STILL LIFE:
THE LIFE OF THINGS IN THE FICTION OF PATRICK WHITE

By

SUSAN JANE WHALEY

M.A., University of Windsor, 1979

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming

to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

February 1987

32

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date April 22, 1987

ABSTRACT

"Still Life" argues that Patrick White's fiction reveals objects in surprising, unexpected attitudes so as to challenge the process by which the mind usually connects with the world around it. In particular, White's novels disrupt readers' tacit assumptions about the lethargic nature of substance; this thesis traces how his fiction reaches beyond familiar linguistic and stylistic forms in order to reinvent humanity's generally passive perception of reality.

The first chapter outlines the historical context of ideas about the "object," tracing their development from the Bible through literary movements such as romanticism, symbolism, surrealism and modernism. Further, the chapter considers the nature of language and the relation of object to word in order to distinguish between the usual symbolic use made of objects in literature and White's treatment of things as discrete, palpable entities. The second chapter focuses on White's first three published novels--Happy Valley (1939), The Living and the Dead (1941) and The Aunt's Story (1948)--as steps in his novelistic growth. Chapters Three, Four and Five examine respectively The Tree of Man (1955), The Solid Mandala (1966) and The Eye of the Storm (1973); these novels represent successive stages of White's career and exemplify his different formal and stylistic techniques. White's innovations demand a new manner of reading; therefore, each

novel is discussed in terms of objects which reflect the shapes of the works themselves: "tree" defines the structure and style of Tree of Man, "house" inspires Solid Mandala and "body" shapes Eye of the Storm. Reading White's novels in terms of structural analogues not only illuminates his methodology, but also clarifies his distinction between objective and subjective ways of understanding the world. Further, these chapters also refute critics' arguments that White's objects are merely victims of his overambitious use of personification and pathetic fallacy, or that they are the result of his dabbling in mysticism.

"Still Life" concludes by showing how Patrick White's novels sequentially break down assumptions about reality and appearance until the reality of language itself falters. The author restores mystery to things by relocating the possibility of the extraordinary within the narrow, prescribed confines of the ordinary. White succeeds in changing readers' notions about the nature of reality by disrupting the habitual process by which they apprehend the world of things.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY TO TITLES

The following abbreviations are used to identify quotations from Patrick White's works:

HV - Happy Valley (1939)

TLATD - The Living and the Dead (1941)

TAS - The Aunt's Story (1948)

TTOM - The Tree of Man (1955)

V - Voss (1957)

RITC - Riders in the Chariot (1961)

TSM - The Solid Mandala (1966)

TEOTS - The Eye of the Storm (1973)

AFOL - A Fringe of Leaves (1976)

FITG - Flaws in the Glass (1981)

Preface and Acknowledgements

I confront an obvious irony in choosing to write a thesis on the works of Patrick White. He has made no secret of his scorn for vulturous academics and too-dry, too-intellectual graduate students. If I betray my better instincts and his it is because he himself places hope for future generations in the reading and understanding of his books. I therefore offer a new reading of his novels, one arising out of my deep respect and sympathy for White's writerly predicament.

I lovingly dedicate this work to my husband Tom, whose unfailing patience and encouragement helped me over many a hurdle. I would also like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Guy Fournier, Professor of French Language and Literature at the University of Windsor, who first showed me la nature morte des choses. My deep appreciation also to Professors William H. New and Diana Brydon at the University of British Columbia for their direction and inspiration. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to L.T., to E.W.S. and to Sam, all of whom helped me find my way.

I

Usually things are so concealed by the use made of them that to see them for an instant gives us the sensation of knowing the secret of the Universe. In a word, to cause things to be seen would be equivalent to proving the existence of the Universe, to knowing a supreme secret.
--René Magritte, Secret Affinities: Words and Images

reality . . . impenetrable beyond the structure of a grammar.
--Zulfikar Ghose, The Fiction of Reality

1.

Introduction

> What is dull is not the universe but the mental operations prescribed for us in observing it.
> --Northrop Frye, The Great Code

Patrick White is a difficult, idiosyncratic writer, and, frankly, his novels are not for everyone. White writes for a special audience; his style is provocative and demanding, not easily penetrable. My purpose is to make him a more accessible, less off-putting author because I believe he has important things to contribute to the way we live our lives. White is a significant novelist: this thesis charts the evolution of a method of reading his works that is appropriate to his complex style.

We connect with the world mostly through processes of the mind. Patrick White short-circuits this intervention of the mind in the relation between self and world: he shapes things in order to re-shape the process by which we connect with them. White presumes that if he can get us to perceive objects differently, we will become more observant of and sensitive to the world we occupy, less estranged from it and more alert to differences and similarities between other things and us. In short, White proposes nothing less than a revolution in the way we inhabit the world. I propose to show that he accomplishes this by evolving a style which turns increasingly from symbolism to fragmentation and dislocation

in order to jolt us into a new way of reading not only the novel, but also the world around us. This new manner of reading is neither hermeneutic nor analytical but rather something I would label holistic. That is, White's style elicits a response from all of a reader's faculties: visceral, imaginative and intellectual. Reading White's fiction demands more than merely cerebral presence from the reader.

White's long career represents a process of discovery in which a few novels in particular stand out as landmarks. There is a progress of imagery from the early, uninspired novels like Happy Valley (1939) and The Living and the Dead (1941) to new territory for the object in The Aunt's Story (1948), The Tree of Man (1955), The Solid Mandala (1966) and The Eye of the Storm (1973). In order to trace the emergence of White the realist symbolist I first explore the historical origins of aesthetic interest in the object. Charting the evolution of the object necessarily touches upon related literary and philosophical movements such as realism, symbolism, surrealism and phenomenology. But White's work resists easy categorization; therefore I neither expect nor assume that he writes out of any particular philosophical or literary tradition. Still, these movements provide us with an historical context out of which to approach White's fiction.

It is neither White's nor my purpose to debate the existence of reality, but rather to explore the process by which language approaches and transforms the real, thereby

shaping our response to it. For the purposes of this study I define the real as that which we generally acknowledge as existing. Furthermore, reality is multi-layered: there is the real we encounter in day-to-day life, which is not to be confused with the reality presented in works of fiction. These two separate worlds overlap in the sense that each depends upon our agreeing to the other's reality. Both text and contents, then, are real and indisputable by virtue of the fact they exist and can be perceived (if not known).

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

In White's fiction the world is always other, and its otherness is always respected. At the same time, White tends to view things in a human context, not because he is given to romantic anthropomorphising of objects, but rather because he wants to emphasize that connection does exist between observer and observed. White does not question the existence of reality; rather, he questions our role as witnesses to and participants in it. We either remain passive and remote from it all, or we aspire to recreate it.

Vision is but one of our senses and, like all physical attributes, remains capable of error or inefficiency. White's exploitation of all five senses challenges us to achieve insight instead of mere physical apprehension of objects. After all, sight is a function of the brain, not of the eyes;

what happens during this inevitable, automatic transformation of objects into language is fraught with peril for both watcher and watched. Language interferes in the relation of subject to object; words, that is, in all their abundant authority, obscure perception, making that process difficult and even redundant. Michel Foucault, among others, goes so far as to say that we can only ever know the projections of our language, not the referents themselves. White intuitively understands this, though he never states it. He leaves it to characters like Mary Hare in Riders in the Chariot (1961) to show us the gap twixt the cup and the lip.

When wonder-ful, inexhaustible object meets arbitrary, derivative language--as happens continuously in the mind--the former surrenders potency to the latter. White strives to restore vitality to things: they are themselves so expressive that language sometimes seems superfluous. Nevertheless, White's ornate--at times even baroque--style attempts to draw objects and words together into new possibilities of meaning:

> The only way of being a demiurge is to fashion a material world out of the one already on hand, not allusively but close-up, so much so that things the words denote seem right on top of the words, on top of the reader too. The ideal is to create a complex verbal world that has as much presence, as much apparent physical bulk, as the world around it.[1]

Language should aspire to re-present reality, thereby forestalling the reader's expectation of mimesis. White's

intense, poetic prose encourages his audience to rediscover the ore- in the ordinary.

White sticks to a sort of psychological realism in his fiction: what his characters bring to their perceptions is at least as important as what they perceive. Furthermore, he adheres to what littérateurs call the "coherence theory" of realism, which holds that the external world can be understood by intuition or insight and which requires emotional language and a subjective point of view for its expression. The Mary Hares and Theodora Goodmans of White's fictional world bring ample imagination and insight to bear not only on that world but also on themselves--that is to say, on their own minds. Theirs is an innate tendency to phenomenologize, although neither they nor White would consciously admit to such highfalutin designs.

Without ever leaving the comfortable realm of realism, White manages to intoxicate his readers with the magic and mystery of things. It's not that objects perform supernatural acts in his fiction, or even strange ones: it's only that they make us gasp from time to time just because they appear in an uncommon light. Patrick White is a connoisseur of the possibilities of things. He recognizes the gap between the world and its representation in language; so, rather than being satisfied to evoke only the appearance of things or their cerebral or abstract counterparts, he strives to present palpable, significant objects. After all, the world is made

up not of words but of things. In short, Patrick White attempts the impossible. He cultivates the inherent poetry and mystery of the object, opening it up to question and scrutiny, reassuring us all the while that the best remedy for uncertainty or ambiguity is none at all.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

We value Patrick White's work because he faces the grand questions about life in unsettling ways. White articulates our own fears and uncertainties in terms of familiar dichotomies such as good and evil, matter and spirit, essence and existence. But what makes White unique as a writer is how he resolves them. It is objects which unite these disparities and overcome the distances in his fiction. Things live on their own terms as phenomena rooted solidly in the mundane, but also as material manifestations of another world. This is not to say that Whitean things partake of the mystical or the transcendental, nor that they are simply victims of his overambitious use of pathetic fallacy or personification. He writes life into the habitual, leaving it fresh and vital and slipping the rug from beneath our ready reliance on what passes for real. His treatment of the inanimate shatters logic; it calls for a revised understanding of the world we assume we know.

Why exalt the object? Because one of this world's

greatest tragedies is that it lacks mystery: it has ceased to provide adequate food for the questing soul. A thing of nature or of man remains a given; it is there, simply--an open invitation. White pauses repeatedly before objects: he often slows the camera's sweep to focus upon a wrist, a hat, an ant. Thus magnified and scrutinized, the thing assumes a prominence proportionate to that struggle engaging the major characters. Clues to the vulnerable, vital now reside in objects made or grown: things are special because incorrupt and original. They represent possibility in a world where all available paths seem to have been travelled.

White suspects materialism. Characters in his fiction who accumulate things for the sake of possession end up impoverished by them. White has identified a cult of the object in which having is all. While wanted, the thing glows with all the radiance of our desire; once acquired, it loses its urgency. As Nadine Gordimer writes in Burger's Daughter: "The act of acquisition. You have to acquire a yacht to escape it."[2] White is out to vindicate the object, to restore to it its native mystery and its potential to threaten or to heal. Surrounded by things of nature, of which we remain more or less suspicious, we heap about us objects of our own design for protection and comfort. If we trust these latter, it is because we assume control over them. White points repeatedly to our naïveté: things do not exist merely to mirror us in the midst of our plenty. He wonders whether they define us or we

them.

We do not see objects; if some thing happens to fall within our line of vision we generally gloss over it, mentally ticking off its name, perhaps, but hardly noticing it individually. Unless, of course, some unusual aspect about the encounter jars the optic nerve. A hammer in the refrigerator or an armchair in the middle of the freeway: remove even the most banal of objects from the flow of daily life and it becomes unquestionably other, unforgivably alien. Patrick White constantly challenges the reader's tacit belief in the lethargic nature of substance.

Even if we were able to constantly renew the aspect of objects around us, we would never succeed in seeing the same object twice. Mankind, the great symbolizer, is incapable of perceiving an object nakedly: we view the world in terms of symbols. An object, however physical, ultimately becomes a mental construct, an image of itself. Therefore, two people viewing the same object will always perceive something different. Not only will they never see the object in its entirety (there is always another, and then another, side which escapes detection), but they will take away pictures of the thing which differ according to colour, texture, and shape, to name but a few variables. Mostly they will be tempted to label the object in terms of things already known or formerly perceived.

Objects suffer from an accumulation of tarnished

perception. As does language. Words, however, are not supposed to be the objects they represent, just as language is not supposed to be life. Words signify objects and are themselves objects, even artifacts, but is the reverse true? While employing words to represent things (as he is constrained to do), White disrupts the inveterate reciprocity between them. He frees language and its referents from each other and from their collective past. An umbrella or a mouldy bowl of mutton fat in a novel by Patrick White leads a life of its own. To discover in what that life consists is to expand our own awareness. So much of life remains unknowable to us; so much that we ignore is in fact apprehensible. Strip away the film of the familiar and novelty pulses forth.

Such an upheaval in the world of the familiar requires language equally original. White's style defies the rational, fractures syntax and mangles metaphors in turn. Call it ornate or inflated or self-indulgent prose: it is above all a language of conflict, an uncanny, disruptive way with words. Language is all any of us have to work with, a fact of which White confesses himself painfully aware. It has a history and, presumably, a future, hence both limiting and emancipating humanity's creative efforts. Literary works knot the untenable present, providing the necessary hinge between the tenses. They keep language new by defying a well picked-over linguistic inheritance. Patrick White's novels embody his resentment of the common store. His fiction records this

lifelong struggle with and journey through a hopelessly banal language to a personal dialect commensurate to his vision.

White's nouns stand out in particular: many blazon forth as objects of wonder. More than just nouns, images or symbols, however, those nouns which inhabit White's literary space are weighty, dense, real. As far as is fictively possible, a Whitean tree is a veritable tree; moreover, it conjures the essence of treeness. Feel the colour of the foliage, taste the texture of the bark; they are other than what we think we know. Experiencing the tree is necessary: it is an object far greater than the sum of our senses can reveal. Tree follows an inner logic unknown to us, and stands at the portal to a side of being not normally perceived by us. Not that this dimension is so hidden or impervious, not that it is other-worldly or unreal. No: the Whitean object strives to show itself to us as something known but new. White's language demonstrates in time-lapse style what habit and hurry have deprived us of.

Things are represented mostly by language because there is nothing else except pictures or symbols, themselves another kind of language. In particular, the word-thing connection needs exploring. The way Patrick White uses objects in his fiction calls into question the relation between signifier and signified. Objects are handled differently in different novels; further, their usage sometimes changes within a particular novel. Symbols dominate <u>The Living and the Dead</u>,

for example: objects used as such always refer to something other than themselves. In The Tree of Man, by contrast, for many words their meaning is their whole content. White questions, for instance, whether words are about things: that is, are they the things themselves ( ceci n'est pas une pipe) or is their obvious meaning their whole content? Are meaning and content the same? Does a word mean or does it simply exist? We can probably agree that while a word is an object, a word is not the same as the object to which it refers. Thus, t r e e is not  . By  I mean an existing tree, in a forest, say, which probably looks much different from this one. A gap exists between the two proportionate to that leap from the intellect to the senses. The sensory perception and identification of the perceived come first, before the intellectual naming of it. The distance between perceiver and perceived can never be overcome but it can be diminished if the word-thing connection is revitalized. Once on new linguistic terms the individual can approach the object as part of the same world. People and things reconcile, as do things with other things.

Despite their aversion to categorization, I propose to read objects in White's fiction in terms of the following scheme: 'body,' 'river/tree' and 'house' correspond roughly to three major structures which I believe shape White's novels. These rough-hewn categories also overlap to a large extent: for example, certain 'body' characteristics also inform

'house' and 'river/tree,' thus supporting White's belief in the essential unity and interrelatedness of matter. Things are different and the same, simple and ambiguous all at once.

The Whitean object raises puzzling issues which I propose to confront in terms of the three analogues suggested above. 'Body,' 'river/tree' and 'house' and their correspondent families will afford ample opportunity to explore objects in terms of the elements, the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, the temporal and spatial, and the natural and artificial. Obvious differences and definitions will begin to blur and recede, because no single thing will stay put within any given category. For instance, objects like the rose in The Aunt's Story, rich as it is in allusions, I would include first in the 'river/tree' group because of its obvious, vegetable qualities. But the rose also embodies a kind of mandala, that most persistent of Whitean designs. Since body too, in quaternary fashion partakes of certain mandalic characteristics, rose and body could on those grounds also share the same category. Further, the hard-working rose illustrates how it is that certain objects are able to utterly transcend a merely symbolic function.

It is relevant to a poetics of White's space to explore things in terms of their symbolic weight and density of impact, and to address the following questions. How is it that objects decidedly dense, substantial and concrete are also not? What significance should be accorded certain signal

objects like table, house, mandala, rose and stone? How can their qualities change so, not only from novel to novel but during the course of each novel? Do things manifest open or closed form, and does this quality reflect the kind of open form White tends to choose for his fictions? How do things resist or complement character and White's thematic concerns? Further, does White's mania for the love of the most unnoticeable of things affect his style: that is, how does sentence structure fare in this upheaval amongst nouns and verbs, subjects and objects? Is White working towards a phenomenology of the object? Finally, is his space habitable or not? It is in terms of these issues that I explore and assess the life of the object in White's fiction.

Finally, the words 'thing' and 'object' are not interchangeable, though I tend to use them so. 'Thing' immediately sounds more general, less concrete, than 'object.' Both prove appropriately vague words when imagination fails to provide something more informative. A glance down the list of usages for each in the OED reveals nuances not habitually associated with each word. 'Thing,' for example, can mean that with which one is concerned, a doing or event, a saying or opinion. It can be anything or something that is incapable of being particularized--an entity of any kind or an attribute thereof. A thing exists individually as an object (there's that word) of perception; furthermore, it is that which is signified, as distinguished from the word, symbol or idea by which it is

represented. The OED specifies a thing as a being without life or consciousness: an inanimate object, a material substance (tautologies abound) or some article occupying space. 'Object,' on the other hand, can connote obstacle or hindrance, whence its use as a verb. The noun signifies some material thing presented to the eyes or other sense, which can excite particular emotions. Objects receive actions, thoughts or feelings; they represent purpose, or the end to which effort is directed. An object is something external to the mind: the non-ego as opposed to the ego. 'Object' is also a part of speech. Finally, the OED lists 'object-soul,' a phrase used to describe a soul believed to animate a material object. Obviously Patrick White is not the first writer to suspect life in things.

2.

Object: History

> Stoans want to be lissent to. Them big brown stoans in the formers feal they want to stan up and talk like men. Some times yowl see them lying on the groun with ther humps and hollers theywl say to you, Sit a wyl and res easy why dont you. Then when youre sitting on them theywl talk and theywl tel if you lissen. Theywl tel whats in them but you wont hear nothing what theyre saying without you go as fas as the stoan. You myt think a stoan is slow thats becaws you wont see it moving. Wont see it walking a roun. That dont mean its slow tho. There are the many cools of Addom which they are the party cools of stoan. Moving in ther millyings which is the girt dants of the every thing its the fastes thing there is it keaps the stilness going. Reason you wont see it move its so far a way in to the stoan. If you cud fly way way up like a saddelite bird over the sea and you lookit down you wunt see the waves moving youwd see them change 1 way to a nother only you wunt see them moving youwd be too far a way. You wunt see nothing only a changing stilness. Its the same with a stoan.
> --Russell Hoban, Riddley Walker

The Bible, itself an edited compilation of a variety of ancient myths and stories, has provided an imaginative framework for most of Western literature through the ages. Northrop Frye, in his The Great Code: The Bible and Literature, sees literate cultures as having "completed a gigantic cycle of language from Homer's time, where the word evokes the thing, to our own day, where the thing evokes the

word, and [we] are now about to go around the cycle again, as we seem now to be confronted once again with an energy common to subject and object which can be expressed verbally only through some form of metaphor."[3] He traces the evolution of language, with the help of Vico, from the beginnings of the written word. Briefly, they identify three ages in the cycle: a mythical age of gods in which the poetic (also metaphoric, hieroglyphic) type of language prevailed, an heroic age of aristocracy in which the heroic (also metonymic, hieratic) type of language dominated, and an age of the people in which the vulgar (simile-prone, demotic, descriptive) type of language was foremost. Frye goes on to discuss the Bible as a typology of the second phase of language. But what emerges as Frye delves deeper into the differences between these linguistic ages is the growing distance between words and things.

In pre-Biblical cultures words contained magic. "In this period there is relatively little emphasis on a clear separation of subject and object: the emphasis falls rather on the feeling that subject and object are linked by a common power or energy."[4] For poets such as Homer words were concrete and abstract concepts like time, space and soul proved very physical because connected with bodily functions or with objects. His was the language of immanence. Plato's writings marked the beginning of the second phase of more individualized language where words were the outward

expression of the inner self. "Subject and object are becoming more consistently separated, and 'reflection,' with its overtones of looking into a mirror, moves into the verbal foreground."[5] Intellect and the emotions parted company and abstraction became possible. Expression thus moved from the metaphorical, this-'equals'-that identification of mankind with nature to the metonymic this-'stands-for'-that where words imitated a reality outside them. Bacon and Locke initiated the third phase of language in the sixteenth century. "Here we start with a clear separation of subject and object, in which the subject exposes itself, in sense experience, to the impact of an objective world. The objective world is the order of nature; thinking or reflection follows the suggestions of sense experience, and words are the servomechanisms of reflection."[6] Language became mainly descriptive, its main figure the simile. Frye sees in this present age of language a return to the direct relation between nature and words. But in the meantime mythological space and time have ceded to scientific space and time; the distinguishing between illusion and reality is problematic for us. Copernicus, Darwin and Einstein, among others, disproved our delusions and ended up creating an observed object out of the observer. There is thus no longer so distinct a separation between object and subject.

Focusing directly upon the Bible, Frye proposes that its primary intention is not literary but historical. Curiously,

its controlling mode of expression is metaphorical and poetic by virtue of the fact that "all language is permeated by metaphor simply because words are juxtaposed."[7] One aspect of metaphor is metamorphosis, and the Bible shows no exception to this. The whole thrust of the Bible is towards

> a future metamorphosis of nature in an upward direction, when it will gain the power of articulateness instead of losing it: For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (Isaiah 55: 12)[8]

Whereas in the beginning the Word was Creation--God spoke and it was so--as book succeeds book language relies increasingly on metaphor and thus upon the distinction between subject and object. But from the psalmist to the preacher to Christ, all contributors to the Bible sing the praises of creation. Simple things like bread and stones also rejoice, clap hands and sing.

According to Frye the New Testament writers used the language of transcendence almost exclusively in order to support the idea of a new world where there would be no death. The body is proclaimed the temple of the Lord more than once, people the living stones of the Church of God, trees and water equated with life. Frye posits that this apocalyptic vision "presents us with a world in which there is only one knower, for whom there is nothing outside of or objective to that

knower, hence nothing dead or insensible."[9] He sees in the Bible an "expanding of vision through language,"[10] especially in books like Revelation. Much later the poet Blake inverts this traditional, biblical form of the trope to "a metaphor of particularity"[11] that enables him "To see the world in a grain of sand." Christian mystics in the Middle Ages are known to have made common things the object of religious contemplation. Alchemy, the transforming of the stuff of the earth into precious goods, was also practised, and the notion that hereafter nothing would die but only be transformed gained ascendency.

Other religions like Zen Buddhism which rely upon visionary experience have long held with the notion of interpenetration, where each thing partakes of both the individual and the Universal, where time and space are annihilated and where every thing in the world shines by its own light. I see much of Zen philosophy as remarkably in tune with Patrick White's elevation of things and with his aversion to language and his distrust of the rational.

> Zen abhors words and concepts, and reasoning based on them. We have been misled from the first rising of consciousness to resort too much to ratiocination for the prehension of Reality. We tend to regard ideas and words as facts in themselves, and this way of thinking has entered deeply into the constitution of our consciousness. We now imagine that when we have ideas and words we have all that can be said of our

> experience of Reality. This means that we take words for Reality itself and neglect experience to reach what really constitutes our inmost experience.[12]

Zen Buddhism strives towards immediacy of experience and intuitive apprehension, and proclaims the unity and totality of all things. It teaches that matter is animated, the source of revelation, and that mankind must purge itself of its propensity for antithetical, bifurcating thought in order to grasp this dynamism. No more division between subject and object: seer and seen are identical and all is pure experience. Individual objects represent not only the totality of Reality, but its infinity as well. For this reason objects are to be marvelled at and venerated, but they are not to be clung to.

> Buddha found that the cause of suffering in this life is attachment. We get attached to things; not just to things but to things as if they permanently existed. To get rid of this attachment, the most practical method is to deny the substantiality of individual entities, that is, ego substance.[13]

Zen teaches that because everything changes, all is therefore subject to death and decomposition. What appears negative, however, leads to higher affirmation, and to perfect self-forgetting. Zen Buddhism denies that it relies upon mystical experience, calling itself instead a radical form of realism. We shall see with respect to the modern history of the object

that artists have absorbed and echoed biblical and zen mythology to some degree. They are both our common inheritance, conditioning much of our culture without our scarcely recognizing it.

Ordinary things experienced an artistic and literary revival about two centuries ago. Still life paintings had always enjoyed enormous popularity: flowers, wine goblets, fruits and cheese were reproduced to photographic precision by countless European artists. Objects were juxtaposed in endless combinations for contrast in shape, colour, and texture. Exact replication seemed to be the purpose of these exercises. Usually those things depicted were caught at the height of perfection: such lustrous grapes, vibrant roses and glistening drink appealed to the senses certainly, but intellectually they did not hold us. Still life portraits ultimately deceived: they captured life at its best, arresting its capacity for change. Still life meant death, 'nature morte.' Unless some human context appeared to inject vitality into the scene--an extinguished candle, say, or a partially peeled orange--still lifes seemed superficial at best. Still, they did demonstrate that artists thought objects from everyday life worthy of notice. The English Romantic and the French Symbolist poets took up that tradition.

As the prominent literary movement of the nineteenth century, Romanticism celebrated the triumph of imagination

over reason and realism. Artifacts such as Greek urns, nature in the form of wildflowers, birds and mountains stimulated the romantic imagination and conjured up reams of associated ideas. The poetic effusions of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats were like homages to the object, and to its ability to open up vistas of feeling in them. Whereas Realism found its values in the actual, Romanticism used the natural or the commonplace as a springboard to the ideal, even to God. However, it was always the individual, as opposed to the object, that was at the centre of art.

William Wordsworth in particular focused attention upon simple objects and called for a correspondingly everyday language with which to articulate them. In his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth proposed a literary style "whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect," choosing to write about humble, rustic people "because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived."[14] This renewal of relations between people and the object world was recognized by Samuel Taylor Coleridge as an attempt

> to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of

> the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not. . . .[15]

Coleridge went on to praise the perfect truth in Wordsworth's depiction of things:

> Like the moisture or the polish on a pebble, genius neither distorts nor false-colours its objects; but on the contrary brings out many a vein and many a tint, which escapes the eye of common observation, thus raising to the rank of gems what had been often kicked away by the hurrying foot of the traveller on the dusty high road of custom. . . .[16]

But the Romantics practised self-absorbed writing which, while highlighting those ordinarily unnoticed features of things, showing them glistening with life, mainly used them as reflections of themselves. "To A Butterfly" was not so much an ode to a particular member of the lepidoptera as it was an imaginary journey back to the poet's childhood. Wordsworth simply explored the essence of butterfly-ness in order to more poignantly lament the passage of youth.

Coleridge disagreed in part with Wordsworth about the necessity to employ common language. Humility was not exactly the point, according to Coleridge, but he did agree that language was vibrant: the meaning of a word included "not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls. For language is framed to convey not the object alone, but likewise the character, mood, and intentions

of the person who is representing it."[17] He thus expanded the equation between word and thing to include that creative cooperation between the mind, the eye and the object perceived. Things were only as alive as the imagination and the language used to describe them. According to Shelley: "All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient."[18] The Romantic legacy was the vision of a unified world, where there was a correspondence between all things, as well as between words and things, and, finally, between individuals and the object world. The Romantic poets championed the object as a key to their own state of mind, as well as to the kingdom of the ideal. Objects linked persons with themselves and with God.

