Proust (London: Calder and Boyers, 1954), pp. 7-8.

[16]The Night The Prowler, p. 142.

> Busby Le Cornu had only once slept with a man, and that was equally unexpected: he had come to mend the dishwasher. It had not given her great pleasure. There had been another occasion, earlier, but she preferred not to think about, or had forgotten it.
>
> Now, out of deference to Mr. Davoren as well as herself, she did not switch lights on, but lay waiting on her mother's bed. Her body looked long, strong, and white, her breasts spread white and cushiony in glimmers from the street lighting. The fuzz of hair between her thighs -- her 'bush' the dishwasher man had called it -- looked by this same light fathomlessly black. She hoped the Irishman would not become unnerved. As for herself, she was by now nerveless or indifferent. (T.C., p. 274.)

Having depicted the utter sterility of his three main characters, White, it appears, reverses the direction of his story. Reaching this far on the road to complete negation, he turns around and begins to bring his characters back to life. The effect is achieved by the introduction of the herd of cockatoos, whom Anthony Hassall sees as "the Laurentian life-symbols of the story."[17] Though this identification of the symbol is indisputable, it is only a casual interpretation of an otherwise multi-faceted image. The real function of the cockatoos in the novella is difficult to define in exact terms. However, this is not even advisable, for it is through the multi-dimensional implications of this image, the various ambiguities that it presents, that White achieves his particular effects. At every stage the duality of the birds is emphasized by the narrator. As Mick Davoren describes them to Busby:

> "Have you ever seen a mob of wild cockatoos? A bit what you'd call slapdash in flight. But real dazzlers of birds! I'd say heartless, from the way they slash at one another. Kind too when they want to be. They have a kind eye. And still. You see um settun in a tree, and the tree isn't stiller than the cockatoos. (T.C., p. 275.)

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[17] Anthony Hassall, p. 9.

In another section, Olive sees the birds as:

> Clumsy, beautiful creatures! On seeing them, her mouth fell open: their crests flicked like knives threatening intruders; then when the first seeds were cracked, the feathers so gently laid in a yellow wisp along the head. (Ibid., p. 281.)

The vision of the cruel cockatoos, slashing at each other with their knife-like crests, is balanced by the number of cockatoos who die through human hands in the novella. This motif of being both the killer and the victim runs through The Vivisector as well. Hurtle Duffield is described as wielding the knife, but he more than anyone else is the victim of the lust and greed of others in that novel. Numerous animals are killed in White's fiction and, as Peter Beatson suggests, "the butchered animal is an emblem for the universal law of suffering that afflicts man too. In spite of his arrogance, man is the universal victim."[18]

Though the cockatoos are the central image of the novella, White's main interest appears to be in the responses that the birds evoke from his characters. All three characters begin to look on the the herd of birds as compensations for what they lack in actual life. For Olive, they represent the children she has never had. On first learning of the arrival of the birds, she dreams of "One of the birds . . . pecking at her womb. He rejected it as though finding a husk." (T.C., p. 279.) Her concern for the birds is almost maternal. She feeds them, puts water out for them and generally considers them her own

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[18]Peter Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala, p. 152. White makes use of this idea most consistently in The Vivisector, where the drowning of the cats, which is discussed elsewhere in this thesis, has the same function.

property, only to be shared with Mick Davoren, who needs them as much as she does. In fact, with the arrival of the birds, we gradually see the Davorens coming to life. For the first time in years, Olive Davoren, hesitantly plays her violin:

> By the time she opened the glass doors within sight and hearing of the cockatoos, she was as brittle as the violin she had not touched in years. Which she began to tinker with, and tune. Fearfully. What if some human being caught sight of her from the street? Her skin grew glossy with anxiety.
>
> She was playing, though: what she remembered of what she had found most difficult. It issued thin and angular out of the disused violin. It sounded yellow. But grave and honest. The composer was collaborating with her. And cockatoos. (Ibid., pp. 286-87.)

Busby Le Cornu also celebrates the arrival of the cockatoos with music. As she plays them a record, she crouches "over what might have been her own lament for a real passion she had never quite experienced." (Ibid., p. 287.) This lament is common to most of the characters in the tales that make up The Cockatoos. The birds force Miss Le Cornu to the realisation of the necessity of "the touch of skin." (Ibid., p. 276.) It is as a result of the birds that she has her first real sexual experience with Mick Davoren, and it is because of the birds, too, that the estrangement between them occurs.

This estrangement is paralleled by overtures of intimacy between the Davorens themselves. The almost overnight disappearance of the birds creates a feeling of despair in both, and forces them to talk to each other. The love that Olive fears has been "strangled -- or worse, deformed, in both" (Ibid., p. 291 ), begins to make its appearance through inarticulate gestures. Their moment of harmony magnificently coincides with the return of the cockatoos:

> And the sky was awash with cockatoos returning, settling on the gumtrees which grew in the garden. If silent, the birds might have merged with the tree, but they sat there ruffling, snapping at twigs, screeching -- cajoling, it sounded; one of them almost succeeded in forming a word. (Ibid., p. 292.)

Like the birds, the Davorens have 'almost succeeded in forming a word.'