The late nineteenth century saw French Symbolist poets such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé continuing the romantic reaction against realism by evolving complicated and personal symbol systems in an effort to concretize fleeting emotional experiences. The object was exalted, again, not for itself, but as symbol of the poet's ineffable feelings. The object as symbol inspired generations of poets. William York Tindall described the symbol as a visible sign of something invisible, the outward sign of an inward state: he defined the literary symbol as "a thing made by the shaping imagination to body forth an unknown airy nothing."[19] The Symbolist poets used concrete images as symbols in order to represent a world of ideal forms, for which this material world was but a

mask. For them, the other, transcendental world was attainable through poetry. According to Baudelaire: "In certain almost supernatural states of soul, the depth of life is revealed in ordinary everyday happenings. Ordinary life then becomes the Symbol."[20] In fact, humankind was surrounded by forests of symbols, to borrow from one of Baudelaire's famous sonnets. Reality existed as a veil between individuals and another, ideal world, and objects only suggested meanings. Things were named as evocations of something more ideal. Although all kinds of formerly unnoteworthy things were rediscovered by the Symbolists, the literary imagination and the object had never been farther apart. Subjective awareness of objects increased, but their native integrity as entities diminished.

Twentieth century Modernists like Joyce and Woolf also exalted the object, using it to symbolize inward states but granting it more intrinsic value than had the French Symbolist poets. Contact with objects could result in moments of epiphany, "The sudden 'revelation of the whatness of a thing,' the moment in which 'the soul of the commonest object . . . seems to us radiant.' The artist, [Joyce] felt, was charged with such revelations, and must look for them not among gods but among men, in casual, unostentatious, even unpleasant moments."[21] The Joycean version of the inner splendour of the thing differed from the Woolfian variety where objects glowed not of themselves but from mental states projected onto them.

The term 'objective correlative' best defines Woolf's use of things to express emotions or abstract ideas. This expressionistic, as opposed to the romantic, impressionistic objectifying of inner experience, on the part of both Woolf and Joyce, was in part an attempt to frustrate readers' desire for verisimilitude. Objects were used not for representational purposes but as transmitters of the impressions or moods of a character or the author. Except for certain epiphanic moments when subjective and objective experience merged, things were also used by Modernist writers to stand for something other than themselves.

If the expressionistic method made use of distortion, the surrealistic one reached for the absurd. The 1920s Surrealists were devoted to the merveilleux, to the wonderful, and to them all objects partook of those qualities. Objects were not solely a source of delight, however; they were also potentially menacing. Because mired in cliché, things threatened to sap humanity of its capacity for imagining. Objects were seen to prescribe to people how to think instead of the other way around. In the visual arts in particular painters like Magritte worked towards shaking up the world of objects in non-mimetic, even anti-mimetic ways. They were out to break through the clichés of form and function, and to that end made use of debris and otherwise unlovable objects. According to Bergson, matter was quickened by élan vital; according to Sartre, the en soi of the object was more

important than whatever use to which it could be put. Surrealists exalted objects, grouping them together in irrational, illogical collocations in an attempt to startle viewers, to shake them out of their hackneyed response to their own environment.

It is worth quoting André Breton at length from the "Crisis of the Object" chapter in Surrealism and Painting. This surrealist manifesto stated that the movement's

> primary objective must be to oppose by all possible means the invasion of the world of the senses by things which mankind makes use of more from habit than necessity. Here, as elsewhere, the mad beast of convention must be hunted down.[22]

Surrealist artists strove to reconcile tensions and contradictions between individuals and objects:

> This ability to reconcile the two images allows such people to transcend the generally limiting factor of the object's manifest existence. With this new focus . . . the same object . . . reverts to an infinite series of latent possibilities which are not peculiar to it and therefore entail its transformation. The object's conventional value then becomes entirely subordinate . . . to its dramatic value, leading [them] to see it more in terms of its picturesque aspect and its evocative power.[23]

What Breton envisaged was nothing less than a revolution of the object. However, since the object ultimately depended upon language for its presentation, the medium itself had also

to be revolutionized.

> The role of surrealism is to tear language away from the repressive system and to make it the instrument of desire. Thus, what is called surrealist 'art' has no other goal than to liberate words, or more generally the signs, from the codes of utility or entertainment, in order to restore them as bearers of revelation of subjective reality and of the essential inter-subjectivity of desire in the public mind.[24]

Magritte, for example, used elements like illusion, dream and the fantastic in his absurd combinations of objects; he disjointed time and space in order to demonstrate that the essence of things was not necessarily linked to their reality. Michel Foucault points out that "Magritte's strategy involves deploying largely familiar images, but images whose recognizability is immediately subverted and rendered moot by 'impossible,' 'irrational,' or 'senseless' conjunctions."[25] Language was severed from representation: words did not refer to things themselves.

The technique used by Surrealists to jolt their audience into new awareness of objects was identified by Formalist critic Victor Shklovsky as 'defamiliarization.'

> As perception becomes habitual . . . it becomes automatic. We see the object as though it were enveloped in a sack. We know what it is by its configuration, but we see only its silhouette. . . . Habitualization devours objects, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. . . . Art exists to help us recover the

> sensation of life; it exists to make us feel things, to make the stone stony. The end of art is to give a sensation of the object as seen, not as recognized. The technique of art is to make things 'unfamiliar,' to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception. The act of perception in art is an end in itself and must be prolonged.[26]

Shklovsky coined the term ostranenie to denote the estrangement or alienation of the object. Otherwise labelled dishabituation, deformation or dis-civilization, the device attempted to do away with the automatic dichotomizing of form and content and to reverse the effects of mass-production on the public's glutted senses. Defamiliarization connoted refamiliarization; as a device it was, however, also subject to habit and thus to obscuring the object once so successfully laid bare.

The Surrealists brought a fresh response to life and an expanded awareness of reality to their art. The fantastic became the real and matter achieved supremacy over mind: the object took on the role of disrupting and challenging an habitually passive intellect. Aniela Jaffé, in her chapter entitled "Symbolism in the Visual Arts" in Man and His Symbols by Carl G. Jung relates the tale of how, in 1914, "the French painter Marcel Duchamp set up an object chosen at random (a bottle rack) on a pedestal and exhibited it. Jean Bazaine wrote of it: 'This bottle rack, torn from its utilitarian context and washed up on the beach, has been invested with the

lonely dignity of the derelict. Good for nothing, there to be used, ready for anything, it is alive. It lives on the fringe of existence its own disturbing, absurd life. The disturbing object--that is the first step to art.'"[27] Objects were much more than what their exterior aspect presented--as Kandinsky said:

> Everything that is dead quivers. Not only the things of poetry, stars, moon, wood, flowers, but even a white trouser button glittering out of a puddle in the street. . . . Everything has a secret soul, which is silent more often than it speaks.[28]

Jung himself lamented the fact that modern, rational culture had purged its language of the fantastic, hence destroying receptivity to the quiet, secret soul of things. The Surrealists kept their ears to the ground of this trembling, timid life.

Literary fixation upon the object reflected philosophical interest in it. The stirrings of a philosophical movement which would later be known as Phenomenology were first felt in mid-eighteenth century when a philosopher named Johann Lambert, a contemporary of Kant, explained phenomena as "the illusory features of human experience" and Phenomenology as "the 'theory of illusion.'"[29] Immanuel Kant went on to distinguish between phenomena as "objects and events as they appear in our experience" and noumena as "objects and events as they are in themselves, independently of the forms imposed on them by our

cognitive faculties." Phenomena are what we can come to know, according to Kant, whereas noumena, impossible to know, are the enigmatic "'things-in-themselves.'" In 1807 Georg Hegel proposed Phenomenology as "the science in which we come to know mind as it is in itself through the study of the ways in which it appears to us." Mind thus officially became the object of, in addition to the source of, knowledge and study. It was under Edmund Husserl in pre-World War I days that Phenomenology came to be seen as primarily a descriptive philosophy whose aim "was to describe phenomena by means of direct awareness." Hence Phenomenology, as it developed in the twentieth century under Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, explored phenomena as "whatever appears to us in 'immediate experience.'" Phenomena were considered intuited, non-empirical essences--essence being defined by those "general, necessary, and invariant features" that make any given object that object and no other. A stone, for example, while it may seem an empirically verifiable thing, is in objective terms merely the sum of all that can be said about it. Phenomenologically speaking, however, each stone has an essence which can be intuited but never known or verified. Hence the inevitably muddled relationship between language and things.

Philosophers, like visual artists and littérateurs, recognized the ultimately frustrated nature of relations between objects and words: "Because we are in the world, we

are condemned to meaning, and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history."[30] Merleau-Ponty visualized a state of primary silence antedating language where essence could speak to essence:

> The separated essences are those of language. It is the office of language to cause essences to exist in a state of separation which is in fact merely apparent, since through language they still rest upon the ante-predicative life of consciousness. In the silence of primary consciousness can be seen appearing not only what words mean, but also what things mean: the core of primary meaning round which the acts of naming and expression take shape.[31]

It was his contention that things themselves preceded knowledge, and that mankind could not possibly apprehend anything without first experiencing itself as existing in the act of apprehending it: "consciousness, the absolute certainty of my existence for myself [is] the condition of there being anything at all."[32] A prelinguistic, self-reflexive self was deemed necessary in order to be able to see the object in itself: since language dealt mostly in abstractions, talking only about or around the thing, so too consciousness, already inseparable from language, could only apprehend objects within its own parameters, set by dim knowledge of itself and its own functioning.

Merleau-Ponty advocated a rejection of inadequate science and a return to things themselves in order to re-achieve direct

and primitive contact with the world. He held that mankind could not, probably should not, possess the world; for Merleau-Ponty, the earth defined "the permanent horizon of all [his] cogitationes and . . . a dimension in relation to which [he was] constantly situating [himself]."[33] Not that objects could be considered static, nor that the human race could ever know all there is to know about them. In a word, "inexhaustible"[34] defined the state of the globe.

Language--that is, how humans formulate their response to life--has proved inescapable, derivative, ultimately reductive yet also abundant. The word 'object' promises a relation: an object is no object without its subject. 'Object' signifies predicate, and thus completion: language itself guarantees this.[35] Mankind's major barrier to renewing contact with the alien, put-upon object is the body; this, itself and object, remains incapable of seeing itself as such. Seeing is the problem. In fact, Husserl earlier defined phenomenology as the search for what seeing is. The Christian philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin also described the birth of thought as a sort of reflection, the "[knowing] that one knows."[36] In fact, he went on to define mankind as "nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself,"[37] thus reinforcing the notion that humanity's superiority lies in its self-reflexive nature. Merleau-Ponty, however, unwilling to grant us complete success in having broken through the veil of ourself, felt that "Our perception ends in objects, and the object once

constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it which we have had or could have."[38] He thus rejected looking beyond the object for immanence or transcendence, abstract nouns which defeat the thing-in-itself. Looking is not seeing, just as seeing is not perceiving: "to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it. . . . every object is the mirror of all others."[39] Things themselves were held to be dynamic, self-sufficient, and individual, much as the subject perceiving them. Subject had to learn to peel down to its last layer of resistance, and to remain fully conscious of itself doing so.

The danger implicit in scrutinizing the object is that the more defined it comes to be, the more shadowy the subject seems to look. After all, consciousness by definition means consciousness of something in relation to something else. Context is all. Thus Merleau-Ponty's recipe for self-perception poses problems. As critic W. D. Ashcroft has written, "I can only be conscious of my body via the world, and in this way the body is the pivot of the world, for it is the point from which my horizons extend."[40] In other words, consciousness becomes the measure of the physical.

Vocabulary like 'immanence' and 'transcendence' did not enter Merleau-Ponty's philosophizing, but contemporary critics such as Ashcroft sprinkle them about with evident glee. For example, his formulation of how a writer like

Patrick White presents objects relies upon the mystical. Ashcroft provides this updating of theories from earlier phenomenologists:

> All possible worlds are immanent in this one because they are immanent to consciousness. . . . Apart from acts of consciousness there is no 'self.' On the other hand, the consciousness of reality does not preclude the 'mysteries' from man's experience, or deny the revelation of the hidden, the transcendent.[41]

Things are not just themselves but more than their immediate features. "The visual image is charged with potentialities . . . aspects . . . transcendent to the initial view of the cup. . . . The perception of any object therefore involves a synthesis of all the aspects on its horizon, a horizonal synthesis which accepts its potential aspects as immanent to it."[42] Immanence suggests horizontality, transcendence verticality: both imply time as well as space. The object is infinite, its possibilities endless. Phenomenology tried to stop talking in abstract terms, emphasizing essence instead; somehow, though, once people succeeded in focusing upon the object they were bound to look beyond it. Things were supposed to mean, not just be.

Opposite phenomenology lay materialism, where nothing existed except matter. Ours is currently the cult of the material, permanence and safety our reigning idols. Acquiring and possessing things matter; otherwise, they exert compelling

tyranny. But owning inhibits imagining; having assumes an end to the tale of the object. Things are resilient, however: they can be and have been approached in a variety of ways. Surely they do not exist simply all in the mind, or only in time and space, or merely as doors to another dimension. Surely each object has a different story which changes not just according to the whim of the perceiver, but also according to its own dynamic. Patrick White's objects reveal some of all of these philosophies: White is the original anti-material materialist.

Phenomenologists and Surrealists managed to undermine our assumptions about reality as something defined and knowable. Formerly we had only concepts like 'unreal' with which to define that which fell outside the realm of the understood; following the philosophical and artistic movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, a whole new vocabulary sprang to life. 'Surreality,' even 'anti-reality' were coined to deal with shattered normality. Louis Aragon, Surrealist poet, on the fate of the real:

> It should be understood that the real is a relation like any other; the essence of things is by no means linked to their reality, there are other relations beside reality, which the mind is capable of grasping, and which also are primary like chance, illusion, the fantastic, the dream. These various groups are united and brought into harmony in one single order, surreality.[43]

'Reality' as a term lost its authority; instead it became snubbed by some as a bourgeois concept, linked with complacency and the status quo. Actuality and reality were no longer synonymous. Instead, the term 'reality' came to connote both the actual, factual, verifiable real as well as the imaginary, apparent, dreamt or nebulous variety. The real was seen by others as multi-levelled, embracing not only natural and social but objective and subjective spheres as well. In 1908 F. H. Bradley firmly established reality and appearance as conflicting concepts, neither of which was entirely knowable. He distinguished between them thus: "Anything the meaning of which is inconsistent and unintelligible is appearance, and not reality."[44] 'Appearance' continued to represent a convenient category for those things which eluded the old definitions, and 'reality' was restored to its original authority.

The concept of reality was profoundly reviewed by twentieth-century thinkers. Simone Weil, for example, reduced the universe to a divine literary conceit, the beauty of which "is the sign that it is real."[45] Surrealists such as André Breton eschewed godly abstractions like Truth and Beauty in favour of more technical talk about reality. As an artistic movement the Surrealists "attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming <u>one</u>."[46] How to verify the success of this goal was never suggested. Phenomenologists

distinguished between the phenomenal world and the real one, suggesting they were not necessarily the same thing:

> what is presented to us as a phenomenon may, though it need not, be real at the same time. The phenomenal world is not a group of entities characterized and set apart by their special structure; rather it is held together merely extrinsically by the fact that the spotlight of observation catches them temporarily.[47]

Visual artists like Paul Klee recognized that this shift in the accepted and expected had succeeded in transforming the role of art.

> Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth . . . Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe and that there are many other, latent realities. . . . There is a striving to emphasize the essential character of the accidental.[48]

The province of art was no longer simply reproduction: its mandate was to discover, to make visible. Finally the literary critic, whose duty it is to monitor changes in how the human race reads the signs around it, dismissed the concept for good. "Realism, Barthes tells us, has nothing to do with reality; it is simply a text that is readable because it is composed entirely of what is already known. The classic realistic text is a tissue of clichés. Because all codes are finally coercive."[49] To be sure, realism is not reality but a

treatment of it, a code. This propensity to adhere to the known and the visible, however, made innovative twentieth-century artists scorn it as a viable mode of expression. Modernist and post-modernist writers inherited a fractured, fragmented, multi-levelled, multi-sided view of the world and a language which had little connection with any of it.

3.

Object: Language

> Established language is the enemy. The poet finds it sordid with lies. Daily currency has made it stale. The ancient metaphors are inert and the numinous energies bone-dry. It is the writer's compelling task, as Mallarmé said of Poe, 'to purify the language of the tribe.' He will seek to resuscitate the magic of the word by dislocating traditional bonds of grammar and of ordered space. . . . He will endeavour to rescind or at least weaken the classic continuities of reason and syntax, of conscious direction and verbal form . . . Because it has become calcified, impermeable to new life, the public crust of language must be riven.
> --George Steiner, After Babel

Somewhere twentieth-century thought has identified a crisis of the object. Things have been paid increasing attention in philosophy, the visual arts and in literature. Whenever talked about, conceptualized in paint, ink or stone or written about, the object always comes up against a fundamental constraint: that is, language. Earlier I touched on the assumed affiliation between object and word; it is necessary to an appreciation of Patrick White's method to delve even further into their tenuous alliance.

Ferdinand de Saussure first proposed the relation between signifying sound and signified concept to be an

arbitrary one. "A sign, he declared, is not simply the name for a thing but a complex whole which links a sound-image and a concept," the sound-image being "what we actually hear in listening to speech and what we imagine we hear in the mind's ear when we read or think in language."[50] This definition begs the question of which comes first--the sound-image or the concept. In the millisecond in which we first catch glimpse of an object, is it the thing itself or its referential word which first occurs to us? This kind of process-oriented study was what the phenomenologists explored, to the extent, as Robert Scholes points out, that "The language-philosophers insisted that there is no possible correspondence between our language and the world beyond it. The existentialists spoke of isolated man, cut off from objects and even from other men, in an absurd condition of being."[51] Fragmentation proved both theme and style for generations of writers, the main causes of which were this exploded notion of reality and the ruptured connection between reality and language. Michel Foucault reasserted de Saussure's idea about the arbitrariness of the sign, pointing out the essentially circumstantial, conventional, historical nature of the bond between word and thing.

> From antiquity to the present, persistent strains of Western thought have conceived the bond between language and reality as fundamentally mystical, a mutual sharing of essences. In the Old Testament, the

> Word is the Beginning (of Creation). For the Greeks, Logos connoted both reality and the knowledge (hence expressibility) of reality. . . . primordial language was a transparent duplication of the Universe . . . After Babel, the literal reciprocity of language and the world was destroyed. . . . [52]

Romanticism saw a return to the mystical substantiality of language, but modern artists faced a legacy of bankrupt vocabulary where words like 'imitation' and 'actuality' were anathema. The question was: "How to banish resemblance and its implicit burden of discourse"?[53] Artists' innate impulse has long been to recreate or reproduce what they saw in conformity with what they believed to be actual or verifiable. Once the latter part of the equation crumbled, they faced a dilemma aptly described here by Zulfikar Ghose:

> Reality offers surfaces which we cannot penetrate but it stimulates our perception; the enormity of the sensations before us at any given moment is overwhelming: and so, we keep things in perspective, as the common phrase is, by interpreting reality within the narrow framework of a language which treats of exclusive categories.[54]

Reality and language, themselves shifting, fluid concepts, remain the ideological givens in mankind's attempt to express itself and its environment. The ultimate enigma stands: how does one go about building a world-view out of such suspect stuff?

The nature of language is metaphorical, and doubly so. Simone Weil hypothesized that "The entire universe is nothing but a great metaphor,"[55] echoing the original, platonic postulation about discourse as the imitator of imitation, and the artist as at least doubly derivative. Unintentionally, inescapably, "The idea is sign of things, and the image is sign of a sign."[56] Literature itself, as Barthes has commented, is "a deliberately reflexive system."[57] To its credit, however, the poetic image succeeds by defamiliarizing the known. Certainly, the end result of this manipulation of the literal is a vision of the object instead of positive knowledge of it. Whether it is desirable to veer so close to the thing is another question: would we not negate it if we could once define it? More crucial still, would we be able to retreat, once descended into the depths of thing-dom? Ghose again: "Only fiction, which takes something from all activities, is committed to concern itself exclusively with reality. An imagery of things is all there can be of the world."[58] A compromise, perhaps, but this view of fiction legitimizes its worth as aesthetic enterprise.

Whereas in literal language the connection between signifier and signified is arbitrary, such is not the case with figurative language. Deliberateness defines the usage of tropes like images, symbols, similes and metaphors. All excite connotations, forsaking accuracy for analogy. As etymology suggests, images spring from the imagination: they

resurrect experience, frequently confusing or combining sensual memory to synaesthetic or kinaesthetic effect. Whenever the imaginative faculty lights upon an object, it tends automatically to project it into an imagistic beyond, as if sheer depiction of reality were somehow "[resistant] to meaning."[59] This imitation-imagination-image triangle strives to recreate rather than merely to represent reality; somehow it is perceived as more sophisticated, perhaps even beneficial, to do so. Writers use varieties of tropes in order to surprise and challenge readers; texts rich in analogies pretend to remove their audience from the real, as if that plane of existence were too impoverished or evanescent to satisfy.

All figures of speech resort to objects in their equations. Often things balance only half of the parallelism, evoking abstract states as opposed to other things. If the Preacher was correct when he long ago decided that there was nothing new under the sun, then objects are indeed heavily encrusted with suggestion. Northrop Frye repeats this very adage in The Great Code: "The statement 'There is nothing new under the sun' applies to wisdom but not to experience, to theory but not to practice. Only when we realize that nothing is new can we live with an intensity in which everything becomes new."[60] The dabbler in words has more to do than simply scramble connotations in order to compose something striking. The trope must still satisfy our

twofold desire for it to make sense and to stimulate our imagination.

Figurative language translates the (dead) objective world into (living) subjective awareness. It is therefore self-reflexive, self-conscious language, aware of itself as such and constantly speaking about itself. Should the sea appear as symbol in a particular literary work, for instance, it trumpets its extra-linguistic, literary function immediately upon our apprehension of it as a word. The sea has lost its ability to exist for us as a salty, blue-green expanse of water. Some objects are plainly overworked as symbols. Yet Ernst Cassirer has said "The potency of the real thing . . . is contained in the word that creates it"[61]: in other words, our apprehension of said real thing depends entirely upon the kind of word deployed. For William York Tindall, word used as image "is a substitute for what it represents," while word as symbol "is the only possible embodiment of what it presents."[62] Image, metaphor and simile reflect--perhaps refract--experience, whereas symbol swallows it whole. Veronica Brady believes that symbolic discourse acknowledges the world as plurivocal, where "any one object, event or person may suddenly swing open to reveal intensities and complexities of experience far in excess of their actual significance."[63] According to its adherents, symbol realizes potential, mythologizing the mundane and catalyzing the transition from patent to latent reality.

Tropes are words and words are objects, all of which objectify experience. Hence, figures of speech are both active and passive units within the larger structure of the literary work. The novel, story or poem is itself also an object--art/if/act--and represents a subjective attempt to objectify experience. Words forged one after the other link to make sense in themselves and as a whole because they create context. The work, however, exists without immediate context. It is a thing adrift. Individuals grant it context once they hold it, open it, or read it. Until they do so, the book might as well be a thing of empty pages, even a hollow object whose dummy spine and covers hide any other thing inside. But if a book it be, a literary text to boot, then what the reader grasps represents imagination, thought, soul embodied. Similarly, word embodies object and vice versa: when all we see is u m b r e l l a, what we immediately visualize is something like  . Conversely, objects originally functioned as speech for those beings whose pictographs archaeologists continue to discover in remote caves. The essential nature of both words and objects, then, is symbolic. As Symbols they incarnate some thing else, whether God or Spirit or Nature, hence mankind's desire to see in them immanence or transcendence, as opposed to the merely manifest. However, if words embody objects they also mirror them, thus reflecting and distorting them: however transparent or opaque the glass, all we ever see is an image of things.

Transparence of the object is what we seek.

How can we isolate the object when it does not exist except in a sticky, almost invisible web of context? If we alter our relation with the thing, thereby exchanging one context for another, then by analogy the language we use to deal with the new situation changes too. Still and always, the object is deeply mired within a limited but necessary context, lost in a lexical haze.

4.

Being There: The Object Itself

> it is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see: what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendor is not that deployed by our eyes.
> --Michel Foucault

Take a cup--let's say a tea cup, without a saucer--and situate it on a plain surface. If we focus all our attention upon said receptacle, what do we remark? Differences between our personal selection in cups aside, we only ever see one part of the vessel at a time: whether front or back is indistinguishable for an object of this shape. We notice the form of the hollow thing: it has a handle but no pedestal. The exterior is patterned; leaves and flowers are represented in earth tones against a white background. The interior proves different: it is all white, at least as far as it reveals itself to my eye. The position in which I have casually placed the container permits part of the handle to be seen as well: it is all white, at least as much of it as I can see without shifting my position. Thus, in face of a crucible such as this one, I actually perceive but a portion of it at

any one time. My mind, however, assumes much: what I presume I see is the entire object. But I am hardly aware of what really goes on round the other face of the cup: gazing on one part, how do I know that there is nothing happening within or on the rest of the teacup? There may well be tea leaves or a bit of amber liquid at the base of its well; lipstick may even mar the cup's other surface. If, upon complete examination such is found to be the case, then we can reasonably interpret the signs to mean that the vessel has at some time in the past been reduced to its functionality as holder. Despite its name, a tea cup is not constrained to handle only tea, or only liquid, for that matter. The volume it retains must be limited by its size, but any smaller amount will sit comfortably therein. When we see tea cup, we think tea and assume containment, but I might just as well dig in the earth with it, spill milk out of it or plant a spring flower bulb in it. In which ever way we alter the vessel's purpose, however, it remains a victim of its functionality, which is to hold, and of its nature as object, which is domestic.

Depending upon the kind of material of which it is constructed, we may even see light or shapes through the walls of the cup. We do not question, of course, that it is a china tea cup whereof we speak. But perhaps this particular cup is fabricated of tin, aluminum, plastic, or even carved from soap. Is it then still a cup? If made of glass, do we not then label the object a glass? When is a cup not a cup but a

mug, a glass, a bowl, a can or a pitcher? Finally, these variations on a theme account only for my visual apprehension of the cup: my view of it would surely change were I to touch it, sniff it or listen to it.

La tasse would appear to fill space--or does it displace it? Should I introduce other objects onto the table, the aspect of the cup changes. It becomes a nest, if I place a little bird next to it, or a weight if I position some feathers beneath it. Slide a still life mural behind it and the china will seem an objet d'art, although perhaps over-civilized. A steaming tea pot near it bespeaks quaint, cosy cheer; perhaps it also suggests sociability and sharing, a fireplace and a curled-up cat. Bring on the cookies and the conversation.

Objects left on their own tend to disorder: they gather dust and house critters. If I turn my back on this vessel, even momentarily, or if I leave the room wherein it sits, what happens to it? I assume nothing does, but then I don't really know. It may well be much less passive than I believe it to be.

Whatever my sensual apprehension of this recalcitrant cup, it is ultimately much more than I perceive it to be at any one time. An object is always the sum of its potential, of its infinite possibilities. Context and connotation alter my view of this thing; they are, in fact, inseparable from it. It thus becomes important to determine just how much we impose

upon objects, as compared to how much we attempt to discover in them. Do things, for instance, only derive life from the life which perceives them, or are they fulfilled in themselves, regardless the state of the viewer/voyeur? We habitually distort objects by inflicting the ready-formulated upon them, hence obscuring their sheer suggestiveness. Each object expresses a unique mode of existence to be excavated, as opposed to lacquered over.

I know, scientifically, that any object is made up of molecules and atoms in a variety of configurations. I myself am not conversant in the relation amongst all the moving, minuscule parts, but I do know that such information resides in the realm of the accessible. Colour, texture and shape are all physical, verifiable aspects of any given object. They define it and make it individual, separate. Once I learn these qualities in their various combinations I am capable of identifying an orange and, more important, of distinguishing it from an apple. It is there, independent of me and inward--that is, its external aspect is not all there is to it. In fact, I prize this particular fruit for what it has in it, although sometimes I also have use for what enfolds it. But is the sum of its physical attributes all there is to this citrus? Philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Teilhard de Chardin and Simone Weil suggest not.

Heidegger defined object as "what stands forth."[64] He took a jug as his specimen, describing it as "an object

which a process of making has set up before and against us. Its self-support seems to mark the jug as a thing."[65] The significant words here are 'making,' 'before,' 'against,' 'self-support' and 'thing': Heidegger equated jug with both object and thing, suggesting that its manufacture was somehow anonymous, or at least dissociated from him, and that once completed it posed independently and stalwartly--perhaps even aggressively--in front of him. He determined essence or thingness by function; in other words, "The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds."[66] The essence of jugness, then, according to Heidegger's formulation, lay in its emptiness--that is, in its potential to contain.

Whereas Heidegger concentrated on the object itself, Simone Weil looked at things as evidence of the unseen. For her the material world existed as both barrier and the way through to God: "The essence of created things is to be intermediaries. They are intermediaries leading from one to the other, and there is no end to this. They are intermediaries leading to God. We have to experience them as such."[67] Things provided the means by which mankind progressed from its earthbound state of becoming to its eventual, spiritual fullness of being. These ideas were compatible with Teilhard de Chardin's, except that he viewed things as dynamic and as part of the processes going on around them. For him, matter and spirit represented two aspects of the greater

cosmos: "Matter is the matrix of Spirit. Spirit is the higher state of Matter."[68] Spirit remained constant but wore an infinite number of material disguises; objects variously enveloped this unity, the cosmos's single essence. So too did man; in fact, suggested Teilhard de Chardin, there flourished an almost symbiotic relation between the two.

> Object and subject marry and mutually transform each other in the act of knowledge; and from now on man willy-nilly finds his own image stamped on all he looks at.
>
> This is indeed a form of bondage, for which, however, a unique and assured grandeur provides immediate compensation.
>
> It is tiresome and even humbling for the observer to be thus fettered, to be obliged to carry with him everywhere the centre of the landscape he is crossing.[69]

This sort of imprinting produced indissoluble bonds between humans and things. Merleau-Ponty regarded them almost as one.

The link between us and objects reflects that amongst objects. Merleau-Ponty wrote that "objects form a system in which one cannot show itself without concealing others."[70] Once the subject of contemplation, however, the object cannot help but reveal others. Things reflect one another, and us. He resolved the difference between subject and object by advising: "We must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive."[71] Coupled with this maxim--"the only preexistent Logos is the world itself"[72]--Merleau-Ponty acknowledged

mankind's debt to its origins. As always, humanity searches for new beginnings. Patrick White is one such pilgrim.

5.

Object: White

> 'Everything is so extraordinary,' he said, 'that there is some question of whether we can withstand the impact, whether we can survive.'
> --Patrick White, The Aunt's Story

All writers are phenomenologists insofar as they pay close attention to fellow mortals and to how they perceive their surroundings. Patrick White in particular has proved himself committed to wringing from words their intellectual content, restoring to them their emotional energy and reconnecting them with the things to which they refer. He presents his vision in terms of dichotomies: opposition means process when perceiver interacts with perceived, object with subject, body with soul and essence with existence. Things represent a means to explore the dichotomies; hence, they are used not merely as beings-in-themselves, but also as literary tools to complement themes and characterization.

More than one literary critic has remarked White's obsession with things. Thus far there exists little consensus on his reasons for being so committed, but Zulfikar Ghose speaks for many when he says about White's novels that

> Physical existence is so intensely present it is almost an oppression in the air. A

> stillness that chokes. . . . There is a menace in things: a marble floor, a hairy wrist, is an inexplicable threat. Solid masses shudder. And yet in the uncertainty of our passions, things are what we must hold on to--the sapphire in the hand, the surfaces of furniture, or a memory of a furry animal.[73]

Elizabeth Hunter's jewels, Arthur Brown's marbles, Theodora Goodman's bobbing black rose and Ellen Roxburgh's smouldering silk lead lives of their own. They both reflect and bestow upon the wearer this brimming vitality. Objects, whether man-made or natural, domestic or alien, vegetable or mineral, inanimate or living, visceral or mechanical--all participate in the lives of the characters. Some become characters in their own right.

Other critics offer a variety of interpretations about what White is up to with his objects. William Scheick links them directly with the stories' personae: objects exist as challenges to characters' ego-selves.

> The most vexing concern for White's characters is the question of whether anything exists behind phenomena. . . . the perceived thing is, paradoxically, both present to White's characters, insofar as it exists as a consequence of their perception of it, and absent from them, insofar as it may manifest an ontological verity or a greater dimensionality beyond their ken.[74]

White's 'elect,' as they have come to be known, constantly peer into things, past their immediate aspects and beyond, as

if in search of a hidden dimension concealed within the visible. Ultimately, claims Scheick, what those viewers seek is "a glimpse of themselves as objects."[75] To lose the subjective self, to peel down to the last of its many layers is a theme echoed throughout White's oeuvre. Not that becoming an object is itself to be so greatly desired--after all, the ultimate object-maker is death--but shedding some of the blocks to intuition and pure sensual apprehension of things is. Peter Beatson enlarges upon this empathy between characters and objects:

> White's characters have a living, organic relationship with the sensuous world that surrounds them. There is a sense of 'being there' in the phenomenal world, an openness to the pulsations and emanations of places and things which is more commonly found in poetry than in the novel. . . . Dialogue with the things of the material world is a means to, and a proof of, election.[76]

Beatson sees White as attempting to restore the totemic bonds between human beings and nature, to how it was before they civilized themselves out of immediacy of contact with the world.

Beatson also talks a lot about Incarnation, Immanence and Transcendence. He sees White as a mystic bent on orchestrating the perfect union between matter and spirit. Other critics share his conviction. For example, Robert McDougall claims that

> The material world in Mr. White's vision does not merely evoke, parallel or slavishly reciprocate the spiritual; it <u>becomes</u> the spiritual and then <u>is</u> the spiritual, constituting a new reality fully informed by an act of faith . . . in the end it is all one. The dichotomy disappears.[77]

Further, McDougall asserts that White is an intense realist whose language dissolves opposition within the dichotomy: "Mr. White builds his spiritual world solidly out of the bricks and mortar of the material world, the world of 'real' appearances."[78] Human and phenomenal nature join so that the dichotomy itself dissolves: all is unity in search of soul. Finally, Peter Wolfe credits White with searching out the very structure of reality, sometimes even creating an alternative reality, and always exploring new ways of interacting with it. White seems to Wolfe to affirm "the goodness of matter" and to believe "in the interconnectedness of matter and spirit."[79] Wolfe sees White as focusing on the fallible and corrupt as sources of renewal: each pole of the dichotomy needs the other for definition and exchange. Filth is as necessary as the pristine, and both are good.

White has been variously described as a mystic, a metaphysician and as a writer afflicted by an overweening penchant for pathetic fallacy and personification. Labels aside, White has succeeded in charting new territory in the history of the object. He provides things with point of view and thus with

their own kind of personal language. Each succeeding novel has contributed to a mythology of the object in which things speak and are spoken. Object is signifier whose possibilities have been plundered; White sets out to restore to things their honour.

Fragmentation, alienation, annihilation: these themes permeate twentieth-century literature. Patrick White's work is no exception. But they do not overwhelm his vision entirely. Barthes identifies the post-modern dilemma thus:

> The fact that we cannot manage to achieve more than an unstable grasp of reality doubtless gives the measure of our present alienation: we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but we restore it to a state which is still mystified. It would seem that we are condemned for some time yet always to speak <u>excessively</u> about reality. This is probably because ideologism and its opposite are types of behaviour which are still magical, terrorized, blinded and fascinated by the split in the social world. And yet, this is what we must seek: a reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge.[80]

The grand dichotomies are necessary and hence desirable: their interaction is what ultimately redeems matter. They lift things from their historical inertia and make them significant again to our lives. Whether we can withstand

the onslaught on our senses is another question. White suggests that we not only take objects more into account, but that we also emulate their humility, honesty, and immediacy.

Notes

[1] Paul West, "In Defense of Purple Prose," The New York Times Book Review 15 December 1985: 29.

[2] Nadine Gordimer, Burger's Daughter (New York: Penguin, 1980), p.134.

[3] Northrop Frye, The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 15.

[4] Frye, p. 6.

[5] Frye, p. 7.

[6] Frye, p. 13.

[7] Frye, p. 59.

[8] Frye, p. 97.

[9] Frye, p. 166.

[10] Frye, p. 167.

[11] Frye, p. 167.

[12] Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, Studies in Zen, ed. Christmas Humphreys (New York: Dell, 1955), pp. 48-49.

[13] Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, The Field of Zen: Contributions to The Middle Way, the Journal of the Buddhist Society, ed. Christmas Humphreys (London: The Buddhist Society, 1969), p. 59.

[14] William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," in English Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford UP, 1956), p. 358.

[15] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, in

English Romantic Poetry and Prose, p. 425.

[16] Coleridge, p. 440.

[17] Coleridge, p. 438.

[18] Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, in English Romantic Poetry and Prose, p. 1110.

[19] William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol (New York: Columbia UP, 1955), p. 11.

[20] Tindall, p. 74.

[21] David Myers quotes Richard Ellmann, The Peacocks and the Bourgeoisie: Ironic Vision in Patrick White's Shorter Prose Fiction (Adelaide: Adelaide University Union Press, 1978), p. 161.

[22] André Breton, Surrealism and Painting, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 279.

[23] Breton, p. 279.

[24] André Breton, What is Surrealism? Selected Writings, ed. and intro. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Monad, 1978), p. 74.

[25] Michel Foucault, This is Not a Pipe, trans. and ed. James Harkness, illus. René Magritte (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 8.

[26] Victor Shklovsky quoted in Robert Scholes, Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction (New Haven: Yale UP, 1974), pp. 83-84.

[27] Aniela Jaffé, "Symbolism in the Visual Arts," in Man and His Symbols, ed. and intro. Carl G. Jung (New York: Dell,

1983), p. 290.

[28] Jaffé, pp. 291-292.

[29] Richard Schmitt, "Phenomenology," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, rpt. edn., 8 vols. (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1972), 6: 135.

The discussion on Phenomenology which follows is based upon Schmitt's article; succeeding quotations are from his work, pages 135 to 151.

[30] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology?" in European Literary Theory and Practice: From Existential Phenomenology to Structuralism, ed. Vernon W. Gras (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 83.

[31] Merleau-Ponty, p. 78.

[32] Merleau-Ponty, p. 72.

[33] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. xiii.

[34] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. xvii.

[35] Transitive verbs far outnumber intransitive verbs. Object becomes secondary to subject, the audience to the performer. Merleau-Ponty makes a case for the activity (as opposed to the perceived passivity) of the object.

[36] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Bros., 1959), p. 165.

[37] Teilhard de Chardin, p. 221.

[38] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 67.

[39] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 68.

[40] W. D. Ashcroft, "More Than One Horizon," in Patrick White: A Critical Symposium, eds. R. Shepherd and K. Singh (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978), p. 126.

[41] Ashcroft, p. 124.

[42] Ashcroft, p. 125.

[43] Breton, What is Surrealism? Selected Writings, p. 126.

[44] F. H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality, rev. 2nd ed. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1908), p. 76.

[45] George A. Panichas, ed. The Simone Weil Reader (New York: David McKay, Inc., 1977), p. 438.

[46] Breton, What is Surrealism? Selected Writings, p. 116.

[47] Herbert Spiegelberg, Doing Phenomenology: Essays on and in Phenomenology (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 134.

[48] Paul Klee, Paul Klee: Watercolors. Drawings. Writings (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969), p. 8.

[49] Roland Barthes quoted by Robert Scholes, Semiotics and Interpretation (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982), p. 12.

[50] Ferdinand de Saussure cited in Scholes, Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction, p. 15.

[51] Scholes, Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction, p. 1.

[52] Foucault, p. 6.

[53] Foucault, p. 8.

[54] Zulfikar Ghose, The Fiction of Reality (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), p. 32.

[55] Panichas, p. 437.

[56] Umberto Eco, The Name of the Rose, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 317.

[57] Roland Barthes, Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), p. 35.

[58] Ghose, p. 143.

[59] Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in French Literary Theory Today, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), p. 14.

[60] Frye, p. 124.

[61] Ernst Cassirer quoted in Tindall, The Literary Symbol, p. 8.

[62] Tindall, p. 31.

[63] Veronica Brady, "Why Myth Matters," Westerly, No. 2 (June 1973), p. 60.

[64] Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. and intro. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 168.

[65] Heidegger, p. 167.

[66] Heidegger, p. 169.

[67] Panichas, p. 364.

[68] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Heart of Matter, trans. René Hague (London: Collins, 1978), p. 35.

[69] Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man, p. 32. Man-image-landscape immediately brings Voss to mind.

[70] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 68.

[71] Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology?" p. 79.

[72] Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology?" p. 84.

[73] Ghose, p. 77.

[74] William J. Scheick, "The Gothic Grace and Rainbow Aesthetic of Patrick White's Fiction: An Introduction," in Texas Studies in Literature and Language, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), p. 135.

[75] Scheick, p. 137.

[76] Peter Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala (London: Paul Elek, 1976), p. 133.

[77] Robert L. McDougall, Australia Felix: Joseph Furphy and Patrick White, Commonwealth Literary Fund Lecture (Canberra: Australian National UP, 1966), p. 9.

[78] McDougall, p. 13.

[79] Peter Wolfe, Laden Choirs: The Fiction of Patrick White (The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), p. 7.

[80] Barthes, Mythologies, p. 159.

II

Connecting . . . Communicating

Writing . . . became a struggle to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words. I began to see things for the first time.
--Patrick White

From words, which are but pictures of the thought,
(Though we our thoughts from them perversely drew)
To things, the mind's right object, he it brought.
--Abraham Cowley, about Francis Bacon

Patrick White's first three published novels--Happy Valley (1939), The Living and the Dead (1941) and The Aunt's Story (1948)--chart the steady rise of a writer learning his way around in language. White began his novelistic career drawing from the same plundered well that had already nourished a whole generation of angst-ridden, modernist writers. Happy Valley and The Living and the Dead offered tired, derivative symbols of the like employed by other 1930s authors who were also responding to the existential times. White unabashedly played symbolist in order to objectify both the stupefying environment of his homeland and the stultifying atmosphere of his adopted home of England between the wars. But he eventually abandoned his reliance on imagery of despair for the elegant, post-modernist style of The Aunt's Story. Explored in succession, these three early works reveal the process of authorial discovery which saw White change the shape of the symbol.

There is a progress of imagery from Happy Valley to The Aunt's Story. To a certain extent, objects like the frolicsome cyclamen in Happy Valley and the mesmerizing glass box in The Living and the Dead do succeed in conveying an almost palpable sense of the paralysis afflicting both societies at the time. However, they rarely rise above their function as symbols, serving rather to objectify the inner experiences of characters who are themselves little more than sensibilities. The objects littering these first two

published novels lead no independent life of their own: instead they exist to telegraph themes like fragmentation, disintegration and alienation. Still, each of Happy Valley and The Living and The Dead proffers glimpses of the writer White became: the pink shell given Margaret Quong by Rodney Halliday and the relation between Joe Barnett and the wooden things he crafts bespeak a burgeoning awareness of objects as discrete, perfect entities.

Happy Valley explores life in a small, suffocating Australian town. The plot follows the doomed love affair between the town's frustrated doctor, Oliver Halliday, and its lonely music teacher Alys Browne. Secondary action is supplied by the sordid liaison between a drifter named Clem Hagan and Vic Moriarty, bored wife of an ineffectual school teacher. When Ernest Moriarty discovers his wife's infidelity he murders her and then dies of heart failure on the very road Oliver and Alys have chosen for their escape. The tragedy forces Oliver to come to terms with his responsibility to a wife and children: the Hallidays leave Happy Valley and the others remain behind, stifled and unfulfilled. The novel portrays characters adrift, unconnected to others, to things, to themselves. Their attitude to things betrays the hopeless state of their soul: rocks ring with "sullen hostility" (HV, 327) when they kick them and the town they inhabit appears a pockmark, "an ugly scab" (HV, 28) on the stubborn face of the earth. There is little in the way of human curiosity about

things, and so objects preserve their autonomy by acting merely as reflectors--silent but potent commentators on the action around them.

Moriartys' big silver lustre bowl is one such object, catching the light and offering in return distorted reflections of the other objects occupying the room. While the bowl itself exists in time and thus has a past of its own, it betrays nothing of it. Eventually it proves itself "tragically adaptable" (HV, 326), representing for its new owner Amy Quong the reward for her anonymous interference in the lives of the bowl's previous owners, the Moriartys. Amy, who in retaliation for Vic's bigoted treatment of her alerts Ernest to his wife's transgressions, cultivates a possession obsession for the bowl, ignorant of the fact that acquisitions trade hands too terribly easily. Things will not be owned, nor are they capable of loyalty. The bowl simply begins to monitor its new environment, trading stormy scenes of adultery and murder for order and quiet.

The big, bright, globe-shaped ornament exists as an object in its own right but serves in addition as home to a cheeky little cyclamen. This flower, blatantly phallic and overworked as symbol, barometrically charts the on-going affair between Vic Moriarty and Clem Hagan. When first readers meet the lusty bloom they see it "sprawled in wide, voluptuous curves" (HV, 33), as if in caricature of its mistress. It continues to act out the lovers' antics in

parodic fashion; the ingenuous narrator comments at one point: "It was funny that yesterday the cyclamen had stuck up straight, always changing, sometimes as straight as a poker and tight in the mouth, almost spinsterly, and now it lolled, couldn't hold up its head, it looked sort of abandoned with its droopy leaves" (HV, 109). This object proves non-transferable: it is crushed shortly after Vic is killed, thus forging a complete identification of character with object.

The shell or nautilus, which later plays such a prominent role in The Aunt's Story, appears first in Happy Valley. It functions as gift; young Rodney Halliday presents one to school-mate Margaret Quong that "was pink, of curious shape, folding like the bud of a flower with brown spots on the underneath" (HV, 65). A sea-shell is an object rich in connotations, which for that reason immediately bids the imagination enter in. The word 'shell' proclaims the object, its construction and its function, because a shell is what it is made of. Literary shells are always deserted: no sign of their builder and original occupant exists. But shells are not empty, either. Rather, they are filled with the sound and smell of their origins. The sea means beginnings, eternity, freedom, nourishment and annihilation all at once. So one thing Rodney bestows upon Margaret with his gift of the nautilus is the opportunity for imaginative escape and for a perspective on life greater than that Happy Valley alone can offer. The shell also connotes domesticity and interiority:

it is safe and secure but also intriguing and arousing because of its spiral shape, suggestive not only of the form of the human ear but of female genitalia as well. The inside of this seemingly small object proves very large indeed, almost infinite; its maze-like construction challenges the mind while its origins free the spirit. The shell is a heap of paradoxes: fragile yet protective, small yet infinite, deserted yet complete. One of the most captivating of nature's shapes, the shell is beautiful, mysterious, enduring and alluring.

Margaret's aunt Amy weaves a pseudo-shell around her territory that the narrator calls a cocoon. This is an important image to both Happy Valley and The Living and the Dead, used to identify those who rank among the dead-in-life. Although Amy is the first of White's characters to exhibit a passion for things, her acquisitiveness is viewed negatively: "She lived in a kind of mystical attachment to her things; she lived with them in the cocoon of custom that led her to dust them, to take them up and put them down. And she wanted more; she was always anxious to add a thread to the soft and necessary structure of the cocoon" (HV, 33). This particular protective domestic envelope neither frees nor enlarges: it limits. Amy feels her life complete and her craving for things entirely justified once she finally possesses the silver lustre bowl. But the cocoon only muffles the senses: "It was so easy to substitute the dead for the living, to

build a cocoon of experience away from the noises in the street" (TLATD, 16). Kitty Standish, from The Living and the Dead, turns out to be another such knitter of webs about herself, reducing life to the merely existing inside a house.

In this second novel Kitty and Willy Standish start out married life promisingly enough, but separate after two children and several years. Their off-spring, Elyot and Eden, grow up in war-torn England: Elyot studies modern languages and turns into an academic composing dry articles on obscure authors and Eden drifts through several love affairs and jobs before committing herself to Joe Barnett and the Spanish Civil War. As the novel opens, Elyot is seeing Eden off on the first leg of her trip to Spain following Joe's death there. Lurking on the fringes of the plot are Connie Tiarks, the awkward, lumpish spinster who thinks she is in love with Elyot, elegant Muriel Raphael, who knows she is not but who sleeps with him anyway, and Julia Fallon, who keeps house for the Standishes.

This novel also portrays characters suffering a loss of contact with the substance of things--with life, in other words. Even those to be counted among the living succumb to the indifferent, directionless, fragmented times. The Living and the Dead almost chokes on this desperate atmosphere; objects serve mainly structural ends, uniting themes and objectifying the sodden inner state of characters. These are divided into two camps: the collectors, like Muriel Raphael,

Connie Tiarks, Aubrey Silk and the Standishes versus the rather smaller group, made up of Julia Fallon and Joe Barnett, which claims a respect for things. Of these, honest, simple Joe is perhaps the most alive, precisely because he "took a pleasure in familiar things, the clean grain of wood planed in the workshop, the steel of a chisel that was very cool as he laid it in calculation against his cheek" (TLATD, 193-4). Joe, like his fictional heir Stan Parker of The Tree of Man, says little but feels much: his hands would tremble "for a something, for a mystery behind the wall, that was still untouched. The days were full of objects that hinted at a correspondence" (TLATD, 268). Touch is perhaps the most primal and immediate form of communicating with the numinous. In The Living and the Dead, however, hands remain permanently unconnected to their owners.

Detached limbs and faces float past one another in this novel all the time: they never connect, much less communicate. Joe is one being conversant in the language of the senses, Julia another, although less so. Her reverence for objects stops at the thing in itself; she uses and respects them. Sometimes Julia and things physically imprint upon one another: "At night when she left . . . Julia lingered, perceptibly, in the objects she had touched. There was a correspondence between Julia and the form of the yellow table, more than an echo in the cheap alarm clock. In the ticking, creaking, groaning night-life of the deserted kitchen, the old

depressed house shoes carried on a deputy generalship" (TLATD, 13).

Here the narrator hints at mysterious nocturnal goings-on amongst supposedly inanimate (read 'lifeless') objects. "Correspondence," the key word, suggests not only physical but also non-physical communication, a sort of wordless articulateness achieved between Julia and domestic things. We know she is to be counted amongst the living because she and "the objects that she touched were united by this strain of absorption. The basin she held in her red hands rounded into shape with those same hands" (TLATD, 58). Here we have an early example of White's use of kinaesthesia to describe the intimacy between characters and objects. He develops admirable agility with this kind of imagery in The Aunt's Story.

Stylistically speaking White's narrator in The Living and the Dead explains much and shows little; direct revelation of the object will have to wait until The Aunt's Story. But the prevalence of hands and touch in The Living and the Dead signals one of White's career-long fetishes. Whether talking about little dark hairs on the backs of men's hands or the quasi-electric tingle of recognition that occurs whenever two people truly touch, White exalts the tactile sense. Things are as inseparable from their functionality as hands are from those things they use: each imbues the other with significant life.

Three strains of imagery pervade the work: water, box-like shapes and road. White uses each image ambiguously: fluid, cube and journey can either confine or free one. Water depicts quality of life in this and other White novels; whereas in The Aunt's Story water represents a desirable state of being, here in The Living and the Dead water only confuses and obscures things. Elyot is often depicted searching out his own image in the watery depths of mirrors, and many London scenes appear to be taking place under the sea.[1] Faces swim past or up out of murky reaches, impossible to focus or to hold. Characters drift passively, avoiding "the submerged element, either in your own life or in the lives of other people, wherever this was possible" (TLATD, 189). The narrator goes so far as to assert that "The world was partly soluble" (TLATD, 304), no doubt testifying not only to climactic conditions but also to the state of certain soggy souls floundering about like fish out of their element. With respect to objects, characters are portrayed as either absorbed by them, like Julia, or absorbing--that is, consuming--them, like Mrs. Standish.

Box figures mainly as Elyot's gift from Connie Tiarks, but also as metaphor for the internal and external form of the Standishes' lives. Near the beginning of the novel, Elyot likens himself and others of his acquaintance to boxes; they have all, he decides, tried to impose some form on the prevailing shapelessness. Alone in a room in what was his

mother's house, Elyot ponders his own contribution to order. He stands, he figures, a box within a box.

> This was a receptacle. They were two receptacles, he felt, the one containing the material possessions of those who had lingered in its rooms, the other the aspirations of those he had come in contact with. Even that emotional life he had not experienced himself, but sensed, seemed somehow to have grown explicit. It was as if this emanated from the walls to find interpretation and shelter in his mind. So that the two receptacles were clearly united now. They were like two Chinese boxes, one inside the other, leading to an infinity of other boxes, to an infinity of purpose. (TLATD, 17-18)

But Elyot's generous evaluation of himself and his place in the world occurs to him very late: his mother dead, his sister off to Spain, he stands entirely alone in the empty rooms of the hollow house. Still the house preserves Mrs. Standish's imprint years after her death: it remains her answer to oblivion. Even now the walls return her voice to Elyot. While for Kitty the house represents a show-case for her collection of bric-à-brac, for Elyot it means refuge, merely bricks and mortar separating him from the rest of wandering mankind. It was Pascal who early suggested that a box-like room could contain the world; neither Catherine nor Elyot recognizes such possibilities exist. It takes someone like Joe Barnett to flesh out space, as he does when he visits Elyot's study to say goodbye: "So it boiled down to this, the

folded hands, the ultimate simplicity in the silence of a room. . . . After the groping behind the dry symbols of words, you experienced a sudden revelation in a shabby, insignificant room" (TLATD, 308). Houses are silently eloquent, although in this novel city dwellings share the malaise of their occupants, blinking unseeing eyes and needing a Joe or a Julia to restore their circulation. House comes to play a central role in later novels such as The Aunt's Story and The Eye of the Storm (1973), to the point where, I will argue, it becomes a kind of structural analogue for The Solid Mandala (1966).

The actual box Connie gives Elyot represents the shape of her love for him. She desires to possess him, to confine and contain him with all her desperately lonely might. Elyot, mistakenly thinking Muriel has sent him the ornament, sees in it the shape of their love: cold, spare and empty. As such, the gift holds a kind of masochistic fascination for him. He recognizes it as symbol rather than as thing-in-itself, and as such it comes to occupy his pedantic mind more and more. A room within a room, the box gloats on Elyot's mantel, perfectly of a piece with the rest of the place. Milky in colour, "only just opaque" (TLATD, 243), it ties in with the futile pernods the elder Standishes downed once in Paris in an effort to revive their floundering marriage. The decoration, while empty of other things, remains full of significance. Still, it is prized for its symbolic value. The object has

yet to come into its own.

Possibly this is a deliberate strategy on White's part. After all, The Living and the Dead illustrates a time of dissolution and disillusionment. Things brimming with individuality would disrupt the sombre mood so carefully cultivated in the novel. Perhaps this explains why, as Mark Williams expresses it, "The novel cannot offer the substantiality it craves."[2] Every thing and every one proves listless, vague, indifferent, and the language used to draw this atmosphere is itself as wrung out as the times. This "agonized separation of life and language"[3] is most vividly felt for the first time in The Living and the Dead; lived experience turns out to be as meaningless and corrupt as language. Action in the form of service in Spain appears the only antidote to the emptiness of the times; thus the exodus of living souls from England to certain death in foreign soil.

Hence the road as metaphor. Characters such as Mrs. Standish are "[travellers] who had chosen to lose [their] way" (TLATD, 291). To Elyot, "Eden was the dark street" (TLATD, 172); to Eden, strolling any dark pathway home alone was like following a way "into the more guarded places of the mind" (TLATD, 185). The road beckons as escape and promises movement and progress. It symbolizes a way out of the external, stagnant world into vital, interior spaces. Routes connote direction and deliberateness: they seduce the mind out of its dependence upon the mundane while they keep the body

mobile and between destinations. The journey motif comes to be increasingly central to later novels such as The Aunt's Story, Voss (1957), Riders in the Chariot (1961) and A Fringe of Leaves (1976), where characters such as Theodora, Voss, Himmelfarb and Ellen journey home both literally and metaphorically.

Happy Valley and The Living and the Dead bear significant portents of the works which followed. The second novel in particular introduces familiar Whitean obsessions such as the intractable nature of language and the sterling qualities of common chairs and tables. For the first time certain objects enjoy spotlit splendour. Notice for example Elyot's novel reaction to a soup tureen he has already seen many times in his life:

> Elyot felt the touch of nostalgia in the green and gold of the soup tureen, as it drifted out of the conversation, into a sudden focus. There was a horrid attraction in the little gilded pineapple on the lid, that now covered what remained of the soup. Ignoring words, that were irrelevant, he could not keep his eyes off the little pineapple. It stood out like a boss on the face of the last ten years, a tangible reminder of escaped time. (TLATD, 173)

Suddenly it glares at him and he is transfixed. The simple, banal object inspires this literary-minded man to dismiss words as 'irrelevant' while he basks in its luminescence. What the tureen represents to him is time irretrievably lost; notice how it weaves its spell over him. 'Green and gold'

signal nostalgia, but they also describe the pustulent, sickly times. The tureen 'drifted' out of its viscous haze, in which every thing and every one in the novel seems suspended. By the time Elyot turns his horrified attention to the adornment atop the lid, the pineapple has tarnished from 'gold' to 'gilded.' For a 'little' thing, the anomalous fruit holds Elyot tight in a spell. His yearning after 'nostalgia' turns into a hopeless realization of 'escaped time.' Although a correlative for the limpid state of Elyot's soul, the homely tureen also represents one of the first Whitean objects to shine forth in all its thingness.