> If Davorens did not comment it was because they had discovered in this other silence the art of speech. Once he touched the back of one of her hands with an index finger, pointing out nothing they didn't already share. She hardly breathed for fear her love might make him fearful of being possessed; she must try to make it look nothing more than gratitude. (Ibid., pp. 292-93.)

However, this moment of harmony cannot be sustained, as any positive reconciliation or affirmation is outside the scope of the novella. Davoren is killed in trying to save the cockatoos from Figgis, the undertaker. Though with his death two relationships in the tale come to an end, the possibility of a third one evolving is held out. The two women, Olive and Busby, come together over Davoren's dead body and "unavoidably stroke each other's hands" (Ibid., p. 294 ). Though within the tale they barely exchange polite niceties, each desires to know the other and they secretly hold imaginary conversations with each other.

This reversal at the end and the possibilities that it suggests are also evoked in the sub-plot of this novella. Tim Goodenough, the protagonist of this sub-plot, is at the tender age of nine at a stage of awareness and perception far beyond the adults in the novella. He is the 'elect' here, conveying attitudes different from those exposed in the main story. The herd of cockatoos figures prominently for him too, but whereas the adults need the actual presence of the birds to 'awaken' them, Tim, already in touch with the 'mystery of unity', can conjure them in his imagination:

> Of course any cockatoo would have flown to roost by now, but he didn't need one. He could make the whole mob spread their wings, exposing that faint shadow of yellow, claws clenched tight and black as they veered against the netted sky, then flew screeching past the solid holm-oaks and skeleton pines into space. (Ibid., p. 270.)

The actual presence of the birds is unnecessary, because:

> he knew what would be going on behind cockatoo eyes; he knew about the wisps of yellow feather the books showed cockatoos as wearing as good as if he had touched these tufts, like people he brushed up against, simply to find out about them, and discovered he already knew. (Ibid., p. 283.)

Like Amy Parker and her grandson in The Tree of Man, Tim is one of the initiates of "the mysticism of objects".[19] His museum of rat skulls and Ethiopian coins bears evidence to this. Like Amy Parker's grandson, he apprehends the mystery of a piece of coloured glass. Tim's adventure in the park,[20] ostensibly to see how brave he is, is essentially a voyage of discovery about himself. Like the young boy in The Tree of Man who discovers an unborn poem inside him, Tim on emerging from the park feels: "If he hadn't gone in, he might never have discovered what was waiting to burst out of him". (T.C., p. 304.)

In The Tree of Man, White writes: "It is not natural that emptiness shall prevail, it will fill eventually, whether with water, or children, or dust, or spirit."[21] Though White makes no such proclamations here, not even of the kind that occur at the end of the short

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[19] The Tree of Man, p. 407.

[20] The exact details of Tim's adventures are remarkably similar to Felicity's experience in the park in The Night The Prowler.

[21] The Tree of Man, p. 431.

story "Down at the Dump" in The Burnt Ones, we can almost visualise Tim Goodenough beginning to fill the emptiness of the spirit that prevails throughout The Cockatoos.

## Epilogue

Originally, this epilogue was intended to be a short discussion of the analogues between Patrick White's shorter fiction and his longer works. However, since the major connections between the novellas and the novels have been established in the body of this thesis, I do not consider it necessary to go over ground that has already been covered. I should rather like to consider, very briefly, the various modes of suffering that a study of these seven novellas has revealed.

We have noticed White's preoccupation with the suffering of lonely, isolated women in Chapter One. Anthea Scudamore, Felicity Bannister, and Miss Docker, though different in age and from different backgrounds, share the common affliction of loneliness in a world that thwarts at every stage their potential and desire for both affection and understanding. All three adopt different defenses and means of coping with their predicament, but are gradually forced to an awareness of their failure. Though this awareness is as painful as the suffering that leads up to it, it promises hope of future redemption. In Dead Roses, The Night The Prowler, A Cheery Soul, and The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats, other characters besides the protagonists also suffer. Yet, what distinguishes Anthea, Felicity, Miss Docker and Kikitsa is both their capacity to suffer and their acceptance of pain as a part of the nature of life.

Though these 'elect' characters of White appear in the novellas discussed in Chapter Two as well, the focus there is on 'ordinary' individuals and not those who have been gifted with the ability to see 'inwards'. The married couples of White's later novellas suffer as intensely as the women of the ones discussed earlier. But instead of

being 'accepted', through the cultivation of social graces and attitudes, their suffering is pushed back into the subconscious mind. Though the pain does occasionally surface in the form of hallucinatory visions or nightmares (as is the case with A Woman's Hand, Sicilian Vespers and The Cockatoos), it is as quickly repressed, so that 'normal married life' can continue. Both Evelyn Fazackerley and Ivy Simpson as well as Busby Le Cornu are aware of the deceptions of a lifetime, but the habit is too strong to be broken. They will continue to lead their hollow lives until the end.

The focus of this exploratory study has been on the portrayal of suffering in Patrick White's novellas -- almost to the exclusion of other things. However, to say that the world of White's fiction is totally bleak and painful would be a misinterpretation and a misrepresentation. There is joy and happiness in White too -- as also a great deal of laughter and humour. Possibilities of affirmative resolutions also exist, as White portrays these through Stan Parker and Hurtle Duffield and Theodora Goodman. Yet, what his characters have to learn is to reconcile themselves to both facets of life. For only then is redemption possible.

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