With The Aunt's Story objects stand exposed in surprising and unexpected attitudes. Here White welcomes the reader to "the rightness of objects" (TAS, 268), to "the great superiority of stationary objects" (TAS, 283), to obstinate umbrellas, escaping doilies and imperious cacti. Most critics see symbol in every object which makes an appearance; certainly White's complex style can be said to lend itself to such pedantic treatment. But consider it for a moment a book in which a thing is simply that thing. Suspend more than your usual allotment of disbelief and accept The Aunt's Story as an account of a woman extraordinarily sensitive to life on every level.

The novel begins with one of literature's great opening lines: "But old Mrs. Goodman did die at last" (TAS, 3). Thus her spinster daughter Theodora finds herself freed from years

of slavery to her mother's selfish whims. Taking leave of her only family in Australia--among whose members is her niece and soul-mate Lou--Theodora Goodman travels, first to pre-World War II Europe, alighting for a while in a hotel in the south of France, then to America, where she reaches journey's end. The Aunt's Story is made up of three sections: "Meroë" details Theodora's formative years on the family estate (also called Meroë), "Jardin Exotique" is the account of her surreal stay at the Hôtel du Midi, and finally, "Holstius" describes her trip by train and on foot to a humble home in the new world. Along the way Theodora encounters a host of characters who either hinder (Frank and Fanny Parrott, Huntly Clarkson, old Mrs. Goodman) or encourage (her father, The Man Who Was Given His Dinner, Moraïtis) her progress.

Theodora Goodman has a capacity to tune in to objects in their separate existences; she never doubts their potential for play or hurt. The Aunt's Story chronicles Theodora's journey of discovery from youth to middle age in terms of her encounters with objects. They provide clues to her first developing, aspiring state of mind, then to its disintegration and eventual resignation. If, along the way (especially in the "Jardin Exotique" section) things seem too fantastically animated, it is not solely because they are dreamed-up but because as Theodora's sanity crumbles she becomes ever more hyperpathic. In other words, to use the living/dead dichotomy White established in his previous novel, as Theo turns

increasingly from what the world considers life to what it considers death--that is, madness--she in fact attains a degree of aliveness it simply cannot comprehend. Objects serve as markers along the way; perhaps they not only encourage but actually push her to her achievement.

The Aunt's Story reveals Patrick White's sense of style and structure and his changing use of symbol. If the novel can be seen as heavily symbolic, it can more profitably be considered White's most concentrated and courageous effort towards reestablishing communication with worldly things. It is true as Peter Wolfe writes, that "White organizes space, rather than leaving it empty or merely using it as a static receptacle for dramatic action. Objects impart rhythm and texture."[4] Whitean space is inhabited space. But once presented, objects never stay the same; they are subject to the same flux with which White's characters contend. Hence, they flow and metamorphose, not only between works, but within single books. The rose of Theodora's childhood, the one which plays home to a grub, is not the same flower which later adorns her hat, nor are their values--symbolic or otherwise--the same. It isn't the same blossom as that which enhances Amy Parker's life in The Tree of Man, either. It is difficult not to see the universal in an object like a rose; Love, Beauty and Perfection pop up automatically like little flags whenever said bloom is invoked. White, however, circumvents such ready jumping to clichéd conclusions by

conjuring up singular objects worthy of scrutiny.

In general, The Aunt's Story talks about things as things perhaps more self-consciously than any of the later novels. Early on, Theodora and Moraïtis agree: "It is not necessary to see things. . . . If you know" (TAS, 106 and 107). While they appear to eschew the sensual in favour of the intuitive or instinctual faculties, both are deeply committed sensualists who, whether innately or experientially, 'know' how to apprehend objects extra-sensually. On one hand objects are spoken of as embodying "a logical simplicity" (TAS, 124); on the other, "'The antics of objects are indescribable,'" (TAS, 199). Even world-weary Alyosha Sergei repeats: "'Everything is extraordinary'" (TAS, 205). "Simple and extraordinary" (TAS, 205), adds Theodora, to herself, ever cognizant that objects contain those polarities and discrepancies implicit in life.

Critics of The Aunt's Story noticed White's new-found infatuation with things. William Walsh praised the "almost Hopkins-like power in the way White outlines the shapes and urgently communicates the intrinsic energy of things. The novelist gives the impression of having . . . an almost molecular sense of what is going on within objects."[5] In establishing such a direct, intimate relation between his heroine and the objects with which she comes into contact, White assures them a stature equivalent to Theodora's. She simply could not evolve as she does without the complicity of

the bewitching hawk, the ill-fated nautilus or the trumpeting corn. Brian Kiernan suggests that "Theodora finds Reality within the world by shedding her social roles and identifying selflessly with the eternal forms that reassert themselves in the fluctuations of the natural world, and by recognizing the honesty, the integrity of such simple objects as tables and chairs."[6] In other words, as Theodora strives to become less of a social object herself she succeeds in confronting real forms with her own, raw, reduced self. If what she vocalizes is the desire to pare down to the last of her several selves, what she achieves is a self neither completely subject nor entirely object. On these terms she approaches similarly self-free things as "solid splinters in a melting universe. They are objects which do not carry with them any strong suggestion of an objective world."[7] What we end up with is a scenario where any bizarre thing can and does happen. In the middle section of The Aunt's Story Theo and objects bump into each other constantly; they heedlessly overstep the bounds which objective humanity's notions of time and space have conferred upon them. These are "living, countersupporting things,"[8] which Theodora consults regularly, and which she interprets for other residents of the Hôtel.

Critics such as Mark Williams see a definite, regressive pattern evolve over the course of the novel with respect to the relation between Theodora and things. "Meroë," he feels, depicts "a sharply present world of things, detailed and

diverse, that is independent of Theodora's perception."[9] What she encounters during this first section are symbols, Williams asserts, useful to us because they reveal our heroine's "infinite subtlety and responsiveness,"[10] and because they call forth her admirable power of illusion. The centre section of The Aunt's Story reveals an imagination run amok, according to Williams: "The objects in the jardin exotique are symbolic in the abstract and chilling sense: they no longer participate in a fruitful union between the mind and the world of things. They are not part of a world which Theodora's mind can touch and be touched by."[11] He protests that the garden of the Hôtel du Midi is no garden but an abstraction of one: things no longer have substance, only status as "equivalents for states of soul."[12] By the time Theodora arrives in America, Williams continues, her world of things has become "wholly mental. The music of the corn is oceanic in the sense of being an undifferentiated whole whose parts do not possess integrity."[13] Her journey, then, represents a decline, according to Williams; despite the many vibrant encounters between Theodora and things in each of the three sections, he sees her saga as something of a failure because of the unremitting and increasing divergence of object and language. But there is much more cause for confidence and optimism in the connections between Theodora and words and things; if they become estranged at one point in her psychic journey they also eventually reconcile.

The Aunt's Story is the first of White's novels to feature trees as objects crucial to the shaping of both narrative and character. Trees figure mainly in the "Meroë" section of the novel; not only does Theodora feel special correspondence with them, but trees also inform the structure of this first part of the book. Narrative here is mostly linear, tracing Theodora's life from girlhood to emancipation following the death of her mother.

Trees inform many of young Theodora's memorable moments. From the first Meroë is recalled as framed by trees:

> The house looked over the flat from a slight rise, from against a background of skeleton trees. But there was no melancholy about the dead trees of Meroë. They were too far removed, they were the abstractions of trees, with their roots in Ethiopia. On the north side of the house there were also live trees. There was a solid majority of soughing pines, which poured into the rooms the remnants of a dark green light, and sometimes in winter white splinters, and always a stirring and murmuring and brooding and vague discontent. (TAS, 13-14)

The house is ascribed an active verb; against a backdrop of tree corpses the edifice watches over its acreage. The mythical, Ethiopian timber is never identified except in the abstract. Still, these trees contribute to the mythical aspect of the house: both claim primitive origins in an exotic land. The live trees face away from the sun and spend their time in melancholy, shedding liquid light and bits of

themselves upon the house they shelter. Meroë appears a kind of tree-house, as dark and moistly green as its sentinels. The trees enact the Goodmans' unrest and dissatisfaction, providing an eerie echo for house and inhabitants, but they remain forces for good in the first part of the book.

That is why Theodora likens her father to a tree. She sees him asleep, "only his breath lifting his beard, as steady as a tree. Really Father was not unlike a tree, thick and greyish-black" (TAS, 16). This equation of man with wood is metaphorical: Mr. Goodman is like a tree, physically (complete with beard for foliage, stout of stature and dark of complexion) as well as spiritually. For Theodora's father is quiet, stately and introspective, "thick and mysterious as a tree, but also hollow" (TAS, 19)--physical and not at the same time. This linking of him with trees occurs many times over in "Meroë" but comes full circle in "Holstius" when man becomes tree. As many critics have pointed out, holz means 'wood' in the original German. Hence it comes as no surprise that Theodora awaits this inverted reincarnation of a father-figure, looking "through the trees for the tree walking, which in time would become Holstius" (TAS, 281). Said arboreal being also recalls a time when Theodora was so clearly identified with wood as to emulate her father.

According to Theodora's telling of it, trees play active roles in some of the more significant rites of passage she experiences. While still a child, Theo revels in her kinship

with things of nature:

> She took off her clothes. She would lie in the water. And soon her thin brown body was the shallow, browner water. She would not think. She would drift. As still as a stick. And as thin. (TAS, 31)

Here style too is as thin and pared down as a stick. White uses kinaesthesia to show Theodora giving herself completely over to physically becoming the water, being the twig. Thus, when on her twelfth birthday she witnesses the big oak riven by lightning, Theo feels the strike deep into her own guts.[14] Theodora's oak serves as lightning rod and, because she identifies so with the tree, Theodora also splits into two from exposure to the bolt of light and fire. Henceforth the young adult Theodora experiences life not as a unified whole but as polar, and, ultimately, as fragmented. Things are disintegrating.

The "Jardin Exotique" section brims with chaos. Theodora assumes a different identity with each of the Hôtel's denizens. For General Sokolnikov she plays his sister Ludmilla, reliving with him some of his escapades. Objects too step outside the bounds of their normal roles. The night Theodora/Ludmilla finds herself alone in the woods at night awaiting Sokolnikov and compatriots, trees cease to be friends, although they remain no less alive.

> Her feet were rooted now in mute needles. She stood close against the tree, which

> smelled strongly of resin, the tree which was rough and so close that it had ceased to be a comfort or protection, as she could feel its heart beating painfully, erratically in its side. Released by the lusty, palpitating gold and red of firelight, trees leapt skyward in sudden puffs of branch and crest. Across the clearing trees had begun to move. It was these that frightened. (TAS, 206)

Trees seem exceedingly vivid in this fantasy/memory play. Not only are they fleshy, they are threatening. Whereas once, in synchrony, Theodora "rose and fell on the breathing of the tree" (TAS, 39), here she is no less than "rooted," pressed close to a terrified and terrifying tree. Eventually, trees return to their status as friends to Theodora. In punning good form White writes of a particular American tree: "Finally bark began to bite. She lifted her cheek from where it had been grained by the friendly tree" (TAS, 263). Throughout the work, even in the so-called expressionistic mid-section, trees manifest texture and presence. The reader sees, smells and feels them through the intervening sensibility of Theodora Goodman, but they never descend to less than real, fictional trees.

So too do the houses in The Aunt's Story exhibit particularly vital characteristics. From Meroë, where house and place are inseparable, to the Hôtel du Midi, where garden and edifice are one, to the bare, abandoned shack in America that Theodora adopts as her final home, domestic edifices do more than shelter their inhabitants. From the first page of

the novel White betrays his obsession with the enclosing function of houses. The death of old Mrs. Goodman

> had altered the silence of the house. It had altered the room. This was no longer the bedroom of her mother. It was a waiting room, which housed the shiny box that contained a waxwork. (TAS, 3)

Boxed within a box within a box, Mrs. Goodman's corpse recalls a similarly stifling scene from The Living and the Dead. However, this house is not Meroë but a thin red-brick one in a Sydney suburb. The short, unadorned sentences impart information only, deftly signalling the dry "breathless" (TAS, 3) atmosphere of Sydney life. The house is as dead as its owner, and always has been. But Meroë--ah, that was another story.

Theodora's retelling of the tale of Meroë to Lou inspires poetic diction and vivid style: "to tell the story of Meroë was to listen also to her own blood . . ." (TAS, 11). Again there is a direct transfer: Theodora is Meroë, just as Meroë is the volcano in the landscape or its mythical original in far-distant Ethiopia. "It was flat as a biscuit or a child's construction of blocks, and it had a kind of flat biscuit colour that stared surprised out of the landscape down at the road. It was an honest house . . . " (TAS, 13). Conceived and executed in child-like fashion, the house peers down on all about it. Chameleon-like, for protection, it has been built to blend in with the yellow and ash tones of the

landscape. To others the shabby property spells "Rack an' Ruin Hollow" (TAS, 18), but to Theodora it provides palpable warmth and security, and ample imaginative stimulation.

> The shut rooms sound like music boxes that have stopped playing. You hold your ear against the sides, which contain a creaking, of music waiting to burst out as soon as somebody touches the spring. It was like this too with the closed rooms, waiting for someone to walk in and coax life from the furniture. (TAS, 20)

Meroë is like this, but not for everyone. Fanny, in emulation of her acquisitive mother, lives a life "of full cupboards. She kept them locked. She made inventories of her possessions" (TAS, 9). While Fanny plays house, Theodora lives it. Wallpaper breathes, the kitchen nuzzles, furniture presses one back. True to all Whitean objects, though, danger lies in permitting them to possess one too completely. The Man Who Was Given His Dinner states baldly that his nomadic style is "a [sic] good a way of passing your life. So long as it passes. Put it in a house and it stops, it stands still" (TAS, 38). George Goodman's life exemplifies this failure: Theodora has consistently pictured her father in his coffin-like, "plain as a white box" (TAS, 15) room on the side of the house where the pines rustle. She learns this from the gold-digger, "that any place is habitable, depending, of course, on the unimportance of one's life" (TAS, 84). The less one lives externally, the more one inhabits the self--that natural house

we all hump, snail-like, about.

The Hôtel du Midi, no less real to Theodora than Meroë, offers more disturbing comforts. Aggressively alive, building and garden collide regularly with the guests. "Walls yawned" (TAS, 141), the corners of Mrs. Rapallo's room "confessed physical secrets" (TAS, 187) and Theodora comes to accept "the tactile voices of the voluble wall" (TAS, 197). Things act in an increasingly hostile manner, echoing of course the growing antagonism in pre-World War II Europe. Only the nautilus, while still alive, shines forth in purity and simplicity. Shattered by those who lust after it, its fate foreshadows that approaching the continent. Similarly, the Hôtel explodes as a result of the consuming emotions of its denizens. Mademoiselle Berthe astutely points out early on that "walls are no longer walls. Walls are at most curtains. The least wind and they will blow and blow" (TAS, 194). The "Jardin Exotique" section of the novel repeatedly questions the substantiality of objects and, indeed, of the Hôtel. Because a repository for anguished souls of international origin, the hospice reflects their volatility to an extreme degree, self-immolating when tensions inside flare to the point of combustion.

Once arrived in the land of vast spaces, Theodora finds "She did not fit the houses" (TAS, 262). They are straight, stark, utilitarian inventions which do not match Theo's yearning spirit. Finally, she stumbles across a house her

size.

> It was a thin house, with elongated windows, like a lantern. The lower part was black slabs of logs with paler clay or adobe slapped into the interstices, but higher up the house became frailer frame, with the elongated windows, through which nothing showed of course, on account of the height. But the windows had also the blank look of windows of deserted houses. Because there is nothing inside, they do not reflect. (TAS, 276)

Rather, she finds an abode sufficiently bare, though not empty, that she can fill. The other houses, captured in fleeting instants while Theodora rides the train west, are filled with other people's intentions. This, Holstius's house, (Holstius being the man/tree with whom Theodora communes, and who restores her to her sundered senses), provides ample space for breathing and imagining. With Theodora installed inside, the house attracts Holstius beacon-like. Inscrutable to the outside world, it is the lived life inside which literally and figuratively restores the vacant woman to herself. This cabin, like Meroë, does not resist its environment. Smelling of "dust and animals" (TAS, 277), protecting the few, discarded, broken things inside, Theodora's house is not susceptible to conflagration. Emptied by her experience in the overstuffed Midi (the middle of the book, half-way through her journey, the centre of France), Theodora refurbishes herself in a humble shack past the end of the line.

Body-wise, hands predominate. White relies upon touching

and gesturing to take over from words, which are hardly as effective as means of communication. He also probes beneath the skin in order to identify the good guys: sensitive, questing individuals like Theodora and Moraïtis are described as bony while the more possessive types like Frank Parrott and wife are substantial, even beefy of build. We picture Theodora as skeletal, angular and brittle, a physique reminiscent of her beloved trees at Meroë or her last, simple home in America. Her lean stature enables her to pierce right through others' padded selves. Early on one of Theodora's teachers prophesies to her: "You will see clearly, beyond the bone" (TAS, 57). But she also lives thoroughly in the bone: "She was as sure as the bones of a hawk in flight" (TAS, 66). What happens when she makes physical contact with another is a melting away of flesh and a clashing of bone. With Frank, whom she suspects she could love: "If she had touched him, touched his hand, the bones of her fingers would have wrestled with the bones in the palm of his hand" (TAS, 77). But they never manage to touch in any sense of the word. With Moraïtis, however, whose "bald head shone like a bone" (TAS, 109), actual contact is unnecessary. They have only to exist in one another's presence a short while for Moraïtis to announce: "I shall remember we are compatriots in the country of the bones" (TAS, 107). His music reduces Theodora to her essential frame, so that, listening to his performance, "The bones of her hands [were] folded like discreet fans on her

dress" (TAS, 110). Bones are elemental, the body in its most reduced state: like the sticks which make up a tree or the wrought iron of the filigree ball which shines with an inner fire, or the fragile nautilus of Part Two, the skeletal system is a basic structure.[15] Humble and practical, utterly personal, bone speaks to bone.

Much disintegrates in the "Jardin Exotique" section of the novel, including bones. Like walls, they can be dissolved at will. And so they are: "Touching the cheek, Katina melted bones" (TAS, 141). Still innocent, Katina's frame is rather like a newborn's, very flexible and soft. Following her rendezvous at the Tower with Wetherby, however, Theodora notices of her surrogate-Lou that "the bones had come" (TAS, 242). The value of bones is here inverted: Wetherby turns out to be "all bones" (TAS, 164), while Theodora learns that "she did not really control her bones, and that the curtain of her flesh must blow, like walls which are no longer walls" (TAS, 197).[16] Bones, like all else, have a dual nature: they support but they also cage. That which was solid and dependable for Theodora disintegrates just like the nautilus in the topsy-turvy world of the Jardin Exotique. It takes stalwart, oak-like Holstius to restore Theodora's bones to her through touch.

Hands further reveal the person. Touching another with one's hand, whether in anger or in love, acknowledges the other and communicates intention. Fleshy hands betray a

tendency to grasp. Theodora knows "It is not possible to possess things with one's hands" (TAS, 120), but following her mother's death her sister and brother-in-law arrive, paws poised for the take. Predictably, Theodora possesses special hands: "her hands touched, her hands became the shape of rose, she knew it in its utmost intimacy. Or she played the nocturne, as it was never meant, expressing some angular agony that she knew. She knew the extinct hills and the life they had once lived" (TAS, 24). Like Julia in The Living and the Dead whose hands round to the shape of the bowl they clasp, Theodora learns things, much as a physically blind person would, by manipulating them. Her hands are the rose, her music is her bony, awkward self. Theodora is convinced that "only the hands tell" (TAS, 77); her mother's bejewelled hands flash hatred, while Moraïtis's "small muscular . . . thinking hands" (TAS, 106), true to their Greek origins, drip humility. When he plays his music reaches out, "more tactile than the hot words of lovers spoken on a wild nasturtium bed" (TAS, 111). Clearly Moraïtis's concert is a kind of embrace between him and his instrument.

But hands refuse to act predictably in the Hôtel du Midi. Just as walls and bones dissolve and vegetation turns hostile, so too do the limbs fail to carry out their usual function. Theodora feels herself divorced from her hands, "as if they were related to the objects beneath them only in the way that two flies, blowing and blundering in space, are related to a

china and mahogany world" (TAS, 3). This random, fragmented quality of communication occurs first just after Mrs. Goodman's death, and then prevails during Theodora's stay in the Hôtel. A tentative, waiting atmosphere prevails: one hardly owns oneself, much less anything else.

> Theodora unfolded her hands, which had never known exactly what to do, and least of all now. Her hands, she often felt, belonged by accident, though what, of course, does not. She looked at them, noticing their strangeness, and their wandering, ingrained, grimy, gipsy fate, which was the strangest accident of all. (TAS, 144)

Here, in fairly prosaic fashion, we see Theodora reflecting upon her lack of identification with her own body parts. Estranged, only accidentally attached to the ends of her arms, Theodora's hands appear to have absorbed much of the chaotic atmosphere of the Hôtel. They end up betraying Theodora, performing stunts she could scarcely approve with a will all their own. Their most revolutionary act is the purloining of the nautilus from Mrs. Rapallo's room. Once pilfered, it is gloated over by the General and his accomplice until its owner arrives to claim it. But as Theodora has always known, possession is not a function of the hands: "the nautilus became a desperate thing of hands. . . . Hands were knotting the air. Then, hands were hands" (TAS, 215). Grabbing holds nothing. Each resident of the Hôtel suffers a disease of the hands: the General's are empty and hopeless, and Wetherby's

are "squamous" (TAS, 235) to match Katina's "cold, dead hand" (TAS, 242). Even the garden presses "dry, paper hands . . . against the windows of the salle à manger" (TAS, 160). Pathetic, beseeching: hands mirror the crumbling world about them in which no handhold is to be found anywhere.

True to the pattern of regression followed by renewal in the third part of the novel, Theodora's hands are restored to her once she reaches America. At Johnsons', she luxuriates again in the feeling of hands: "Theodora began in the agreeable silence of the washhouse to wash her hands. She folded them one over the other. She folded them over the smooth and comfortable yellow soap" (TAS, 269). At home with the humble soap, Theodora reawakens to touch. But she is haunted from her earlier experience by a sense of the lack of permanence in life. No matter how thoroughly her hands return to her, Theodora knows that permanence does not reside in touch. Hence, "she could have touched the body of Holstius, his thick and muscular, but quiet and soothing, hands, the ruddy skin, the indication of bones, the coarse greyish hair, the eyes, of which the expression was not determined by passion" (TAS, 279). An apparition to most, to Theodora Holstius exists by virtue of the fact that 'she could have touched him'; 'but didn't,' seems to be understood. There is no need to touch him to know him. Not that there is no longer need to touch: love represents the highest form of communication and hands the instruments of that exchange.

"Holstius laid his hands on, and she was a world of love and compassion that she had only vaguely apprehended" (TAS, 285-6). His hands banish the shadows and restore to Theodora her too solid flesh. If caring, concerned outsiders think of Theodora as less than complete, she acquiesces; but when they arrive to perform their Christian duty they take away no less than a fully connected body, still oblong, angular, and touching in its humility.

A short miscellany of other objects also essential to the structure of The Aunt's Story includes the filigree ball, the hawk, the rose, music and the nautilus. The magical wrought-iron sphere full of invisible fire figures mainly in the first chapter--that short interim between Theodora's emancipation and her journey abroad. Theodora's soul-mate Lou introduces the enigmatic object when she asks to play with "the brass ball" (TAS, 8). She and her brothers appreciate its mystery and exoticism: "It was something that Grandmother Goodman had brought from India once, and which, she said, the Indians fill with fire and roll downhill" (TAS, 8). Although now distorted and tarnished green, they still see in the ball some subtle fire. Lou's hands meld with the shape of the tiny globe in order to protect it from the boys' boredom: "Lou, who continued to roll the filigree ball, flowed, in which direction you could not tell, and for this Theodora trembled" (TAS, 8). Lou inhabits the same fluid medium as her aunt, and Theodora shivers for this recognition. Meanwhile, both also

respond to the elemental fire housed within the ball. Like Meroë itself, the curious, ornate sphere symbolizes mineral nature subverted to human will in order to recapture time past. A useless thing as modern standards go, it defies practicality and exists on terms that only fluid, flexible beings like Theodora and Lou appreciate. As far as the novel goes, the filigree ball is a potent object, appearing as it does right at the beginning and then scarcely again, and establishing the fire-water dichotomy which pervades the novel. The fact that the artifact contains fire but is not itself consumed by it marks it as a holy thing.

With the hawk we move into the animal world, where this particular feathered creature holds special rank.[17] Aggressive, independent, fiercely free, it encounters its human counterpart in Theodora.

> Once the hawk flew down, straight and sure, out of the skeleton forest. He was a little hawk, with a reddish-golden eye, that looked at her as he stood on the sheep's carcass, and coldly tore through the dead wool. The little hawk tore and paused, tore and paused. . . . She could not judge his act, because her eye had contracted, it was reddish-gold, and her curved face cut the wind. . . . the act of the hawk, which she watched, hawk-like, was a moment of shrill beauty that rose above the endlessness of bones. The red eye spoke of worlds that were brief and fierce. (TAS, 26-27)

Neither the bird nor Theodora yields to the other; mutually respectful, they challenge one another with eyes of fire.

Nature is not sentimentalized here; the hawk shows Theodora nature's brutality, but it also proves to her its rightness. All is reduced to the elemental: bone predominates in 'the skeleton forest,' in the sheep's corpse, even in Theodora's face. The hawk represents perfect being in the midst of transience. Its right to exist and to feed on nature's offal is unassailable.

This incident also demonstrates Theodora's ability to identify completely with other objects. Once more Theodora adopts another form; White uses kinaesthetic imagery to show her striving to feel what the hawk feels at the sensory level. Here her own eye is transformed to 'reddish-gold,' and her 'curved face' assumes a beak-like aspect. The fierce, hawk-eye introduces a large network of visual imagery; for instance, The Man Who Was Given His Dinner, another creature with whom Theodora completely identifies, also exhibits a fierce eye and predicts Theodora's capacity for seeing clearly.

Theodora's uncompromising vision hampers her in her attempts to function conventionally, hence her shattering of the red eye. Competitive as any man (one aspect of a vanity she tries repeatedly to quell), Theodora feels compelled to one-up Frank Parrott (he, of course, bears the name of that frequently domesticated fowl of exotic plumage most prized for its ability to mimic). Theodora treats her fellow hunter like a child, deliberately shooting wide in order to boost his ego.

The hawk, however, is hers, is Theodora; when Frank aims to take it and misses, pride and fear dictate her revenge. She aims for their shared red eye and blasts it, negating herself and whatever budding relationship with Frank as she does so. "I was wrong, she said, but I shall continue to destroy myself, right down to the last of my several lives" (TAS, 66). Eliminating the hawk as one of her points of reference means Theodora loses a means of identification with something other than, beyond or external to herself. Perhaps a step towards maturity the hawk-murder is also, paradoxically, a kind of suicide. The dead, umbrella-like thing is left to hang, brutally, on a fence, reminding Theodora thereafter of aspiration and failure combined, and strongly reminding the reader of the staked dog Joe and Eden stumble across in The Living and the Dead. Nature shows itself not nearly so bestial as man.

With rose we enter a vast, rich universe of suggestion. Foremost a captivating object from the vegetable realm, it also functions symbolically as another fragment of Theodora's identity. In zen-like fashion, Theo is able to merge with a rose as completely and satisfactorily as she is with the hawk. While sister Fanny is like pink roses, Theodora is the rose with a grub at its heart. The Goodmans' entire lives at Meroë are bathed in roselight; roses, in fact, dominate the first section of the novel. Queen among flowers, roses are imported status symbols Mrs. Goodman (like Amy Parker of The Tree of

Man and Mr. Bonner of Voss) uses as protection against the inhospitable landscape around Meroë. Since roses are as exotic as the filigree ball Mrs. Goodman brings home from afar, it is thus perverse that she establishes "an artificial rose garden so untidy that it looked indigenous" (TAS, 14). For Theodora the rosa flora are weighty presences: "lying in her bed, [she] could sense the roses. . . . She felt very close to the roses the other side of the wall" (TAS, 14). Fleshy, heavy roses drench her in their scent and light and compel her to touch them. Despite her mother's attempts to chase her homely daughter from the vicinity of the perfect, flashy beauties, Theodora continues to discover them. Once she finds a grub-thing stirring within a rose. Fanny quails but her sister "could not condemn her pale and touching grub. She could not subtract it from the sum total of the garden" (TAS, 15). Again White presents an object in which co-exist the polarities of existence: the rose is a particularly potent example of transience and perfection, recurring as it does in various forms throughout the book.

As with the hawk, perfect identification reigns between Theodora and roses. Again White uses kinaesthetic imagery to show that just as Lou's hands seem to become the filigree ball, Theodora's hands, when she is young, "touched, her hands became the shape of rose, she knew it in its utmost intimacy" (TAS, 24). Again, notice the importance of hands and their role in establishing intimacy with objects. "Intimacy" is

itself a revealing word, one which White uses often to indicate this coveted state of unity with things. Is he perhaps punning when he claims Theodora "rose and fell on the breathing of the tree" (TAS, 39)? Time after time insipid little Fanny is metaphorically linked to roses in the abstract, while Theodora always reacts to a particular, sensual member of the rose family. Others like Huntly Clarkson, who rely on roses for their symbolic, cultural value, and who can afford them, veritably bathe themselves in the prestige they confer. "Huntly's table was smouldering with red roses, the roselight that Theodora remembered now, of Meroë. She swam through the sea of roses towards that other Ithaca" (TAS, 104). Roses reflect Huntly's ostentatious habits, whereas for Theodora in this instance they are the means to memory. Ornamental in function for most characters, roses remain the essential texture of childhood to Theodora.

Once inside the Jardin Exotique, however, Theodora encounters bizarre species of roses. She finds herself retreating from "the jaws of roses" (TAS, 137), listening in her room to the "Maroon roses, the symbols of roses, [shouting] through megaphones at the brass bed. Remembering the flesh of roses, the roselight snoozing in the veins, she regretted the age of symbols" (TAS, 136). White uses synaesthesia to great effect here; it is a mark of the stylist he has become that he dares 'listening to maroon roses' and 'recollecting snoozing roselight.' Still, the repetition of

"symbols" signals that we are with Theodora in a space and time when things like roses no longer count as things. Once so much a part of Theodora they were her lifeblood ('snoozing in the veins'), they are now reduced to the status of intellectual concept. Referred to in "Meroë" as flesh, roses in "Jardin Exotique" become all mouth, uselessly sawing and shouting, unable to penetrate the film of abstraction to which they have been consigned.

As at the beginning of her life, Theodora continues to be surrounded by roses, especially in her room at the Hôtel, where the "rose wall" proves particularly threatening.

> It began to palpitate, the paper mouths of roses wetting their lips, either voice or wall putting on flesh. She was almost indecently close to what was happening, but sometimes one is. Sometimes the paper rose has arms and thighs.
>
> Theodora realized she must accept the tactile voices of the voluble wall. (TAS, 197)

During her days at Meroë, Theodora revelled in the glow of roselight which would invade her room from the garden. She touched rose, became rose. With a wrench she enters the world of the Hôtel du Midi, where values are inverted and things only the appearance of themselves. Here her room is also drenched in roses--but two-dimensionally, on wallpaper. These blooms, no less singular than those of her memory, prove angry in their animation, striving to burst their paper confines and

grapple with a reality they are denied. To Theodora the roses are no less real than those of Meroë, only more insistent and yet distant. She has somewhere along the way lost the ability to communicate and identify with them, and so, despite their 'volubility' she and the roses which surround her appeal to each other in mute frustration. Lack of connection between characters and things like roses results in them losing one another; the Demoiselles Bloch, for instance, are always trailing after errant doilies and runaway shoes. The world of things is in revolt in Europe of the 1930s.

The declining, then rising, fortunes of the rose mirror Theodora's trek from blissful childhood through painful adolescence and early adulthood to the final, satisfying wholeness she achieves in middle age. Obviously her story does not end there, a fact signalled by the large, black, gauze rose which bobs its way through the "Holstius" section. In this part of the novel, roses are hardly evident, except for the one adorning her hat. Instead, practical, economical corn trumpets its overwhelming presence. She removes the hat at Johnsons', only to find it catches up to her thanks to young Zack, the one who first remarks its strangeness, and his mother. This curious, flimsy ornament is too much identified with Theodora to be so casually put aside. Thus, when the authorities come to take her away, she goes crowned: "the doubtful rose trembled and glittered, leading a life of its own" (TAS, 290). These words close the novel, attesting to

the great independence of objects, particularly those which speak directly to man.

Critics have remarked on the plethora of roses in this novel. Peter Wolfe, for example, sees roses as symbols of divine paradox:

> Although the rose may evoke Paradise as God's loveliest creation, it also grows out of the soil of the fallen world. That it may grow best in the stench and filth of a manure pile shows waste as an appropriate seedbed for transcendence. Broadly speaking, the rose in White symbolizes the comfort and security of the family. Part of its joy, like that of family living, comes from its transience.[18]

Like David Tacey's linking of the rose with the mandala as the archetype of wholeness, and his tracing of rose imagery in The Aunt's Story as symbolic of totality of the self (the self being a union of opposites),[19] Wolfe's and other critics' theories about roses are pertinent and insightful. But many of their comments are applicable to any number of roses in a variety of novels. As far as White's novel goes they all fall short in dealing with said prickly bloom. For White presents not rose-ness but specific flowers throughout the work. The fact that it is not the same rose from Parts One through Two and Three illustrates why exploring Whitean symbolism proves inadequate to the reading of his books. Things are rarely only mental constructs; mostly, as is the case with roses in The Aunt's Story, they appear as unique, notable items, linked

by necessity to the common store of connotations and allusions, but also teeming with independent life.

There is a music in things to which Theodora thrills even though it is agony for her to attempt to produce some of her own. Meroë is "a golden murmur of roses" (TAS, 14), her father's room is "filled with a dark murmuring of boughs" (TAS, 15) and the pines buffeting against the windows moan "in throaty spasms" (TAS, 16). But Theodora playing piano strikes out "an angular music that did not exist" (TAS, 108). A failure at reproducing others' music, what issues from her fingers conforms, more importantly, to her inner being. Her every fibre vibrates to an artist like Moraïtis's music: "She was herself the first few harsh notes that he struck out of his instrument against the tuning violins" (TAS, 109). Theodora identifies so thoroughly with his cello she becomes it, a lover rising to his commanding fingers. Music, like roselight, is another of the fluid mediums through which Theodora makes her way. But it is for her a difficult, sometimes tempestuous element because it arouses depths in her she would suffocate: "The 'cello's voice was one long barely subjugated cry under the savage lashes of the violins" (TAS, 110). Moraïtis's music proves as tortured as the man; it is the arena in which he works out the conflicts which barb him. Theodora, troubled by similar conflicts, participates fully in the clash.

Part Two introduces a very different kind of music, an

agonized, alienating rendition. Mrs. Rapallo, for example, described in terms of music, is "the rather stiff overture muffled by the velvet through which it played, the heavily encrusted bows just scraping the breaking gut" (TAS, 152). Music is here a shrieking and a wounding; melody has turned into cacophony, consisting mostly of the disenchanted mutterings of the Hôtel's guests.

Music returns in triumphant tune with the opening of the novel's final movement. There is a clamour of corn, a rich, full, overwhelming trumpeting of the vegetable world, beside which man seems "the frail human reed" (TAS, 257). Here music issues from the many instead of from the individual. Music is the language of this "Holstius" section; notice the diction in this part of the score.

> Sometimes against the full golden theme of corn and the whiter pizzicato of the telephone wires there was a counterpoint of houses. Theodora Goodman sat. The other side of the incessant train she could read the music off. There were the single notes of houses, that gathered into gravely structural phrases. There was a smooth passage of ponds and trees. There was a big bass barn. . . . Where children played with tins, or a girl waited at a window, or calves lolloped in long grass, it was a frill of flutes twisted round a higher theme, to grace, but only grace, the solemnity of living and of days. There were now the two coiled themes. There was the flowing corn song, and the deliberate accompaniment of houses, which did not impede, however structural, because it was part of the same integrity of purpose and of being. (TAS, 261)

The landscape is a symphony in which Theodora feels herself the only note of discord.[20] Badly out of tune with her environment in the Hôtel du Midi, Theodora finds Holstius, a fellow wooden instrument, who restores her to perfect pitch. "The struggle to preserve her own instrument for some final, if also fatal, music that Holstius must play, had been at times difficult and unpleasant, but at least it was preserved" (TAS, 284). The parallel with Moraïtis's healing powers is clear; in both cases, men adept at communicating via music restore Theodora to herself. Music, a subtle, flexible and fluid means of expression for things in "Meroë," becomes wooden and jarring in "Jardin Exotique" because things are jolted from their natural means of expression. "Holstius" finds music restored to things and Theodora preserved for future performances.

The nautilus also impacts heavily as object. Like the rose it lends itself to rich and varied readings, but, like the rose, the filigree ball and the hawk the nautilus exists in its own right. Out of its proper element, the nautilus excites more emotion than any other single object during the course of the book. In terms of form, the spiral shell embodies the shape of the novel itself. The wide entrance to the nautilus is where Theodora begins her reminiscences about Meroë, the narrowing, twisting tunnel represents her stay in the Hôtel du Midi and, just as corkscrews eventually reverse,

the spiral finally propels her back into the funnel mouth, the open spaces of America.

The nautilus dominates the book's middle section as the coveted toy of Mrs. Rapallo. J.F. Burrows suggests it catalyzes those ticklish questions of ownership, acquisitiveness and choice which plague the characters, Marjorie Barnard calls it the grail of pre-World War II Europe and, in similar fashion, Peter Wolfe sees in it the prize of Europe. The narrator relies on excess to convey the nautilus's special rank. Here it arrives, borne by a rapacious, jaded Venus: "But most marvellous was the nautilus that she half carried in her left hand, half supported on her encrusted bosom. Moored, the shell floated, you might say, in its own opalescent right" (TAS, 153). Mrs. Rapallo's purchase embraces paradox. Land-bound, it floats; silent, it sings: Katina, herself a frail shell, "listened to its sound. She listened to the thick-throated pines fill the room, their clear blue-green water, rising and falling. The music of the nautilus was in her face, Theodora saw, behind the thin membrane that just separates experience from intuition" (TAS, 154). Katina, in Theodora fashion, is taken over by the vibrant tones which recall Meroë much more than Europe. To the others like Mrs. Rapallo and the General the nautilus is something to be fought over: "it is mine" (TAS, 154, 155), shouts each in turn. The wealthy American assumes ownership is conferred in proportion to dollars lavished, hence, "I

bought my nautilus" (TAS, 155). Even so the reluctant spiral sails on in defiance of the conflict it arouses, beauty and perfection incarnate. It makes everyone hungry for its cool separateness and wholeness, yet the nautilus proves as elusive as every other object in the Hôtel and measures to a large extent the growing distance separating characters and things.

An object of contemplation, and eminently strokable, the shell makes Mrs. Rapallo feel "as if she were touching a distance" (TAS, 159). No real contact is ever established between the lovely sea-thing and its would-be possessors, and ownership is abolished once Theodora and Sokolnikov plot to pilfer it. The disease of the times invades Theodora too so that she plays thief in the night: "Theodora saw no reason why she should not. She was herself by now as vibrant and transparent as a shell. . . . she began to be obsessed by the same obsession as Sokolnikov, to hold the nautilus, to hold, if it is ever possible, to hold" (TAS, 211). Words like 'reason' jar when used in conjunction with our heroine, for she has never been a creature of rationality or logic; neither has she been prone to obsession. The mania to hold marks her a changed being. Once she succumbs to greed and grabs the shell, her hands turn to "water. . . . Then Theodora made the darkness move. It was released. Her skirt flowed. Ferns shook. The dull and usually unresponsive tails of pampas grass flumped against her fixed eyes. She was walking down the passage with the nautilus" (TAS, 213). The capturing of

the prize proves such a cataclysmic event that virtually every thing awakens from its customary torpor in order to witness it. The entire sequence seems to occur in slow motion and under water. Returned to its proper element, the nautilus sails on towards imminent destruction. As Theodora knows, "the nautilus is made to break" (TAS, 214). Then follow the transformations from shell to hands to air; slivers are all that remain, ultimately.

This splintering of the single desirable object in the Hôtel du Midi merely reflects the parallel disintegration of personae and the closing of ranks by the other objects in sympathy with their martyred colleague. Following the murder of the spiral "the night was denser. Emotions had trodden into the carpet the slight white rime which was what remained of the nautilus. Theodora felt herself considerably reduced" (TAS, 215). The only things left to happen are the deflowering of young Katina and the Hôtel fire, both further reductive events. The shattering of the nautilus signals certain decline for the Hôtel and its guests; for Theodora her part in the abduction and destruction of the innocent shell marks the lowest point in her relations with things since her shooting of the hawk. Part Three finds her attempting to renew communication with them.

Objects provide glimpses into characters: they resist the possessors like Fanny whose only interest is in mounting up stores of things, and open to those such as Theodora who

meet them on their own terms. They open doors to one another. Especially as a child Theodora seems capable of suspending reason in order to merge, zen-like, with the hawk or the Syrian's ragged shawl or the blighted rose. Things and characters are completely interdependent and each is more than a little responsible for the identity of the other: whereas Peter Beatson feels "it is the state of mind that releases the pleasant or malignant aspects of the symbolic precinct,"[21] Mark Williams suggests that objects referred to "map the infinitely subtle registrations of a particular world on consciousness."[22] White has mastered the ability to focus upon the outward thing while also keeping attention turned inward to the subject. This bifocal vision allows for extraordinary intimacy between characters and things.

It is only ever through language that objects have any viability. Gaston Bachelard likens words to "little houses, each with its cellar and garrett," also to "clamor-filled shells. There's many a story in the miniature of a single word!"[23] White succeeds in creating of each word an object and of each object an entire story. White's style is at times necessarily illogical and ungrammatical, especially in the middle section of the novel, but also elsewhere. Words, themselves obstinate things from the material world, White wrestles into shapes they would ordinarily resist taking. He explodes metaphorical and symbolic expectations in order to come directly into contact with life. As A.M. McCulloch

points out: "The allencompassing [sic] emotion . . . is White's yearning to make contact linguistically with the extraordinary behind the ordinary, to express the infinity existent in life, to grasp that goal which is the point of union, and to demand of the energy of art, the tools to grasp what becomes inevitably inaccessible, the nucleus of life/art itself."[24] McCulloch's statement demonstrates the critic's dilemma in dealing with White: whatever 'the extraordinary behind the ordinary' means, the phrase originates with White and has proved a life-jacket to those who attempt to explain his defiance of the formal limitations of metaphor and symbol.

The fact that particular objects such as roses change not only from novel to novel but also within each novel supports their claim to selfhood. Were they only symbolic, roses could not so vary from one context to the next: they would be confined to the pre-established symbolic precincts of roseness. McCulloch again: "Kafka's comments on the inevitable failure of symbolism also express White's artistic dilemma. He said, symbols are 'of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have'; they 'merely express the fact that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we knew that already' . . . "[25] Characters cannot interact physically with symbols; the paradoxical nature of McCulloch's evaluation of White as rediscoverer of the realism of the symbol captures White's dilemma as writer: he "rejects the symbol which refers to abstractions in the manner of an allegory. White's

language . . . describes; and in describing it opens our eyes to what really is."[26] Concrete diction plus the extraordinary sensitivity of characters to the textures of existence give us real objects which also (not only) open experience to the unfathomable.

White eschews metonymy and simile for simple equivalence, thus purging figurative expression of its second-hand tendencies. Things are not <u>like</u> other things, they <u>are</u> other things.

> Theodora, felt Huntly Clarkson, is an upright chair, a Spanish leather, in which an Inquisitor has sat, a shabby rag of skin passing judgment on souls. For a few moments he hated Theodora. The way you can hate something that is untouchable. (<u>TAS</u>, 105)

Huntly's subjective opinion equates his mysterious lady-friend with an object decidedly unfeminine. Yet surprising as it seems, his appraisal of her makes sense in terms of what we know of Theodora. She is stiff and distant, the self-described soul of shabbiness, and a creature of ambiguous sex. So, the inquisitive/Inquisitorial exotic Spanish rawhide, while hardly flattering, strikes us as a surprising but appropriate thing to equate with our heroine, despite what we know of her special qualities. Words are objects are truth, and there is perhaps nothing more stalwart or honest than a straight-backed leather armchair.

White's novels, <u>The Aunt's Story</u> in particular, tend to

open form, and objects reflect this. According to Bachelard, "By means of poetic language, waves of newness flow over the surface of being. And language bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed. Through meaning it encloses, while through poetic expression, it opens up."[27] White's language is predominantly poetic, descriptive and concrete throughout The Aunt's Story: words evoke the things themselves. They do not mean--which, as Bachelard has said, encloses--but rather are, and hence, open. White's fractured, fragmented language, the confusion of fantasy and dream with heightened reality and an inverted state of being where plants and furniture are more animated than characters offer something of a challenge to the reader of The Aunt's Story. It seems to me, though, that the novel serves as model for the ideal way to read Patrick White's fictions. It asks us to approach his work the way Theodora Goodman 'reads' or comes to terms with her world: that is, relaxing the inclination to interpret and analyse and trusting instead in a more visceral than cerebral response.

Theodora Goodman represents the first in a long line of Whitean characters who lead several lives, all of whom also claim ambiguous sexuality. The list includes Mary Hare of Riders, Arthur Brown from Solid Mandala, Eddie Twyborn of The Twyborn Affair (1980) and Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray from Memoirs of Many in One (1986). Theodora frequently indulges her many selves and multiple identities in order to be some

thing or some one else. She strives to contain other things like the hawk, the stick, the rose and the nautilus, just as she willingly acts out the parts of persons long dead, like Ludmilla, or non-existent, like Holstius. All are part of her, and she of them. Like the narrator of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," Theodora contains multitudes. In order to meet the demands of such complex characterization, White's language in The Aunt's Story thus stretches out of the more regular, linear shape it wore in Happy Valley and The Living and the Dead. He employs stream-of-consciousness technique as well as kinaesthetic and synaesthetic imagery, startling juxtapositions of words and fractured syntax in pursuit of a style commensurate to his subject matter. White's language in The Aunt's Story marks the return to a magical, mythical age when poetic, hieroglyphic language prevailed. Restored potency to words means new life in things, hence the catalogue of remarkable objects in The Aunt's Story. Fire-ball, hawk, rose and shell: all are examples of perfection in the midst of transience. The novel which follows, The Tree of Man, offers a drastic change of pace: it uses rich, rhythmic, Biblical language to depict characters engaged in the search for permanence.

Notes

[1] Elyot's descent into the watery depths of the mirror is strongly reminiscent of White's own account of venturing through the looking glass as a boy:

> There was the Long Room, at one end the garden, at the other the great gilded mirror, all blotches and dimples and ripples. I fluctuated in the watery glass; according to the light I retreated into the depths of the aquarium, or trembled in the foreground like a thread of pale-green samphire. Those who thought they knew me were ignorant of the creature I scarcely knew myself.

Patrick White, Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait (New York: Viking, 1982), p. 1.

[2] Mark Williams, "Remittance Bards: The Places, Tribes, and Dialects of Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry," Diss. The University of British Columbia 1983, p. 157.

[3] Williams, p. 160.

[4] Wolfe, p. 67.

[5] William Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977), p. 25.

[6] Brian Kiernan, "The Novels of Patrick White," in The Literature of Australia, ed. Geoffrey Dutton (Victoria: Penguin, 1976), p. 465.

[7] William Walsh, A Manifold Voice: Studies in

Commonwealth Literature (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p. 95.

[8] Wolfe, p. 71.

[9] Williams, p. 284.

[10] Williams, p. 277.

[11] Williams, p. 298.

[12] Williams, p. 295.

[13] Williams, p. 315.

[14] Northrop Frye, discussing varieties of biblical imagery like trees, fire and water, remarks pertinently that "Whatever is struck by fire from the sky, whether benevolently or in wrath, is symbolically at the highest point in the world."

Frye, The Great Code, p. 158.

[15] What bone reminds us of most potently is the fact that we are already only skeletons. Transience co-exists with permanence; we are never far from the grave.

[16] This reinforces Mlle Berthe's earlier pronouncement about the tentative nature of walls (TAS, 194).

[17] Hawks seem to hold special significance for Patrick White: it is the first thing we meet in his novel Happy Valley.

[18] Wolfe, p. 83.

[19] see David Tacey, "The Secret of the Black Rose: Spiritual Alchemy in Patrick White's The Aunt's Story." Adelaide ALS Working Papers, 2, No. 2 (1977), 36-78.

[20] Music I would place in the river/tree scheme of things

because both river and music in particular have traditionally been used to symbolize fleeting time. Smetana's Ma Vlast, for instance, depicts the changing fortunes of the Vltava River from stream to river to sea using modulations in notes, volume and tempo.

[21] Beatson, p. 137.

[22] Williams, p. 29.

[23] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 147 and 179.

[24] A.M. McCulloch, A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), p. 110.

[25] McCulloch, p. 143.

[26] McCulloch, p. 154.

[27] Bachelard, p. 222.

III

River/Tree

only a leaf falling at dusk will disturb
the reason without reason.
--The Tree of Man

In countries where the leaves are large as hands
where flowers protrude their fleshy chins
and call their colours,
an imaginary snow-storm sometimes falls
among the lilies.
And in the early morning one will waken
to think the glowing linen of his pillow
a northern drift, will find himself mistaken
and lie back weeping.
--P.K. Page, "Stories of Snow"

Trees and rivers conjure up visions of natural grandeur and dignity. Long and linear, they provide a sufficiently roomy structure for the novelist to flow into. The Tree of Man is just such an expansive, unhurried narrative about the cultivation of the Australian outback. Just as the New Testament assures us not a sparrow falls, nor hair from a head that God is unaware of, so too can the same be claimed of Patrick White's novel: no leaf that parts from a bough goes unrecorded in this epic, all-encompassing narrative of life on the land. Stan Parker starts hacking his way through trees and scrub as a young man, builds himself a house, marries, has children, and matures watching the gradual transformation of bush into town. The book chronicles Stan's relations with his wife Amy and their eventual children Ray and Thelma, along the way also recounting local events such as floods and fires and more universal disruptions such as World War I. A vast sense of time and space reigns throughout the work. Whereas time and space were compressed in The Aunt's Story to the point where there was little sense of time passing or of location, The Tree of Man depicts both as moving, interconnected streams which sweep characters through their lives. Further, style conforms to structure: sentences tend to be long and traditionally put together, as simple and humble as the main characters and lifestyle depicted. The Aunt's Story combined various styles and structures to chaotic effect; The Tree of Man sticks with the prosaic and the linear as evidence of the

permanence and continuity Stan pursues throughout his life.

Tree and river seem to me objects which best illustrate the shape of The Tree of Man. I join them because together they embody the limits of man's possibilities: both inhabit time and space, the one expressing horizontally what the other suggests vertically. Their long, linear form bespeaks directionality and the beyond. Firmly rooted in the verifiable, rivers and trees also compel humanity's gaze into and beyond itself: they act as hinges between the real and the numinous. They also link those polarities which define the human race's view of the world: heaven and hell, sunrise and sunset--trees and rivers hold together the opposites.

Both, however, prove to be victims of their extensive past; for instance, rivers have historically been called upon to symbolize fleeting time and trees to symbolize the self as process of growth. While their appropriateness for these chores is indisputable (sanctioned mainly by centuries of being used in just these ways), it is peripheral to their best role as themselves. When is a river not a river? When it is a symbol, or, more to the point, when it is a word. Surely rivers and trees, in all their amplitude and rich allusiveness, can satisfy any number of readerly and writerly intentions, not because of their well-documented flexibility as symbols, but also because they remain superb, complex, individual creations? Consider, for example, theologian Martin Buber's approach to trees:

> I contemplate a tree. I can accept it as a picture . . . I can feel it as movement . . . I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance . . . Does the tree then have consciousness, similar to our own? I have no experience of that. . . . What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself.[1]

Whatever they invoke or connote must always arise from what they are. Somehow literature has misplaced true rivers and trees, forgotten that they are wet or rough, cool or green. Novels like The Tree of Man recover them from unjust exile in the land of abstraction and restore them to the eroded landscape of modern fiction.

Subject as they are to life, death and change, river and tree cannot help but embody timelessness within temporal parameters. Because time remains a practically opaque concept, objects like rivers and trees size the daunting down to human terms. For all their textual and elemental reality, river and tree cannot help but tempt our imagination beyond them as objects. This is as inevitable as our continual posing of those questions to which we cannot expect answers. What we are left desiring, ultimately, is renewed connection with things because they are also, essentially, important in themselves.

Water and vegetation come to describe the texture of life in many White novels. In Voss, for example, there is sometimes little to differentiate flesh from herbage, just as

in The Living and the Dead characters and objects seem to drift helplessly through life. Mirrors take on the characteristics of fluids and flora habitually snatch at ladies' skirts in The Aunt's Story, The Tree of Man and Voss. Mary Hare's riot of greenery in Riders in the Chariot proves particularly tenacious: "As Miss Hare passed, several barbs of several strands attached themselves to the folds of her skirt, pulling on it, tight, tight, tighter, until she was all spread out behind, part woman, part umbrella" (RITC, 9). Things try to communicate.

1.

River/Tree

Consider first any tree--that is, whatever "tree" conjures up. My particular tree is a tall, mature deciduous, leafy and green and multi-branched. Certainly a common enough object, a tree nevertheless yields much in the way of distinctiveness. Take any tree--a natural, vegetable phenomenon--and the most obvious of its physical aspects are its verticality and directionality. Some other-worldly alien, entirely unfamiliar with the concept of "tree" might be at pains to describe it. To him it might appear a long, linear form with fork-like off-shoots at either end of a rough, brown, cylindrical stem. Our alien might go on to perform seemingly absurd tests on the tree in order to discover more about it: he might taste it, or put his ear to it and then come up with his own personal, unclichéd idea of what tree is. Substantial, concrete and living--although only arguably animate--trees respond even to those senses not usually employed to verify them, like hearing or taste. René Magritte offers this concept of tree as arch-metamorphizer:

> Pushed from the earth toward the sun, a tree is an image of certain happiness. To perceive this image we must be immobile like a tree. When we are moving, it is

> the tree that becomes the spectator. It is witness, equally, in the shape of chairs, tables, and doors to the more or less agitated spectacle of our life. The tree, having become a coffin, disappears into the earth. And when it is transformed into fire, it vanishes into the air.[2]

Not only are trees subject to change, they also embody life's basic dichotomies: tree trunks, coarse outside, prove smooth and hieroglyphic inside, and branches and roots reach in opposite directions for light and nourishment. Unless interfered with in some way, trees usually live long years and displace increasing amounts of space, digging ever deeper into the earth in which they anchor and snatching ever larger handfuls of sky.

Confronted by any large, mature tree, one's gaze is compelled upwards and beyond the self. Tree, although familiar, remains undeniably other. Usually the context in which a given tree is found includes a vast backdrop of sky, although at times other tree tops or clouds or passing birds enlarge the scene. As independent and alien to human concerns as it seems, tree is nevertheless subject to the same natural laws which affect humankind. The tree trunk, for instance, functions as the field of tension for the forces of gravity as well as for the conflict between motion and stasis. Somehow the stem withstands the pull of the branches up and away into undefined space, even while its lower body responds to the pull into earthly oblivion. Trees exist as dynamic phenomena,

in tune with natural cycles, losing and regaining colour or foliage in turn. People see trees as functional, and use their matter for lumber, their bulk for shade or their produce for food, just as nesting animals look on trees as natural abodes. Hence, tree as structure shares affinities with both body and house.

These very different forms also share some of the same terminology: 'limb' applies to both tree and body, and 'family tree' provides the metaphorical equivalent to 'house of Windsor,' for example. Consider tree as upside-down man or woman, where the intricate root system is like long, flowing hair. Or think of tree roots as labyrinthine, invitations to a maze impossible to follow. Consider the branches of a fir tree, poised arrow-like towards the stars, or deciduous branches as the hideaway of gods. Trees evoke powerful associations, originating in no less than humanity's first defiance of God. The tree of knowledge of good and evil precipitated a drama which saw man and woman reduced to temporal beings in an imperfect world. Later, however, tree took on a redemptive function as crucifix. Trees figure largely in Christian mythology, from the beginning until the very end, or new beginning, as foreseen in John's Revelation of a new heaven and new earth, made possible by Christ's sacrifice upon the holy rood. More popularly, tree came to be synonymous with gallows as well as with various wooden implements like the shaft of a spear or the framework of a

saddle. Its form has also prompted the invention of domestic, utilitarian objects like the clothing tree.

Throughout the ages trees have inspired artistic contemplation of all kinds, and Patrick White is obviously alert to this allusive richness of tree in his novel The Tree of Man. His tree stands in direct contrast to and defiance of the original, biblical version of tree. White plainly attempts to demythologize tree in this his fourth published novel. As Vincent Buckley points out, it is a tree trimmed down to size.

> The tree of man: in short, unspectacular and unobtrusive, half of whose life is a spreading and deepening of roots, not an explosion and diffusion of heroic gestures. It survives, in so far as it survives at all, because it has a real relationship with the earth. It does not ponder, does not consciously accept or reject, its bonds with the earth. It simply has, is those bonds.[3]

Despite overwhelming cultural accretion, much of which is admittedly foregrounded in a novel like The Tree of Man, tree still pulses with some uniqueness of being. Not only does its form inspire the structure of the novel, tree also largely informs the character of humble, stalwart Stan(d) Parker.

Just as tree cleaves sky, so river cleaves land. It is that copious stream of water flowing in a channel, always towards another body of water: the sea, a lake, or another stream. It is liquid and moving, hence dynamic and

changing--again, only arguably animate. Like tree, river's form is linear, invoking direction and distance; as tree branches, so too may river, thus making it metaphorically suited for evoking vast reaches of time and space. Like tree, river is subject to forces of gravity, although it continually defies these in the course of the great cycle of water evaporating and then condensing again. River establishes laws of its own in the form of currents and eddies, and it, like tree, serves as abode for infinite varieties of creatures. Just as tree is normally viewed in the context of sky, so is river seen flanked on two sides by land. The word itself derives from the French "rive," meaning "bank," but it also denotes "cleave," "open," or "sever," and in addition lends itself to variations like "rêver." For in a symbolic sense, river has long been seen as repository for dreams. Mythologically, river represents the boundary between life and death. It is still looked to as the source of life and renewal: consider, for instance, the mystique of the Ganges and the role it continues to play in Indian religious life. Water also plays a central role in biblical mythology: it is there, in the beginning, even before the trees. In the Old Testament water provides the means for many of God's miracles as performed in Egypt by Moses. The New Testament finds water the central ingredient in the life-affirming ritual of baptism as practised by John the Baptist. Whatever the mythology, water is feared and revered as source of both life and death.

River does not play as prominent a role in The Tree of Man as does tree. Except as destructive force during the flood, river scarcely surfaces at all, although, again, lack of water almost destroys the land during the fire. But as we have seen in The Aunt's Story, water as medium frequently informs the texture of characters' lives. Whenever they peer into mirrors, characters like Theodora and Stan and Amy gaze not upon glass, but into the dark mysterious depths of some troubled pool. But it is not so much river as water as it is the long, winding form of the thing itself which justifies its link to tree and to my claim for it as inspiring the structure of the novel. What tree is to space in The Tree of Man, river is to time.

White's novel is itself a tree. White specifies it a tree of man, but, by virtue of its structure, the book is first and foremost a tree plain and simple. The novel unfolds according to a chronological, linear sequence of events which start at several beginnings: of Stan Parker's life on the land, of the land as cultivated and inhabited, of Parkers' marriage and their house, and of their community. First comes one, then two, then many. Story develops according to numerous arrivals and departures: the Bible pedlar, appearing as he does at the beginning, complements the biblical nature of the book's opening and, disappearing as he does, introduces the novel's first loss--that of the silver nutmeg grater; the adoptive boy, coaxed against his will by Amy flees, leaving

behind his fragment of rose-tinted glass, which object, like the grater, serves to link beginning with end (that is, both are re-discovered--the first by Parkers' grandson Ray, the second by Amy herself); Fritz the German, whose helpful presence becomes such a liability during the war years that he imposes exile upon himself; Con, second after Moraïtis in a long line of Greek characters to people White's novels, who inspires the Parkers with exotic thoughts and the children with dark passions, and who ultimately leaves to make it big in the city; finally, Ray and Thelma themselves, both of whom forsake the land for the city and who both come to be virtually dead to their parents. From solitude to community to city, from self to family to shattered fragments thereof, The Tree of Man traces a declining quality of life. Self-reliance and strength of character hold no currency in Sydney, where conning represents a way of life and immersion in the material defines the individual.

The novel's structure is carefully balanced. Seven chapters comprise the first and last of its parts, framing the central two sections' six chapters each. As both Leonie Kramer and Manfred Mackenzie have pointed out, The Tree of Man's four-part structure can be seen to correspond to other structures of man and nature which also appear in multiples of four, namely: the four ages of man and the four seasons, where youth corresponds to spring, middle age to summer, old age to fall and death to winter. These perpetual cycles are

punctuated by natural, as well as metaphysical events which, when traced, reveal a kind of rise and fall curve: the flood which occurs in Part One corresponds to Stan Parker's sense of virility and self-sufficiency; the fire in Part Two comes in Stan's maturity, replete for him with wife and children but also with vague gnawings of doubt, for it is during this period that he rescues Madeleine from the fire at Glastonbury, and also that he goes to war; Part Three brings the formerly burgeoning doubts into sharper focus, with Stan's discovery of Amy's infidelity, of his son's disreputable ways and of daughter Thelma's rejection of her parents; Part Four moves from Stan's complete dissolution and denial to his eventual return to some kind of peace with himself. Again, the quality of life depicted declines steadily.

Like a tree, which branches out both above and below the ground, The Tree of Man exhibits open form. The novel ends not with Stan's death but with another beginning in which his grandson discovers life, death and art in the form of trees. Narrative proceeds episodically, and White's style remains entirely realistic throughout. Critics such as Mackenzie and Kramer persist in seeing The Tree of Man as paradigmatic and apocalyptic, and as unabashed allegory in which objects and events take on heavily symbolic value. But, while biblical overtones are certainly evident in the novel, biblical structural mythology is not strictly adhered to; I therefore suggest that this work depicts no allegorical fall

from Eden. I would also argue with Mackenzie's distinguishing between White as realistic in manner but not in method; it seems to me that White injects realism back into the symbol in this novel so that the reader never ends up with static trees or cabbages or roses.

The first paragraph of Part One, Chapter One, begins the novel in all due simplicity.

> A cart drove between the two big stringybarks and stopped. These were the dominant trees in that part of the bush, rising above the involved scrub with the simplicity of true grandeur. So the cart stopped, grazing the hairy side of a tree, and the horse, shaggy and stolid as the tree, sighed and took root. (TTOM, 9)

Man appears nowhere in this scene: the cart moves and stops of its own accord, its only witnesses a horse and two trees--specifically, "two big stringybarks." The name conjures a vision of lean, humble trees, but, as the narrator informs us, they represent royalty in that part of the bush. The fact that the cart stops is repeated, signifying this to be a momentous pause, as indeed it is. For what next occurs is a kind of reversal, where tree is "hairy" like the horse and horse, "shaggy and stolid as the tree, sighed and took root." Taking root quickly turns into the dominant metaphor for the entire novel: The Tree of Man proves to be about nothing less than Stan Parker's "melancholy longing for permanence," (TTOM, 13) his desire for "the peace of permanence," (TTOM, 14) and

his search to find it. The novel, which traces the span of Stan's life, bears witness to him as a kind of battlefield on which "the nostalgia of permanence and the fiend of motion" (TTOM, 14) fight it out. Permanence is unchanging and forever--a deceptive yet appealing (and hence cruel) state that humanity covets to no avail; permanence is also a tree--the tree of man: changing but enduring.

When next tree appears, two paragraphs later, it is in human company. Again, the encounter proves momentous:

> Then the man took an axe and struck at the side of a hairy tree, more to hear the sound than for any other reason. And the sound was cold and loud. The man struck at the tree, and struck, till several white chips had fallen. He looked at the scar in the side of the tree. The silence was immense. It was the first time anything like this had happened in that part of the bush. (TTOM, 9)

The man, who will remain unnamed for almost two full pages, meets a tree with violent gesture in order to affirm his own presence and strength. The arboreal recipient of the man's blows, "hairy" as before, is scarred by the attention, as the man notices. The "cold . . . loud" sound of the thwacks emphasizes the isolation the man faces; hence his reason for swinging at the embodiment of that solitude. Before long the man sets out to rid the land of its long-lived denizens, putting up shelter for himself and building a fire at their expense. Strangely enough, in seeking his own permanence, the

man destroys the symbols thereof. Clearly though, by the end of his first day on the land, a transference has occurred: "He smelled the smell of green wood burning. . . . And the cavern of fire was enormous, labyrinthine, that received the man. He branched and flamed, glowed and increased, and was suddenly extinguished in the little puffs of smoke and tired thoughts" (TTOM, 10). The man has taken on certain tree-like characteristics. As he uproots, he himself takes root, branching out and increasing in reciprocity with land and trees; as he shapes the land, so too does his life take shape.

Stan's claim is not staked without a certain amount of violence. Purpose he defines as the "opposing [of] silence and rock and tree" (TTOM, 15). So, as he advances through the scrub, hewing and clearing, the diction becomes increasingly militaristic:

> As the day increased, Stan Parker emerged and, after going here and there, simply looking at what was his, began to tear the bush apart. His first tree fell through the white silence with a volley of leaves. This was clean enough. But there was also the meaner warfare of the scrub, deadly in technique and omnipresence, that would come up from behind and leave warning on the flesh in messages of blood. (TTOM, 16)

The assault of man on nature is not only ruthless but also reciprocated: Stan wrenches the bush back from the land and vegetation avenges itself by clawing back. The narrator describes Stan as "possessed by his daemon of purpose" (TTOM,

16), hence adding a malevolent note to his intrusion. "The logs of sleep lay dead heavy" (TTOM, 16) suggests not just Stan's exhausted slumber at the end of a long, laborious day but also the corpses of trees that litter the ground on which he lays his head. Stan's wish for changelessness brings devastating change to the land and, what is more, it alters the very nature of time itself.

The book's opening chapter harbours many beginnings, among them Stan's own. As far as he remembers, his own origins coincide somehow with the pale-blue gentle God of his mother, and the fiery, gusty God of his father. "Anyway, in the beginning. At Willow Creek, God bent the trees till they streamed in the wind like beards" (TTOM, 11)--God's beard, of course. God and beginning and tree remain all lumped together in his young boy's mind and, despite his reading forays into Hamlet and the New Testament, interpretation eludes him: "Anyway, not yet" (TTOM, 12). As a young man, Stan contents himself with a longing for permanence and sporadic attempts at sharing the distance between himself and other people. Grown older, he opts for solitude and sheer living in the moment: "His place in the present was warm enough. . . . Because the present prevails" (TTOM, 13, 15). But as he struggles with the bush, he works himself into a frenzy of tomorrow: "Anaesthetized by the future, he felt neither whips nor actual wounds" (TTOM, 16). From formlessness, Stan strives towards form.

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

Time and space come to wear a human face in the form of piled logs. Stan's efforts, slow and deliberate as always, represent his first step towards establishing the longed-for permanence. In time, the stumps cease to bleed. Riot in the underbrush settles down and the "blunt" house, "plain but honest" (TTOM, 17) fulfils necessity. His spurt of creativity complete, Stan pauses in his labour to find himself a mate. The opening chapter closes on this promise of a future.

The language of this first chapter marks the novel as entirely different from The Aunt's Story. Cart, tree, horse and dog fill the first few pages with real presence. Here, where words are the things themselves, is ground-zero writing. Mark Williams puts it this way:

> His [Stan's] world is one of at-homeness between things and self. This feeling of being at home in the world allows a sense of intimate connection between words and things, actions and meanings. Stan's world is commensurate to his desires.[4]

Neither words nor things function as symbols: things are what they seem--except that they manage to exhibit some vitality: fire, for instance, "licked at and swallowed the loneliness" TTOM, 9)--and nouns exist in their denotative function. The writing style strives for and achieves an evocative effect, with its long, rhythmic sentences, repetitions and biblical resonances. But Stan has not discovered Eden, and the style sometimes reflects this: "A dog lifting his leg on an anthill. The lip drooping on the sweaty horse" (TTOM, 9). As simple and humble as style appears, however, it remains distinctly impersonal, as if to demonstrate Stan's plight as man in the middle of a vast nowhere.

By the end of the first section the homestead Stan has carved out of the bush is part of a community named Durilgai. The scrub has been subdued, Stan has married Amy and she has further civilized their land by planting rose bushes. So far, Parkers' fledgling family numbers two, the boy from the floods at Wullunya having declined to join them. Even so, at this early stage in their relation both Stan and Amy feel themselves complete, and their common life to be good. Unable to articulate his satisfaction, Stan looks once again to tree as a point of reference for his life: "They were close. Their lives had grown together. They would continue in that way, because it was not possible to divide their common trunk" (TTOM, 98). Further on, their bodies are referred to as "stems" (TTOM, 98), thus reinforcing the physical nature of

their association with each other and with the land. Stan feels most gratified to notice in Amy what he believes to be a change from her shallow, girlish self to the woman his wife. Again, this improvement in her Stan gauges according to Amy's burgeoning relation with the land: "She had begun to see the shapes of the trees, the white columns, and the humbler, shaggy ones, stirring and inclining towards them in the morning light" (TTOM, 98). Hostility between man and nature seems to have begun with Stan's felling of the first tree, to have crested with the devastating floods and finally to have abated with the promise of a fruitful tree of man.

Near the end of the novel Stan is once again referred to in arboreal terms. The speaker is his daughter Thelma, who, in her usual denigrating fashion, "took Dad for granted, he would still be standing there, his hard and surprising trunk, rooted" (TTOM, 346). The parallels with Theodora's father in The Aunt's Story are clear: both men, quiet and stalwart, simple and honest, remain somehow incomplete and unsatisfied--Mr. Goodman because he has betrayed his potential by settling for convention and Stan because he never manages to adequately convey the sense of wonder the world inspires in him. In Voss, man is also likened to tree, to its capacity for both endurance and change. Judd, the ex-convict, about to accompany Voss into the unknown heart of the continent, "was, in fact, a union of strength and delicacy, like some gnarled trees that have been tortured and twisted by time and weather

into exaggerated shapes, but of which the leaves still quiver at each change" (V, 133). For each of these men trees remain potent witnesses of their internal struggles.

Like Joe Barnett in The Living and the Dead, Stan enjoys wood-working and takes up carpentry in later life as a hobby:

> he had developed a passion for carpentry in recent years, and could now see with peculiar distinctness the grain of the particular wood on which he was working, and the little nick near a dovetail which had been worrying him because of the blemish it would leave. (TTOM, 391)

His is such an intimate relation with his materials to the extent that "There were certain objects, particularly an axe and the hacksaw, that he could not bear other people to touch" (TTOM, 231). Fashioning objects out of wood suits Stan because it is humble, useful, even creative work which sees him transforming one beloved thing into another, a chaos of trees and scrub into the order of home and hearth. To him, the surface of the wood he works on bears signs and hieroglyphs: "it is like a map. There are the mountains. That is a mountain peak. The round one. That is the highest" (TTOM, 392). Wood is substantial, self-sufficient, a thing of beauty and of truth whose reliability affirms for Stan the reality of his own existence.

The affiliation of man with tree and tree with man continues throughout the novel. In Part Two, for instance, the reader is introduced to the Quigleys in what are by now

not unflattering terms:

> [Doll and Bub] were like the furniture, or doorposts rather, their long wooden frames. Sometimes Doll nursed the baby, and the folds of the shawl hung from her long arms in long folds of carved wood, as if she were holding the child not according to her own instinct, but after some honest sculptor's plan. (TTOM, 117)

We recognize in this description of crafted wooden madonna with child that these are homely, simple and honest people, for White's highest praise is always meted out to those who share the attributes of reliable things like wooden tables and chairs. There is, however, a minor distinction to be made: Quigleys, despite their élite qualities, do not continue but die out, inflicting barely a sign on the land which held them.

Bub Quigley seems to be one of those minor characters destined for election early on. He notices things; even a leaf is to him a wondrous sign.

> 'Look,' said Bub, 'that is a leaf. See? But a skeleton leaf. You can look right through it. It's like a sheep's skeleton, or a cow, only this is a leaf. My sister says it is made of lace. Fancy, a lace leaf. From a lace tree.' (TTOM, 117)

Little Ray, to whom Bub shows his prize, can only think in his mother's possessive terms. He covets the leaf, but Bub cannot bear to part with it.

> It was of most curious, mysterious workmanship, which he kept in a book that

> had belonged to his grandfather, and which nobody read. He could not part with the leaf. Circles of mystery, beauty, and injustice expanded inside him, distorting his face. (TTOM, 118)

Leaf, emblematic of tree, represents for Bub a kind of mandala--the first in a long line of such designs which clearly fascinate White. The lace leaf, intricate and fragile, reveals the state of Bub's own being. He marvels at things and reveres them, looking through the part to the whole beyond.

The artist Gage is another character who notices things. His story unfolds in Part Three of the novel, when, after his suicide, his private musings in the form of his paintings go public. Considered quite mad by the locals before his demise, Gage's tortured visions occasion even more embarrassment and shame once his widow flings them to an incredulous public. Amy withholds judgement as she gazes on Gage's mysteries. Of ants, of Christ, of trees:

> He seemed to have painted a great many trees, in various positions, their limbs folded in sleep or contemplation, or moving in torture. And the dead trees. The white forms of these did not look a bit dry and sceptical, as bones do in a paddock. So also a bottle can express love. She had never before seen a bottle of adequate beauty. This one tempted her to love her neighbour. (TTOM, 282)

Gage's trees exhibit human characteristics, yet their form also flickers and wanes into other shapes that call forth from

the viewer emotions scarcely recognized. The misunderstood painter is the first of a series which will include Alf Dubbo from Riders and Hurtle Duffield of The Vivisector (1970), and he is part of a continuum of artists which has already been introduced in the person of Moraïtis in The Aunt's Story. All of these characters, shaman-like, see clearly to the bone.

As in The Aunt's Story, the way characters interact with objects reveals a good deal about them. The Parker children, for example, inherit their mother's propensity to want to possess: Thelma feels comfortable only when surrounded by piles of things vouchsafed indispensable by her material ideals and, while Ray is governed by a total irreverence for things, he does not believe in anything he cannot touch. Part Three of The Tree of Man details Ray's relationship with Con the Greek and the eventual loss of his hero. Notice how trees figure in that scene of angry separation:

> He had thinned right out, till he was exclusively of that place, as exhalation of leaf or bark, his hanging hands no longer idle, except that they did nothing, otherwise there was purpose enough in being, amongst the grey scraggy trees. . . . After a bit he stopped. It was under a tree. It was a big old banksia full of dead heads, the trunk and branches of the tree tortured into abominable shapes, full of dust and ugliness. All beauty and goodness were excluded from that place, the sky being obliterated for the moment. (TTOM, 234, 235)

Here in heavy-handed detail, tree functions as objective

correlative for the 'thin' state of Ray's soul. "Thin" describes both Thelma and Ray innumerable times during the course of the novel. In this case, trees expose Ray's twisted state of mind: they prove "scraggy," "tortured," "abominable," "dusty" and "ugly" in turn. Ray is no tree of man, despite the fact that he does produce an heir. Rather, he is a user, as destructive of things as of persons.

It is left to his young son Ray to redeem both Stan's and his own thwarted aspirations. For his grandfather young Ray will articulate all of life, and for his father he will transform impotence into action, coming to know things and assigning them meaning. The last chapter of The Tree of Man is devoted to young Ray. It begins, aptly, "In the end" (TTOM, 479) and ends, in open but paradoxical fashion, with "in the end, there was no end" (TTOM, 480). This short chapter follows Stan Parker's death but refuses to provide the ending to his life. Denying end, it affirms only beginning, and, in fact, re-presents what was there at the start.

> In the end there are the trees. These still stand in the gully behind the house, on a piece of poor land that nobody wants to use. There is the ugly mass of scrub, full of whips and open secrets. But there are the trees, quite a number of them that have survived the axe, smooth ones, a sculpture of trees. On still mornings after frost these stand streaming with light and moisture, the white and the ashen, and some the colour of flesh. (TTOM, 479)

The present-tense refrain of continuity--"there are the trees"--immediately annuls the "in the end" setting. This paragraph proves in retrospect to be an expanded version of the chapter's/part's/novel's closing words: "So that, in the end, there was no end" (TTOM, 480), delivered in past tense as if in evidence of the perpetuity they promise. Trees prove to be survivors; they live on in the form of sculpture, or art, they endure in the form of flesh, or young Ray, and they achieve permanence in the form of this novel.

The novel's final chapter re-creates the first: we have a beginning, trees, a dog, and a boy-man. What is missing is the initial hostility of man towards tree; instead, the boy enters the clump of trees as if it were a temple, in order to see and feel his way to making sense of the death of his grandfather.

> The rather leggy, pale boy comes down later into the bush. He is mooning there, and rubbing his forehead against the bark of trees. He is breaking twigs, and making little heaps of sticks in various patterns. He is writing in the sand, and expecting precious stones in the surfaces of rocks. . . . He lay on his back, on the sandy earth, on the root fibres and decomposing leaves, and looked through the glass at the crimson mystery of the world . . . . The crimson sky drifting on his face, and the purple snakes of trees. (TTOM, 479)

Here is a portrait of the incipient artist: dreaming, creating designs, searching for meaning--all on nature's terms. Trees

provide the palimpsest for young Ray's budding greatness and so, the almost symbiotic relation between people and trees goes on.

Whenever tree appears in The Tree of Man it shines with some special light. No ordinary trees dot the landscape; they all participate in the settlers' lives on the land. In this remarkable evocation of tree, the narrative voice forges a link in normally non-reflective Amy between her present and her past at a particularly crucial moment of her life. Faced with pursy Leo, her former and perhaps still lover, Amy settles into an uncharacteristic stillness in which "she could hear the shape of objects" (TTOM, 319). Then follows her ode to the pepper trees.

> In expectation, considerable litheness had crept into those pepper trees round which fowls were scratching. There was a nervosity of fronds just twitching in a little breeze. The woman remembered how, as a girl, she had run up the side of a hill, gathering her breath and laughing, and had lain on the top. She remembered the cool touch of the fronds of pepper trees, and now this same smoothness and litheness had returned to her, if she could tell him. (TTOM, 319)

But when Leo looks at Amy, what he sees differs decidedly from her own view of herself: Leo remarks instead a sallow old woman whose stockings sag and wrinkle about her ankles. In contrast, Amy's thoughts run with herself as young girl, discovering her own sensuality beneath the captivating pepper

trees. Even now they twitch and flutter in anticipation of another steamy encounter between Amy and Leo; clearly, pepper trees--close to the ground and ornamental--are Amy's trees, investing her with life when young and continuing to respond to her desires when old.

Those critics, then, who dismiss Amy as representative of evil or as a less successful character than her husband Stan miss or ignore those moments when she too shows insight. Correspondence does exist between Amy and other things, and she is possessed of a certain amount of understanding. If Stan outshines her in this, it is because Amy also battles the grip of materialism. Frequently though she too yearns for the something more, the unnameable, which she suspects Stan of knowing of and keeping from her.

The Tree of Man is a book, a novel, a fictional prose epic depicting most of one man's life on the land as he progresses from youth through middle and old age to death and all the accompanying stages in between. His outer existence amongst the things of the earth is for the most part indistinguishable from his inner quest for, as he calls it, permanence. What he learns during the course of the book (of) his life is taught by tree: never still, ever changing, it too is permanence. The tree of man is also the book of man--the chronology of his days in which generation succeeds generation--the family tree, as they say. This too is permanence: both the book and the family of man. The book is

a tree both literally and figuratively: not only is it physically constructed of paper products, its literary structure also mirrors the tree's linear form. Tree represents the open and cyclical at once, reaching both up and out, deep and down and answering to nature's eternal call for it to bud, bloom, grow, shed and rest in turn. So too does the book, both as physical artifact and as art. And tree contributes not only to form but to content as well: trees are remarkable objects in The Tree of Man, both opposing and answering to man's needs, resisting and complementing him in turn. Finally, trees remind man of the dichotomies in the midst of which he exists, the parameters of which define his ability to make sense of or to derive meaning from the world.

As much as the novel is a tree, and Stan too, they are also rivers. Water--or lack of it--both physically and figuratively defines the novel and its characters, from the great fact of the floods at Wullunya to the consistently fluid descriptions of the texture of Parkers' lives. Young Stan, on his way back from volunteering at the floods, takes to musing.

> In his exhaustion his own life ebbed and flowed, along other roads, or he opened doors and went into the houses that he had known, in which the familiar faces were looking for him to behave in an expected way. But because he too, for all his apparent solidity, was as fluid and unpredictable as the stream of life, he left them standing with the words half out of their mouths and a surprised row of teeth. (TTOM, 91)

Long and sinuous as a tree is tall and straight, river and tree identify Stan as outwardly steadfast but inwardly shifting. Amy too is vouchsafed this quality: following the birth of her second child she "was at last continuous. She flowed" (TTOM, 117). Conversely, unoriginal, pretentious Thelma is dismissed in this trial by water: "She had an instinct for floating" (TTOM, 336), for resisting water. Fluidity not only defines life but it is also the medium for dreaming and, finally, for death. Mrs. O'Dowd's last scene, for example, shows there is no dam or natural barrier between the two halves of life: death and life are not opposites but the mingling of two streams, both of which flow towards the same destination.

2.

Wilderness/Garden

The Aunt's Story showed us an over-civilized garden from which most of the exotic flora were trying to escape. The Tree of Man, by contrast, introduces us to a wilderness of indigenous trees which needs subduing. Stan succeeds in transforming the hostile, untamed bush into a garden--even a kind of Eden, and then sees it turn against him yet again before it finally enfolds and encloses him at the end of his days.

Stan learns to inhabit seemingly hostile space. He thwacks into one, then two, then several stringybarks in order to create space for his shack. This domicile undergoes later transformation, but from the first Stan creates room and order where there was none. When first she encounters her new home, Amy is struck by its diminutive size and remoteness. Here is space she quickly sets out to conquer, taking it over even as Stan wrested it from the land. She sets up her silver nutmeg grater and plants her rosebush, the one a frivolous bit of impracticality and the other a complement to her burgeoning role as wife and mother. As their lives proceed, Stan and Amy increasingly push the wilderness back, enlarging their house and garden to make way for children, animals and workers. The

garden becomes a kind of paradise in its abundance: roses increase and lie heavy on their stems, cabbages swell and conceal dew drops in their leafy recesses, vines flourish as well as do luxurious, sensual blossoms like dahlias, camellias, lilies and fuchsias. But as the novel unfolds, garden turns increasingly unwieldy so that by Part Four it threatens to engulf the Parkers. By the end of the book garden does in fact swallow gardener, albeit in a peaceful, beneficent manner.

Throughout Parkers' sojourn on the land, mention is made of the produce their garden yields. Amy, greedy for exotic flowers, not so much plants as sticks greenery here and there. Part Four opens with the results of this slipshod hobby.

> The garden at Parkers' had almost taken possession of the house. It was a haphazard sort of garden. Mrs. Parker would plant a shrub with passion, something she had seen and desired intensely, would plant it, and forget about it. Then suddenly it had grown and was sawing at its neighbours. All flowers, all leaves, were interlocked in that garden. The shrubs were blooming in each other. . . . Branches of trees, twigs of shrubs, would catch at her hair and draw it out. It got in a mess sometimes, but what can you do? . . . Then she would go inside her house, rather a secret woman, into the brown house, inseparable from the garden, from the landscape in which it was. (TTOM, 359)

Parkers' is a tree-house of man, truly native to its environment. And the vegetation surrounding it clearly leads

a life of its own, hostile and teasing in turn, externally mirroring the increasingly unsettled, disordered relation between Stan and Amy. The plants are also blatantly sexual, mimicking the grasping, possessive way of Amy with her men.

House never acquires a name, and garden too remains anonymous, even aloof. We later learn that Amy, as keen a planter as she is, "could not name things" (TTOM, 418). This dysfunction of the labelling habit, rather than distancing the relation between people and vegetation, emphasizes the unimportance of language in that exchange. Furthermore, it emphasizes that a different sort of connection exists between woman and vegetation. Amy seems content to nurture growth for its own sake; she exhibits no urge to articulate the experience.

Thus the garden grows, almost overwhelming them both physically and psychically. For the dark, secretive vegetable life seems to evoke, from Amy especially, memories of past crimes and other deeds. Plants come to seem the texture of her own remembered past.

> Lost at times in the jungle of her past failures, Amy Parker had her plants, not so much those shrubs which had grown and oppressed the house in overbearing clumps and thickets, themselves a jungle which enticed with obsessive smells of rot and scents of cold flowers into the lemon-coloured light of secrets and of large leaves, not so much these, but those plants which she kept around the verandas of the house, the more tender, waxy ones in pots, that she would prod and sigh

> over, looking into them till she saw the insects there, and pores and knobs of dark leaves. These plants that she loved, and for which she had made moist nests of bark and fibre, were almost all dark and fleshy. (TTOM, 418)

Amy's choice of plants betrays her still sensuous nature and her nurturing of them her frustrated maternal instinct. Elsewhere in The Tree of Man is stated that Amy had failed to love; here, amongst the herbage, she seems to have found a sort of fulfilment to replace the kind denied her by her husband and her son. So that Ray, on his one return trip to his childhood home, meets only with coldness when he warns his mother, concerned-like: "'You've let yourself get overgrown. It'll push you out, Mum'" (TTOM, 419). Above all, Amy's remains a real garden, complete with bugs and earthy odours, existing not only to reflect the thematic concerns of the novel.

By the end of the story, garden is once again wilderness. Both Stan and Amy, old now, have let the garden go. But there is still a kind of order reigning even amongst the disorder. Some critics have correctly pointed out the mandalic design of the plot wherein Stan passes his last living moments. Notice how each detail contributes to the tired, dilapidated but still vital feel of the garden and the man.

> That afternoon the old man's chair had been put on the grass at the back, which was quite dead-looking from the touch of winter. Out there at the back,

> the grass, you could hardly call it a lawn, had formed a circle in the shrubs and trees which the old woman had not so much planted as stuck in during her lifetime. There was little of design in the garden originally, though one had formed out of the wilderness. It was perfectly obvious that the man was seated at the heart of it, and from this heart the trees radiated, with grave movements of life, and beyond them the sweep of a vegetable garden, which had gone to weed during the months of the man's illness, presented the austere skeletons of cabbages and the wands of onion seed. All was circumference to the centre . . . [and] he was the centre of it. (TTOM, 474)

Notice too the levelling of language: "lawn" is rejected in favour of the less pretentious "grass." Stan and Amy are reduced to "the old man" and "the old woman"--as they were in the beginning, but for the adjective. It appears a design has formed despite Parkers' haphazard horticulture, and that Stan now waits at its "heart." As Peter Beatson explains, using an archetypal system of exegesis, God also waits at the heart of the labyrinth:

> The Eden that Stan had found or created in the beginning, and which was taken from him in middle life, is returned to him in a dying vision. He finds himself at the centre of a boundless Garden, which is also a terrestrial mirror-image of the Celestial Rose.[5]

"Boundless" (TTOM, 478) is originally Amy's perception: Stan's death seems to liberate time and space from the precincts of the garden.

The garden's sexual/sensual nature must not be overlooked. There is frequent confusion and intermingling of flesh and vegetation, a tradition begun, as we have seen, in The Aunt's Story and perfected in Voss. The most obvious example of this transference is Stan, who stands, rooted and gnarled, a tree. But cabbages, dahlias, camellias and lilies also participate in this exchange between individuals and flora. Most astonishing, perhaps, are the cabbages, first introduced near the beginning of the novel and then returned to during its closing pages. Normally one of the more insipid vegetables, cabbages are here invested with real, fleshy presence:

> All along the morning stood the ears of young cabbages. Those that the rabbits did not nibble off. In the clear morning of those early years the cabbages stood out for the woman more distinctly than other things, when they were not melting, in a tenderness of light.
>
> The young cabbages, that were soon a prospect of veined leaves, melted in the mornings of thawing frost. Their blue and purple flesh ran together with the silver of water, the jewels of light, in the smell of warming earth. But always tensing. Already in the hard, later light the young cabbages were resistant balls of muscle, until in time they were the big, placid cabbages, all heart and limp panniers, and in the middle of the day there was the glandular stench of cabbages. (TTOM, 31)

Diction such as "ears," "veined," "flesh," "muscle," "placid," "heart" and "glandular" suggests that the vegetable kingdom

shares much with the human. This drawing together of disparate worlds one to the other illustrates White's firm belief in the essential unity of all matter. Thus not only vegetation but also mineral splendours speak each to each and to mankind. As people associate with the things of the earth, so do the similarities between them grow. No thing should be foreign to any other thing.

Take White's lilies, for instance. His scarcely resemble the pristine, hard-worked variety of the flower lauded in the Bible. Here again there is correspondence between Amy and that most blatantly sexual of flowers: "Big sticky lilies are too heavy to hold their heads up after rain, or with the dew even, but bask in their fresh flesh" (TTOM, 292). This after lusty O'Dowd has just peered deliberately inside Mrs. Parker's blouse and given her a momentary surge of excitement. He makes her feel young and desirable, if only for an instant--she feels quite properly disgusted but a second later. Encounters with men other than her husband often bring florid colour to Amy's face. Here is a scene in which she chats with a passerby:

> 'Go on,' he said, leaning more heavily on the fence and looking at the mysterious greenish flesh of her face, that the dahlias made, the big, heavy cushions of magenta dahlias rubbing and crowding her into their green gloom. (TTOM, 208)

These tall, luxurious blooms seem to be acting somewhat

protectively towards Amy, and, in fact, nothing ever comes of this casual meeting. But Amy is consistently associated with lush blossoms and certain produce, whereas Stan and trees, or Stan and honest wooden things, prove to have much more in common.

For both Stan and Amy, however, vegetation proves to hold the key to memory. Stan, for example, on a wild duck chase, ends up at Glastonbury years after his rescue of Madeleine from the fire. He hardly recognizes the derelict mansion, of which vines have taken over the better part.

> Under the wide sky, thickening into night, at the top of the deserted, desecrated house, vines crumpled in his hands with a fleshiness, a soft muskiness of flesh. Only he could not remember enough. He could not remember the pores of her skin, the veins in her eyes, her breath on his neck, however hard he tried to. Whole rooms of his mind, in which each separate detail had been stored, seemed to have gone . . . Now the middle-aged man stood crumpling the vines at the top of the ugly house. (TTOM, 217)

White uses synaesthesia in the above passage to show how Stan's crumpling of the fleshy vines takes him back in time but does not succeed in inducing in him the specific, erotic memories advancing age deprives him of. However, memory for Amy seems to be a distinctly vegetable phenomenon. Here she is, towards the end of the book, once again amongst her cabbages:

> Then it was her youth that began to come back in the world of cabbages. She heard the dray come up with the mound of blue cabbages, and the snap of straps in the frost, as putting her shoulders through the window she spoke to her husband. She was remembering all mornings. (TTOM, 397-398)

Sensory impressions from vines and cabbages trigger the past with Proustian immediacy. Not that they represent memory. If anything, vines and cabbages suggest permanence, itself a kind of eternal present.

3.

Rose

The obvious correspondence between Amy and the unlikely cabbages extends to roses which, in fact, physically resemble the slow, rubbery vegetable in the endless unfolding of petal upon petal. Both objects exude earthy sensuality, and both--like the nutmeg grater and the fragment of crimson glass--link the beginning of the novel with its not-ending. Like cabbages for Amy and the vines at Glastonbury for Stan, roses too bring memories to the fore. As they did in The Aunt's Story, roses in The Tree of Man seem to induce a strange, half-dream, half-memory state. In retreat from Mrs. O'Dowd's pointed criticism of her pasty child Thelma, for example, Amy lapses into silence.

> If Amy Parker continued to sit, it was because the rose is rooted, and impervious. The big milky roses nodded on the window frame. She was firmly rooted in the past, as old roses are. This was her salvation in the face of words . . . She had grown up full and milky out of the past, even her little girl must wait for roses, while nodding and stirring her mind twined again, twining through the moonlight night on which it had half-spoken, half-dreamed the rose. (TTOM, 121)

Here is no mere metaphorical likening of woman to rose;

instead Amy is equated to the distinctive flower. Amy firmly identifies herself with the sexual, perennial nature of roses --even her meandering thoughts "twine" in the fashion of certain roses.

Another remarkable passage has Mrs. Armstrong gathering reams of great lush blooms from her formerly grand mansion at Glastonbury, as if by grasping them she could reconnect with the happier past. She would "tear the roses from their bushes in guilty handfuls. Great handfuls of her own roses. She could not gather too many too quickly, almost as if she wanted them and they were not hers" (TTOM, 215). Ultimately unsatisfied, she would then toss them out the window of her car, wondering all the while why she had picked them in the first place. Roses seem to trigger memories but they remain incapable, finally, of retrieving the past. Still, characters--almost exclusively female--bend over them, peering into their jewelled depths as if in search of an oracle. Even level-headed Laura in Voss succumbs to the spell of roses: "But the girl was dazed by roses. She continued to cut the big heads . . . She bent to reach others, till roselight was flooding her face, and she was forced to lower the lids of her eyes against the glare of roses. Then she became caught . . . She was held" (V, 159). Throughout White's novels roses give off dazzling, mesmerizing light which induces in the admirer a never satisfied greed for them.

The roses' life cycle follows the Parkers' declining

fortunes. Amy first imposes the exotic bush upon unfriendly ground: "She thrust her shoulders through the window, outside which it was determined she should plant the white rose, and where the slope of the land was still restless from the jagged stumps of felled trees" (TTOM, 28). When next we see this phenomenon, it boasts a festival of colours, aromas and textures.

> There was a rosebush now, growing against the veranda, a white rose . . . It was already a branching, irregular bush, with the big wads of shapely paper roses just smelling of tobacco. Cold perhaps. It belonged to the dank green light on that side of the house . . . Its branches would grow black and straggly later on. But the rosebush of Amy Parker was still green, sappy wood. The marble roses were solid in the moonlight. The white roses glared back at the heavy light of noon or fluttered papery down into the yellow-green of the cow-itch. (TTOM, 43)

A queer rosebush, to be sure, offering great "wads" of blooms which range from "paper" to "marble" and which responds in turn to various qualities of light throughout the day. Amy's is a distinctly individual rosebush--playful, even: "Then her own pregnancy stretched out before her in heavy days. The thorns of the straggly rose bush caught at the harsh blue of her jacket as she passed" (TTOM, 56). During the rains, the bush puts on an appropriately soggy, rotting mien but afterwards blesses Parkers' with that benevolent greenish light so prevalent from Aunt's Story roses. By the end of

Part One the roses are in full bloom, as are Parkers' lives.

The first ominous note sounds in Part Two. Early on Amy makes love with Stan as if she at last possesses him.

> In the cool of the released world, amongst the dreaming furniture, at the heart of the staggy rosebush that pressed into the room and wrestled with them without thorns, the man and woman prayed into each other's mouths that they might hold this goodness forever. But the greatness of the night was too vast. (TTOM, 112)

Clearly the passionate spirit of the rose has influenced Stan and Amy in the summer of their lives, and as clearly as night follows day, so will the passion fade. The narrator has some fun with Amy and her modest pretensions when he describes, through the eyes of Mrs. O'Dowd, Amy's big papery roses as those of "crushed country brides" (TTOM, 120). Later the comedy continues as Amy, visiting O'Dowds' for the first time in a long while, takes in their new décor: "Roses had been pasted in wrinkles over every possible crack of escape, with the result that life had given up and was littering the window sill with wings and shells and pale spidery legs" (TTOM, 143). Roses appear to be coveted for both interior and exterior display.

The rose, which has passed from idea to young reality to full-grown splendour and then to its paper surrogate, declines into shabbiness as Parkers' relationship deteriorates. The day Amy meets lover Leo for the last time, "The dead balls of

brown roses were hanging on the old staggy bush, that brushed her as she went down" (TTOM, 311). The flowers droop, depleted, as if to suggest to Amy that she is too well past her prime for that sort of thing. Such empathy exists between Amy and the bush that its own changes measure out the rhythms of her life.

4.

Objects

Certain objects in The Tree of Man glow with the same sombre intensity which animates Stan Parker. He proves consistently sensitive to the honesty and simplicity of things--especially of crude objects crafted by hand--and he tends to weigh all things in terms of this natural elegance he cherishes. Even Amy Fibbens at first appeals to him as one such object: "Stan Parker knew this girl. As all oblivious objects become known, and with the same nostalgia, the tin cup, for instance, standing in the unswept crumbs on the surface of your own table. Nothing is more desirable than this simplicity" (TTOM, 22). The words "knew," "oblivious," "known," "nostalgia," "desirable" and "simplicity" weave a tale of the object as something intimately perceived and ardently yearned for. When the narrator so disarmingly states, near the end of the novel, that "There is a mysticism of objects, of which some people are initiates" (TTOM, 384), he refers to just this aura of virtuous other-worldliness that Stan feels but does not articulate, right from the beginning. In his own way, Stan fashions order out of the chaos around him by improvising "honest objects in wood and iron, which, if crude in design, had survived to that day" (TTOM, 269).

Objects replace the words Stan does not utter, not standing for them but obviating any need for them at all. Both Stan and the objects with which he surrounds himself are survivors and thus signs of the permanence he so longs for.

"Mysticism" seems an odd choice of diction, coming as it does from a writer bent on relocating the mysterious and awe-inspiring in the palpable now. The Tree of Man demonstrates how it is possible to preserve the numinous in the real. Along the way the novel introduces certain initiates into the mysticism of objects besides Stan Parker, namely Bub Quigley, Mr. Gage and even Amy. Bub is automatically one of the select because of his marvelous simplicity in collecting things from the natural world, like the leaf from the lace tree, and living intimately with them: "He had found a curious round stone, that had been rolled and polished in other floods . . . The world was concentrated in his hand" (TTOM, 84). This passage is distinctly reminiscent of Blake's famous quatrain from "Auguries of Innocence": "To see a World in a Grain of Sand/And Heaven in a Wild Flower,/Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour." As the narrator later writes, "Rocks . . . are sufficient in themselves" (TTOM, 406), complete little worlds capable of unifying the extremes of time and space within their limited confines. Gage belongs to the same league of madness or ultra-sanity as Bub: "He would sit looking at an empty plate as if it were an object of importance, or on the old iron bedstead under the pepper tree,

in his singlet, as everyone had known him, just sitting" (TTOM, 280). Mr. Gage converts these things which take his fancy into other things, like paintings, which finally serve to frighten a blinkered populace used only to things as functional.

Gage's disturbing works produce a sense of wonder in Amy. No afficionado she, but still she senses and respects the tormented spirit the paintings betray. It is a mark of Amy's worth that she too shares moments of rapturous unity with objects: "So also a bottle can express love. She had never before seen a bottle of adequate beauty. This one tempted her to love her neighbour" (TTOM, 282). Amy does not arrive at this communion with the bottle on her own, but through the intermediary of Gage. Were it a 'real,' graspable bottle, she would more than likely want to possess it; here, due to Gage's transforming vision, Amy faces the essence of the bottle, and it ignites in her emotions scarcely felt before.

The Tree of Man puts the lie to ownership of objects early on. As White reasserts throughout his oeuvre, things cannot be possessed, and only those characters most comfortable with this tenet live in harmony with the things around them. The flood, for instance, becomes a kind of huge yard sale in which victims clutch what they can of their own goods and others grab for the rest:

> In a flood many objects change hands.
> There is no vice in this. It is not a

> stealing. It is merely a change of ownership. This way various pots and pans, a cheese, a length of rope, a world gazetteer, even a hip bath, had passed honestly enough to the passengers in Peabodys' dray. (TTOM, 90)

The practicality of this solution to the watery chaos of the flood nets Parkers a young boy and his precious piece of crimson glass. Objects are reduced to their net worth: whoever needs something, claims it. Sentimental attachments mean nothing against the great fact of the flood. Amy does not manage to hold on to her treasure from the disaster: her possessiveness frightens off the strange boy who is not, like the other objects, "oblivious" to his chances in life. The crimson glass, however, remains, a memento to be inherited by the one male Amy does not attempt to own.

Domestic things in particular glow with special worth. Inside Parkers' rustic house, "there were many objects that had been shaped and worn by their own hands. These are the things that exist" (TTOM, 93). Their furniture, for instance, "was worn by and accustomed to the habits of people" (TTOM, 29), much as a favourite pet might affectionately indulge in its owners' quirks. The most surprising characters come up with appreciative comments about the value of trustworthy furniture. Mrs. Armstrong, for example, says "'Louis This and Louis That is all very well. But a comfortable chair is something you cannot buy with money'" (TTOM, 174). Her claim may well serve to show up her colonial roots, but it fits in

very well with White's belief that things sympathetic to humans can scarcely be bought or sold. Even the aged Mrs. Madeleine Fisher protests, during a visit to Parkers: "'But ugly furniture can be most interesting . . . It has reality'" (TTOM, 425). So the homely, the ugly, the unwanted also have virtue--a sort of truth or undeniable thereness. Bread, for instance, remains the original, humble stuff of life: Bub "would eye milk or bread, of which the shapes themselves are good and touching, beginning and end, in fact, perfection" (TTOM, 462). And again, "The substantial squares of bread were true by the very fact of their substance" (TTOM, 414). Things like bread remain complete and whole, vital to mankind for more than just its nourishment.

Stan is rewarded near the end of his life for his long belief in the rightness of simple objects. "At this age, anyway, he could see an object as it was, and interpret a gesture as it was meant. His life was no less wonderful for this baldness" (TTOM, 391). "Baldness" is a wonderfully appropriate choice of diction here, implying that just as Stan faces the winter of his life, so too the tree of man is bare of its leaves. But bare is not barren: Stan has attained the clear-sightedness he long desired as well as the ability to articulate some part of what he feels. Carpentry, for example, comes to express his aching love for his wife, for his land, and for his things. But the effect of Stan's certainty about his own clear vision is mitigated somewhat by

the end of the book, when the narrator announces that, just before his death, Stan's "eyes had been reduced to a rudimentary shape, through which was observed, you felt, a version of objects that was possibly true" (TTOM, 474). "Possibly" undermines the earlier evidence for Stan's achievement. But perhaps "possibly" is all there can ever be, at least as far as one man's discovery of the interrelatedness and unity of all things goes.

Critics present varying opinions as to the success of Stan's final vision. Leonie Kramer, for example, suggests that "The major weakness of the book is White's failure to make credible connections between Stan's actual life as a small farmer, and his role as discoverer of a doctrine of the unity of human life and material objects."[6] She goes on to explain that Stan's problem is too much God, that it is only once he rids himself of such inflated baggage that he is able to truly see and believe in the world. There has been so much conjectured about the role of God in this novel, and responses have ranged from those who believe that Stan vomits Him out of his system once for all in Sydney, to those who see Stan as finally reaccepting Him in the garden. But just how relevant is God to this work anyway? He is rarely mentioned until the end of the book, and when He is, it seems to me it is only in order that Stan comes to relieve himself of others' perceptions of God. For others' doctrines prove the main obstacle to Stan's discovery of what God is. If God exists

for him, then He is not only in things themselves--yes, even in the gob of spittle--but He is things themselves, both their substance and their mystery. Neither Stan himself nor the narrator makes claims for Stan as mystic or visionary, nor does either inflate things or events to meanings beyond what they should bear, as Kramer complains. Objects and events are always equal to the words they call forth.

Whereas in The Aunt's Story writing is dense and style complex, in The Tree of Man language is reduced to its simplest, least self-conscious aspect. Mark Williams evaluates the novel thus:

> White's prose aspires towards a style of absolute simplicities, that is, towards the appearance of stylelessness. Words possess only their barest, denotative function. Yet, precisely because there is such an equivalence between words and the few, fundamental objects they denote--tree, axe, man, dog, fire--words achieve the epic, incantatory and universal qualities of Biblical narrative.[7]

By levelling language, by making style as humble as subject matter, that which White seeks to illuminate--the extraordinary behind the ordinary--shines forth as if in relief from the drabber background of mundane details that sum up simple lives. Both White and his protagonist Stan Parker reject ideas about things in favour of things themselves; it is matter that matters. If there is indeed a search for God going on in the novel, it ends with the unalterable fact of

Stan's ball of spit. There is no need to look beyond the world of substance when such perfection can be found therein.

Some critics sense that The Tree of Man charts a steady decline from the beginning, when Stan feels thoroughly at home in the world and when he enjoys a real feeling of connection between words and things and things and the self to "the broken post-Edenic world where everything becomes text, and he must learn to 'read.' Nature becomes a set of signs which point to some immanence."[8] But Stan, despite his sense of betrayal following his discovery of Amy's indiscretion and despite his feelings of alienation from himself and his family, never despairs of his faith in the simple, honest-to-goodness of things. 'Immanence' hardly applies to Stan's quest for meaning: that is a critic's perception, certainly not Stan's. The anti-resolution/revelation at the end of the novel reaffirms what has been evident to Stan all along: what he sees he knows and vice versa. Words like 'God' require substance to make them relevant--thus the gob of spittle. Stan divines, finally, that "all phenomena share a single substance; division is mere illusion. The world is not merely charged with God, it is God."[9] The world remains sufficient in itself in The Tree of Man. With The Solid Mandala, however, published eleven years after Tree, White reverts to exploring the divided, fragmented self he first introduced in The Aunt's Story.

Notes

[1] Martin Buber, I and Thou, transl. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp. 57, 58-59.

[2] Harry Torczyner, Magritte: Ideas and Images, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), p. 109.

[3] Vincent Buckley, "Patrick White and his Epic," in Australian Literary Criticism, ed. Grahame Johnston (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1962), p. 188.

[4] Williams, p. 35.

[5] Beatson, p. 140.

[6] Leonie Kramer, "The Tree of Man: An Essay in Scepticism," in The Australian Experience: Critical Essays on Australian Novels, ed. W.S. Ramson (Canberra: Australian National University, 1974), p. 278.

[7] Williams, p. 334.

[8] Williams, p. 391.

[9] Williams, p. 394.

IV

House

The house is bleeding.
A house is strong . . . and has its own time.
A house should be like a cave . . . closed and dark.
My house is a conch . . . By and by it will ring in the wind.

.
.
.

The house endures.
--Randolph Stow, Visitants

the appearance of relative solidity in my grandmother's house was deceptive. It was an impression created by the piano, and the scrolled couch, and the bookcases full of almanacs and Kipling and Defoe. For all the appearance these things gave of substance and solidity, they might better be considered a dangerous weight on a frail structure. . . . It is better to have nothing, for at last even our bones will fall. It is better to have nothing.
--Marilynne Robinson, Housekeeping

Whereas tree implies longevity and spaciousness--the ultimate in freedom--house suggests containment, both time and space condensed. And whereas tree belongs to the natural world, an object created, not made, house is part of the domestic scene, an object designed and constructed. When we encounter house, we face geometry, for what is one's domicile but a collection of lines, angles and curves, all come together in pleasing proportion for the purposes of practicality and aesthetic harmony? With minor exceptions, a dwelling takes the form of a cube, which usually includes variations on the quaternary theme. Its vertical aspect sees the habitation stretched between sky and earth, while horizontally house exists between the bounds of its outer walls. Notable exceptions to these generalities about domestic domiciles include Indian longhouses and railroad roundhouses, each of which serves a specific cultural or industrial function. What comprises house are walls and roof, with the occasional arch or turret or other embellishment in deference to the style of the times. A lodging generally includes useful additions like windows and doors, and is also usually divided inside into various stories such as garret, living quarters and cellar, and floors are in turn mapped out in rooms. Thus while the structure offers a picture of unity from the outside, it presents a honeycombed effect inside, somewhat like the unified yet divided form of the mandala.

If we encounter geometry when first we consider what

house is, we also encounter domesticity. House connotes hearth and home, promising warmth, comfort, security and the familiar. It is not merely incidental that 'house' wears the feminine gender in the romance languages, for it fulfils all the functions of womb; furthermore, in sexual terms, house is where one enters into. One's habitation is a haven, a kind of cave or retreat where the known and the personal reign. It is space artificially consecrated to our desires and to our perceived need for shelter and privacy. The inhabitant of any given edifice leaves his or her mark on the structure, arranging it and the objects it houses to personal tastes and needs. Here one exists as if in an oasis, where there is nothing to challenge or disrupt. House guarantees gentleness, calm, affection, sanity and intimacy. A solid, concrete, inanimate structure, one's abode promises stability and permanence. Or does it? Does order reign supreme, or is house really a den of disorder and intrigue, as Jean Cocteau in Les Enfants Terribles or as Gaston Bachelard in The Poetics of Space contend?

The living in a house does not demand or even expect one's passivity. To inhabit assumes activity on the part of all denizens of house, including its tables and chairs. House can be considered a microcosm of the external world: concentrated, intimate space which reflects its owner's bias. But there is also a potentially insidious side to living in a house: as much as it is a function of inhabiting, house also

functions as enclosure, and as much as it promises permanence, house also leans to the static. Home is enclosed as house is enclosing: there is but a short leap from one's dwelling as fortress to one's abode as prison. There exists quite as much danger as delight in a house, for a domestic habitation can cloister as much as it can repel the outside world. Yet house always beckons one enter in; house presumes existing within, or interiority. The question to be considered, which was first posed in The Aunt's Story by The Man Who Was Given His Dinner, is: does a man's life stop once it is placed inside a house?

Bricks and mortar or wood and stucco comprise the physical dwelling which we call house, and home specifically refers to its interior, which is personal and intimate. Many artists have drawn parallels between house and home and body and spirit; body has, since the New Testament, often been referred to as the temple of the soul. The rationality of the attic has frequently been metaphorically contrasted with the irrationality of the cellar.[1] In fact, as Gaston Bachelard, the phenomenologist of interiority concludes, "the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being."[2] House is indeed as intimate, as felicitous, as poeticized a space as body. Bachelard again: "Our soul is an abode. And by remembering 'houses' and 'rooms,' we learn to 'abide' within ourselves. Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much

as we are in them."[3] House, like body, combines the dialectics of large and small, of inside and outside, and of open and closed.

House is no inert box; house is dream space. Once opened it reveals a psychic state, an interior landscape, a kind of "living value."[4] Bachelard suggests that the house we were born in remains always the fundamental house, of which all others we experience are but variations; further, that our original dwelling we inhabit over and over again, until it is as much a part of our inscape as we were once part of its. House thus stimulates memory and inspires flights of fancy: it is the space to which we retreat in order to sink, unobserved, into reverie. Safe within its walls, one's dwelling vouchsafes privacy and sequesters one from external demands. One can be thoroughly oneself, or anyone else one desires. House accommodates every whim; altogether it is the architecture of our private experience. And the houses of others offer particular allure: our eyes are often drawn to the windows of houses we pass, as if by peering long or penetratingly enough we will know all we need to about another's life. This knowledge is power. Consider also our fascination for houses in miniature: doll houses, dog houses, bird houses. We expect the most unlikely creatures to settle contentedly into our idea of domestic space. And our own houses: we spend entire lifetimes furnishing and arranging them according to often borrowed notions of perfection.

Houses exert bewitching power over us.

House houses not only persons but things. According to Bachelard, houses "bear within themselves a kind of esthetics of hidden things. To pave the way now for a phenomenology of what is hidden, one preliminary remark will suffice: an empty drawer is unimaginable. It can only be thought of."[5] The same goes for an empty house. Consider the chests, drawers, closets, cabinets and cupboards which hide away our most personal and cherished possessions. House proves highly populated, when you start to consider its inventory: boxes within boxes within boxes. House, onion-like, harbours multiple layers and deep, dark reaches. It sanctifies past and future in the things it shelters--those things which provide us with our identity. House is the not-I in miniature.

Many kinds of houses exist, the most obvious being that four-square building used for human habitation, the dwelling place of a family. But as we have seen, house also functions as receptacle or repository for those things with which we adorn our lives--a kind of personal museum. House can also represent the abode of an animal: cocoon, for instance, serves as home to the larva in transformation, conch for the domicile of a sea creature and shell for the turtle's protective covering. 'House' is included in many compound words, which, taken as a group, greatly expand the primary meaning of 'house': almshouse, bakehouse, greenhouse, public house,

boarding house, playhouse and household all imply specific uses to which the basic concept of house can be put. Furthermore, 'house' connotes a wealth of related ideas: it can be used to describe a lineage or a race, much like 'family tree'--as in 'house of Romanov'--it can refer to a place of worship--as in 'house of God'--the place of abode of a religious fraternity, a college in a university, the building in which a legislative assembly meets, a place of business, a vineyard. More esoterically, 'house' can be used to refer to a twelfth part of the heavens, or to each individual square of a chess board. What all of these various connotations share in common is their function as dwelling places. House is the location wherein some thing lodges. Inhabiting, interiority, intimacy, domesticity all describe what house represents: it is earthbound, material, even mundane, yet it has the capacity to liberate, to open into another dimension. House is after all shocking, unpredictable, unsettling space.

1.

House/Mandala/Body

House and body have much in common: both are structures wherein dwells space--literal space, as far as house is concerned, metaphorical space as far as body goes. Both contain whole worlds in miniature. But consider house and body as representing the outer circle of the mandala, that enigmatic sign which plays such a central role in White's seventh published novel The Solid Mandala. Both forms are, in fact, solid, and both strive toward unity and wholeness, which qualities are also central to the mandalic design. Moreover, house and body both reflect those tensions at work in them between their own particular form and the content they enclose. What Peter Beatson points out as true of body is also true of house: simply, that it is simultaneously the most and least important of the soul's possessions. He later defines the Whitean version of mandala thus:

> The mandala is a square within a circle, with a symbolic centre that represents the in-dwelling god which is double-natured or hermaphroditic. The square is a symbol for life in the material world, the life trapped in the body and in the house. . . . The outer circle is the world of Being, which threatens the defensive walls of the four-square house. The end of the spiritual cycle is the transformation of

> the outer limits of the personality from the square to the circle . . . [6]

This conjures up visions of the Renaissance propensity for designing churches according to plans based on the body's proportions, symbolic of the union between spiritual and earthly man. Hence man-dala's significance as resolution of the fundamental tension between opposites.

Mandalas can assume many designs, but mostly they appear as a square within a circle. Mandala, a Hindu word meaning "magic circle," is a mythological representation of the Self, where roundness symbolizes a natural wholeness and squareness --or the quadrangle--represents the realization of this wholeness in the conscious mind. Circle also symbolizes the psyche, and square the earthbound body. Spirit confronts matter, then, in a soothing, restorative way. Since house is most obviously square, it is appropriate to see it as the form enclosed within the magic circle. Thus house exists within spiritual precincts. Body too forms a quadrangle within larger, spiritual confines: proof that one cannot exist without the other. In both cases, the necessary feature remains the tension between opposites.

House and body, then, are closely allied in many of White's novels. Critics such as Beatson have remarked upon this rapport between Whitean houses and their occupants:

> White's characters wear their houses as intimately as they wear their bodies. . . .

> his collector's enthusiasm and architectural verve make his house-building one of the most memorable aspects of his descriptive power. In almost every page of the writing, the reader is aware of the almost organic link between the house and the emotional life of its occupant. Houses live the lives of their owners . . . Their topography reveals the topography of the soul.[7]

This relation between house and body proves especially pertinent to The Solid Mandala: not only are these two objects or structures linked with each other, they also share close ties with the central mandalic symbol. Furthermore, each of the Brown brothers manifests an individual relation to his house, to his body, and to the sign of the mandala. The intricacy of design of the novel is itself mandalic.

2.

White's Houses

Throughout his oeuvre, White has paid particular attention to houses. And he has created some exceptional ones: Meroë, Rhine Towers, Xanadu, Sunningdale and Elizabeth Hunter's mansion at Moreton Drive immediately spring to mind. House proves more than simply place or location to White: it is also destination, destiny, even state of mind. As White himself admits in Flaws in the Glass (1981), "Till well into my life, houses, places, landscape meant more to me than people. I was more a cat than a dog" (FITG, 16). When he hearkens back to the summer he was fourteen and his parents had taken the family to Felpham, Sussex, what White remembers best is the neo-Gothic house in which "life seemed to be forming" (FITG, 1), and certain rooms and furnishings which made the place unforgettable. True to his own experience, houses and characters in White's fiction interact a good deal, each revealing the other. White's houses, whether opulent or ramshackle, all lead lives of their own.

Numerous critics have remarked on the phenomenon of house in the fiction and drama of Patrick White. As Peter Wolfe suggests, White lauds domesticity because it springs from the same humble impulse as chairs and tables. House is the abode of all wholesome values:

> The stress he places upon feeling uncovers a civilizing point of view in White that can be described as feminist. Like many women writers, he finds value close to home. He enjoys describing domestic routines like baking and washing, and, aware that houses acquire souls along with their inhabitants, he sees to it that many of his major figures (the Parkers in Tree, the Brown brothers in The Solid Mandala, Hurtle Duffield of Vivisector and Elizabeth Hunter of Eye) live in the same house for many years.[8]

Memorable scenes occur inside houses, especially in kitchens and bedrooms, allowing White to explore two of mankind's most pleasurable yet complex activities: eating and sex. Houses in White always seem so perfectly appropriate to their owners, too, resisting them--as Hurtle's sometimes does in Vivisector --and complementing them--as does Elizabeth Hunter's in Eye --in turn. William Scheick goes so far as to suggest that "throughout White's work houses and buildings objectify the self."[9] He offers the example of the burning synagogue in Riders as objective correlative for the lives of Himmelfarb and his fellow Jews. This seems to me perfectly true of this particular novel, but few of White's works are so dependent on symbolism as is Riders.

Beatson also praises White's way with houses. "White's sensitivity to the auras and emanations of houses makes them an almost infinitely flexible language for the expression of many areas of existence that reason cannot reach."[10] It is eminently true that the rational is not the language of house-

ness; nooks, crannies and turrets all stir the emotions and stimulate the imagination. Beatson proceeds to examine Whitean houses in the abstract, dividing them and the land surrounding them into archetypal Edens and Wastelands, Temples and Prisons, reducing them in a way White never does. Beatson's thesis is this: "The individual, often unconsciously, is participating in a wider human drama . . . which receives symbolic reinforcement from two great archetypes . . . on the apocalyptic side, the Garden . . . and, on the daemonic side, the Desert, Wasteland or Labyrinth."[11] He goes on to expand this idea: first the soul inhabits an earthly paradise, where it is in touch with itself, its body, and with the phenomenal world. Edenic examples include Meroë (from Aunt's Story), Rhine Towers (in Voss), Xanadu (in Riders), and Courtneys' sheep station (from Vivisector). Inevitably, however, the garden becomes overgrown and starts threatening the house: hence the derelict state of Xanadu and of Browns' house (in Mandala). As the besieged dwelling begins to feel like a prison to those who continue to live in it, the link between house and occupant slowly dissolves, until at some climactic moment the house is abandoned. Both Beatson and Karin Hansson point out that this pattern is repeated throughout White's oeuvre. Evidently, houses are to be shed much like outgrown clothing.

The grander the edifice, the more like a prison it is, and the more insignificant the structure, the more temple-like

it appears. Hansson lists Himmelfarb's shed, Voss's twig hut, Hurtle's dunny and Holstius's shack as temples "connected with moments of spiritual illumination, whereas the Prisons are proud, strong and solid buildings, related to ideas like false pride, trapping and materialism."[12] An example she gives of one such prison is Mrs. Flack's Karma in Riders. Hansson goes on to echo Beatson's theory that even the temples are sooner or later destroyed or quitted "in the climactic moment when the seeker is about to reach his goal."[13] Since these goals are always spiritual, the parallel between house and body is obvious. Just as the Dostoevski epigraph to The Solid Mandala suggests that the barest churches are best for praying in, so too does White relentlessly advocate the peeling away of layers, the paring down to essentials, of both body and soul. The lighter the baggage, the more likely the pilgrim to reach his goal.

The prison/temple, apocalyptic/daemonic dichotomies are perhaps useful tools for distinguishing among and evaluating White's many kinds of habitations. But ultimately we are drawn to the houses themselves. Especially to the large ones. White's manors irresistibly draw one in, even the seemingly inhospitable ones. None, however, is without blame. As Brian Kiernan writes, the ostentatious dwellings of Courtneys, Goodmans, Armstrongs, Mustos and Hares "are monuments to their efforts and ambitions, assertions of a will to establish some permanence in the fluidity of experience, representations of

the hierarchic social ideals they have sought to impose on, and maintain in a society in which these have not developed organically."[14] The Sunningdales, Meroës, Glastonburys and Xanadus prove vain and insubstantial follies after all; one catches fire, another is sold to vulgar people and yet another crumbles quietly away, all putting the lie to whatever permanence, security or solidity their original owners thought they were guaranteed when they first invested in them. Kiernan rightly points out the ironic tension that builds because of the houses' exotic names and exalted promise and the end to which they come. He goes on to suggest that domiciles embody not only ways of life but also the basic dialectic in White's vision, namely: "the conflict between the impulse to surrender to the flow of life [like the Cox Street shack in Vivisector or Jildra in Voss] and the struggle of the will to impose itself on experience [like Courtneys' or Bonners' mansions]."[15] Even though White remains ambivalent about all such repositories for the soul, whether ramshackle or opulent, he does not skimp on lavish details about either style of dwelling.

House varies wildly from fiction to fiction. For critic Harry Heseltine, home in The Burnt Ones "is not a centre of warm fulfilment but a material object designed to display worldly success."[16] As we have seen, houses in The Vivisector represent two ways of living: the natural and the social. And dwellings in The Aunt's Story, from Meroë to the Hôtel du

Midi to the shack where Theodora encounters Holstius, all serve to chart her mental regression-progression. One of the most lively of Whitean abodes appears in The Ham Funeral (1965). Here, where expressionistic technique permits much, house speaks, and it does so for all its inarticulate occupants. The Twyborn Affair uses a variety of domiciles: Eddie moves from a villa in the south of France, back to Eddie's parents' home in Sydney, to a sheep station and, finally, Eadie takes up residence in a bawdy house. Eddie's/Eadie's roles alter with the place in which s/he performs, each persona dictated to in some degree by locale. House and the dwellers therein affect each other reciprocally.

3.

House and The Solid Mandala

The Tree of Man inspired reflection on the novel as tree; consider now the novel as house in The Solid Mandala. Waldo and Arthur Brown are brothers who inhabit a house notable for its classical pediment in an otherwise unnoteworthy suburb of Sarsaparilla. Waldo, a dry, bookish sort like Elyot Standish in The Living and the Dead, works in a library most of his life and spends the rest of his time ashamed of his slow, sensitive brother Arthur (descended from Bub Quigley in The Tree of Man). Priggish, friendless Waldo is pathologically jealous of his less presentable but more popular brother and of Arthur's undeliberate but effective way of out-doing him. Tension builds between these two throughout their long life together until it erupts into violence. The cast of characters also includes Browns' neighbour Mrs. Poulter and friend Dulcie Feinstein, both of whom look to Arthur as a sort of shaman. Browns' house plays a critical role in the shaping of their lives.

The conventional house takes linear form and bends it into geometric shapes like the cube. Then it divides the cube into mini-cubes or cells, each of which leads an autonomous life within the larger functioning of the whole. Novels, polymorphous in form, can also be shaped this way. William

Walsh notes of The Solid Mandala that "the procedure here is . . . one of shading and emphasis, of varying from the point of entrance and sweeping backwards and forwards from there, so that The Solid Mandala impresses the reader as a 'composition' rather than the linear progress which is more customary with Patrick White."[17] In fact, according to William York Tindall, literary form can itself be seen as a kind of house, in which words are bricks, images are windows and doors and themes are corridors.[18] The form of The Solid Mandala brings to mind a sub-divided house or duplex, where the two brothers' lives not only connect but intersect and overlap as well. Each section of the house has its cellar and garret, and, while it is capable of supporting itself, it also depends to a large extent on its other half. The novel is much like this, its two main sections each devoted to a brother and each part capable of standing on its own. But the period of time covered by Parts Two and Three is the same, and thus many of the events related overlap. But, just as there exist two 'sides' to the brain and two sides to every story, so do the two central sections of the novel espouse two points of view. The common wall separating the two halves of the structure represents what the two brothers inescapably share: their ramshackle house and their Tallboys heritage.

Structurally, then, The Solid Mandala is a large, divided house. The novel's progress, however, is broadly cyclical: action begins with the two brothers as old men shambling along

together during a walk, then flashes from past to present from Waldo's point of view, then again from past to present from Arthur's point of view, and ends later that same day the action began. So, beginning and end meet, although there is rambling between the two during the course of the novel. Thematically, the quaternary, four-square nature of house ties in with the mandala symbol which pervades the work. The book's complex back-and-forth manipulation of time, set within a larger, cyclical frame, can also be seen as mandalic in design. If novel is a house, then, and house is a mandala, then syllogistically speaking novel is also a mandala, hence its vaunted 'solidity.'

White introduces a variety of houses in The Solid Mandala. Sarsaparilla makes a return appearance from Riders in the Chariot, Four Plays (1965) and The Burnt Ones (1964) and again bears the brunt of White's scorn for suburbia. The grander homes are provided by Feinsteins, Saportas and Mrs. Musto of Fairy Flour; ultimately, though, Poulters' and Browns' places, across from each other on Terminus Road, claim most of White's attention. Sarsaparilla elicits comment first from Mrs. Poulter, then from Waldo Brown. The former, on her way into town by bus, has occasion to inspect and admire the suburb: "She was proud of the glossier side of Sarsaparilla, of the picture windows and the textured brick" (TSM, 5). Substantiality appears to be what Sarsaparilla has to offer, and it is what even Waldo, as refined as he believes himself

to be, cannot help craving. The suburb represents the "families in advertised clothes, who belonged to Fellowships and attended Lodges and were not afraid of electrical gadgets. Waldo yearned secretly for the brick boxes to an extent where his love had become hatred" (TSM, 24). In Waldo hatred always looms dangerously close to love. Normality and conventionality reign in Sarsaparilla, and it is what Waldo in his mediocrity identifies with: "In any case, there were the shops, there were the houses of the street you knew, providing signs that a man is a rational animal. . . . From a reasonable angle the houses remained the labelled boxes which contain, not passions, but furniture" (TSM, 52). "Knew," "rational," "reasonable" and "not passions" identify the level on which Waldo functions most comfortably. Were it not for his bumbling, shameless brother Arthur, Waldo's reason would never suffer ruffling in a place like Sarsaparilla with its ludicrously labelled boxes like "Ma Rêve."

Feinsteins and Mrs. Musto provide the more glamorous residences in the novel. Following their marriage and Mr. Feinstein's stroke, Dulcie and Leonard Saporta move into the original Feinstein dwelling.

> The Feinsteins' house looked enormous because of the many flourishes it made--battlements and turrets, spires and balconies, bull's-eyes and dormers, even a gargoyle or two, which the weather was cracking and chipping too soon. Although it looked like a partly fortified cement castle, with veins in it after the leaves

> of the Virginia creeper had fallen off, it was a fairly normal, human house inside. From the beginning Dulcie didn't allow the inherited furniture to take over. It was she who pushed it around, often into unpremeditated groups. (TSM, 268)

This inhospitable, anomalous gothic edifice fires Arthur's imagination. Unlike Browns' house with the classical (im)pediment, Feinsteins' is a romantic folly which draws Arthur to it after Waldo's death. "The house on the edge of the park increased in possibilities at night. Darkness, by dissolving its ironwork, its gingerbread columns, its cement shell, had made it more truly a castle, the electric stars screwed into silhouetted battlements" (TSM, 304). Arthur does not feel he can trespass on Saportas' celebration, so he leaves "without attempting to storm their fortress" (TSM, 305). Family seems to be what turns clammy castle into protective fortress. Still, the ambiguous nature of 'fortress' ensures we do not forget that family and security can be as devouring or as paralyzing as they can be Saporta/supportive.

Poulters' house lies across the way from Browns', and its beginnings are reminiscent of Parkers' start on their land. To Browns' great annoyance, Poulters put together their "blank box . . . In the end the structure looked less a square house than an oblong houseboat" (TSM, 134). The habitation seems a shabby affront to Browns' pretentious domestic aspirations, but it doubtless holds some charm, for the marine metaphor is

repeated more than once. As we have seen, fluidity guarantees some grace in White's scheme of things. Poulters' had "that abrupt look, not so much of house, as of houseboat moored in a bay of grass. . . . Mrs. Poulter used to come on deck, and lean upon the gunwale of her boat, in her capacity as captain and lookout" (TSM, 177, 178). If Bill Poulter proves to be no more than the average Australian male, his wife appears to be somewhat more inspired. Despite her simplicity and banality, she recognizes Arthur as someone special, and proves at the end to be his anchor.

Browns may consider Poulters' place an insult to their sensibilities but their own abode inspires the same sort of sideways, distrustful glances. No more than a wooden box like all the others, positioned at the end of Terminus Road, Browns' only claim to architectural curiosity proves to be its rather bizarre front. As Mrs. Poulter explains to Mrs. Dun, a fellow Terminus Road denizen, Browns' is now surrounded by a thick hedge, "'for privacy like,'" and their veranda, well, "'It sort of come up to a peak . . . Mr. Brown told me the front was in the classical style'" (TSM, 7). The pediment may have been George Brown's idea originally, but between him and his wife Anne with her Quantrell heritage, they share a common fund of strange tastes in houses.

The boys, Waldo in particular, love to hear their mother reminisce about the family seat, "'a shocking architectural muddle'" (TSM, 157), named Tallboys. Waldo eggs her on to

verbally reconstruct it for him, cupola by tower, and throws hints her way to stimulate the flow of her memories.

> 'Oh, Tudor! Tudor was too down-to-earth, too much like human beings living and loving and stabbing and poisoning one another. Tudor got pushed back hugger-mugger behind the stone. The kitchens were in the Tudor part of this great baroque treadmill. When I say 'baroque' I only mean it fig-figuratively, I think.' (TSM, 158)

Then he baits her with the word "Gothic," which brings on a giggled recounting of yet another habitation, a "'Gothick folly,'" also known as "'Waldo's Folly'" (TSM, 158). For Waldo these tales revive his sense of a glorious past, one of which he rightly deserves to partake. This house which he has never seen but only visualized thanks to his mother's disjointed ramblings comes to invade Waldo's dreams and to interrupt his thoughts, this "great baroque mess of their Quantrell heritage, which Waldo loved to distraction, its crimson rooms and stone corridors extending through the terrors of sleep and war. By comparison, their own immediate Tudor imbroglio was a mere bucket of blood" (TSM, 167). Surely "Tudor" is a somewhat inflated term to describe the style of Browns' abode in Terminus Road. Still, Waldo's obsession with a past not his betrays flashes of an excessively romantic, pretentious--even Gothic--temperament. For instance, Waldo pictures his mother as effigy, even well before her death: true to her ancestry, Anne Quantrell "was

carved out of stone, the true Gothick. At least Waldo had that satisfaction, although it caused him to suffer before he could inscribe her name on what he always hoped was the authentic dust" (TSM, 160). Once his mother dies, Waldo is left in the shabby present in a house which, "in spite of the classical pediment, was a disintegrating wooden box" (TSM, 166-167)--the Greek affectation a façade, merely, once imposed in the attempt to mitigate an unrelentingly banal reality.

Those building Browns' house are astonished the day George Brown approaches them with the idea about the fancified veranda. He announces: "'I know it's no more than a bloomin' weatherboard, but I want to suggest, above the front veranda, something of the shape of a Greek pediment'" (TSM, 30). Embarrassed but co-operative, the construction workers agree to the curious front. "So the classical pediment rose by degrees above the normal weatherboard, giving it the appearance of a little, apologetic, not quite proportionate temple, standing in the trampled grass" (TSM, 31). Diction clashes and jangles here as "classical" meets "normal" and "temple." The classical Greeks embraced the rational and the proportionate, whereas Browns' box of a house is "not quite proportionate" and surrounded by "trampled grass." George Brown's thirst for the ideal leads him to impose an incongruous façade on an unworthy structure. Yet the result of this affectation is a kind of modest "temple," a house for worshipping the gods and assuaging the spirit. Thus, in an

oblique sort of way, Browns' dwelling becomes a retreat or refuge. The family withdraws increasingly into it until it becomes almost completely isolated from the community.

George Brown is one of a series of fathers unsatisfied with life and engaged in a quest for they don't quite know what. Mr. Goodman, Stan Parker and Norbert Hare all rage ineffectually against the mediocrity of their existence. Of these Stan Parker, the one most lacking material resources, is perhaps the only one who does not succumb to his unhappiness. George Brown, physically afflicted, locked into a dry, unpromising job at a bank and disappointed in his sons, raises the house as a monument to his unarticulated aspirations. Eventually, as houses will, his claims him:

> they would look back and see him seated on the front veranda under the classical pediment, the branches of increasing quince trees hemming him in, the long trailers of the rambler drenching his taut skin with crimson. The boards at the edge of the veranda were eaten by the weather already in his lifetime, but the daybed held out till well after, only giving in to the borer the year the boys retired. (TSM, 31)

Here the native vegetation, importunate as always, claims house and owner. No longer quite so incongruous, they seem to blend into the nature surrounding them. As if to ease this process, Browns decide to paint their domicile an unoriginal brown: "and it was accepted by the landscape, because at that time all the other houses were brown. As the hot brown box

settled into the steaming grass the classical pediment was no longer so painfully noticeable" (TSM, 32). The colour brown and the marauding vegetation eventually normalize the house, making it seem of a piece with the suburban landscape.

Thus far, all the impressions about the Brown house have come from Waldo's section, and he has unconsciously succeeded in outlining the tensions which inform their family life. From his father Waldo inherits a predilection for the rational, while from his mother he adopts a romantic streak. But Waldo's basically cold, unemotional nature short-circuits the best qualities from both sides: the rational he perverts into dry, academic impotence and whatever impetuous, imaginative tendencies he possesses atrophy. Arthur, on the other hand, is all intuition and senses and imagination, a sort of noble primitive--were it not for his addiction to Dostoevski--whose feelings and knowledge bypass his mind. He is the impulsive, uninhibited, creative one, whose unfettered nature makes Waldo crazed with jealousy. It is their house which embodies both classical and romantic ideals, and which serves as the battleground for the opposing forces. The house proves something quite different to each of the brothers: whereas Waldo sees little in it besides a tawdry wooden box, Arthur reveres it almost as a place of worship and as the stage whereon their lives are played out. The veranda, in fact, serves literally as stage for Arthur's performance of his tragedy of the cow. As it turns out, house is both shrine

and shack.

Because Arthur is "authentic man . . . cleansed of the illusion of culture,"[19] he views his house with unblinkered eyes. "Arthur loved the classical façade of the brown weatherboard house. He learned there was something about the Classical which Dad called 'sacrosanct--in a manner of speaking'" (TSM, 217). Arthur realizes, even if Waldo does not, that if their apparent life is lived on the outside, in the places where they go to work, their actual life "was the one which continued knotting itself behind the classical weatherboard façade" (TSM, 276). "Knotting" clues us in to the tensions which plague relations between the twins. Arthur's home may well seem to him a castle, but even he recognizes it to be a haunted one. The passage continues: "Sometimes Arthur wished Dad hadn't burnt his copy of The Brothers Karamazov, so that he could have got on with it at home. Then he realized it mightn't have been desirable: to introduce all those additional devils into their shaky wooden house" (TSM, 276). As their relation to each other disintegrates, so too does their feel for their house:

> If it had not been for the dogs they might have succumbed to the silence of their suddenly unfamiliar house. It seemed as though the house had grown elastic with time, and they would have to accustom themselves to its changing shapes. The rooms which they had used before, or not, according to their needs, began using them. So much of what they had forgotten, or never seen, rose up

> before their eyes: the dusty paper bags still hanging by their necks as Dad had left them . . . a simple deal chair suddenly dominating the shadows; the smell of old milk rags, of turps, and rotted quinces . . . dates of years ago turned to fly-shit on the calendars; a ball of Mother's hair . . . a dress of Mother's. (TSM, 280)

Surrounded as they are by ghosts and by the accumulated debris of a lifetime, Arthur and Waldo feel like strangers in their house, mainly because the house is reacting directly to the ill-will that exists between its occupants. House, because frightened, proves frightening.

The house resonates to the friction between Waldo and Arthur as if in anticipation of the inevitable showdown between them. Notice how syntax suffers in this rendering of the anxious house:

> Now the dry woodwork ticked the rusty iron creaked or responded to mere claws or rain-scurries at night the water dripped in the scullery basin plant life was reflected in the thinnest smear of sunlight on the walls and ceilings of the house in which not everyone had died. (TSM, 285)

House and dwellers seem to be listening in some suspense for each other's breathing. The mention of death introduces even more anxiety, although Arthur quells it by insisting to himself that no one, not himself or Waldo or their house, is about to die:

> It seemed fitting to Arthur that the house which had been built in the shape of a temple should be used as a place of worship, and he took it for granted it would continue to fulfil its purpose, in spite of timber thin as paper, fretting iron, sinking foundations. Like the front gate, it would be held together by rust and lichen, or divine right. At least there was that about age: there were others in the conspiracy.
>
> The gentleness of it appealed to Arthur. (TSM, 285)

But temple functions not only as a place for prayer; in Greek times the temple was also the place for ritual sacrifices. Even if Arthur does not sense what is coming, the house does. It alone receives the terrifying news of Waldo's death:

> Then Arthur went stampeding through the house in which their lives, or life, had been lived until the end. It was a wonder the cries torn out of him didn't bring the structure down. Before he slammed a door on the shocked faces of dogs. (TSM, 288)

With the closing of the door Arthur effectively closes his section of the novel as well as life as he has always known it. The wooden box which he and Waldo have inhabited all these years becomes Waldo's coffin. When Arthur returns to Terminus Road it is to Mrs. Poulter's houseboat he goes, as if to an anchored ship. Browns' house has run the whole gamut of experience, from theatre to temple to shack to coffin. Its life ceases with the lives of its owners.

4.

Mandala

Mandala, unlike tree/river, house or body, is only ever symbol, although evidence of its power is manifested in certain unique objects and events such as Arthur's glass taws, his dance of life, Saporta's rug and even the novel itself. Critics converge on the mandala as the work's key symbol, and each brings his or her own definition of mandala to their discussion of its role in the book. In general, a mandala is two-dimensional, a circle enclosing a square. A more complex, solid mandala is three-dimensional, a sphere enclosing a cube. In either case, the configuration of the mandala makes it appear that the form inside is trying to break the bonds which the outer form imposes. There exists tension between within and without as well as fusion between the two. Some religions interpret this opposition/unity as symbolizing the eternally conflicting yet interdependent nature of the relation between matter and spirit. Above all, the mandala is prized for its completeness, its perfection, its inner harmony. Mandala is said to articulate man's longing for religious experience; it is also believed to point the way to God. The centre is in fact the purported dwelling place of the god, which is double in nature. Finally, mandala remains the symbol which unites all other symbols.

The mandala proves capable of metamorphosing into many different objects and events, all of them 'solid' in their way. The first we encounter in The Solid Mandala is the Chinese woman's wheel-tree. That the woman is Chinese is no mere accident: her cultural origins doubtless make her finely attuned to the mandalic significance of this most extraordinary tree. Mrs. Poulter divulges early in the novel to Mrs. Dun about having seen the Chinese woman standing under said tree when it was in flower, and Arthur next relates the same episode--in Waldo's section--from his point of view: "'We saw the Chinese woman standing under the wheel-tree. You ought to see a wheel-tree flowering'" (TSM, 138). Mrs. Dun and the Browns are embarrassed to be the recipients of these vaguely shameful confessions, so the story waits until Arthur's section to be told in all its dramatic intensity:

> And under the tree was standing the Chinese woman, whom he often remembered afterwards. They stood looking at one another. . . . There was no great reason why he should remember her, except as part of the dazzle of the afternoon. For that reason he did. (TSM, 257)

Of course the rest of that brilliant afternoon includes Arthur's dance of life, which he performs in front of Mrs. Poulter with utterly spontaneous abandon. That is why the whole afternoon of berry-picking and discovery imprints so deeply into the hearts and minds of both Mrs. Poulter and Arthur. This latter comes to have one more experience of the

wheel-tree towards the end of his section. This time, Arthur walks alone:

> One year he went up to look at the wheel-tree, again in the season of its second flowering, and, as though by contrivance, the Chinese woman was standing beneath it. Only the crackle of her surface was more pronounced, her bones more obviously breakable. . . . But the wheel-tree fairly sizzled with fire, burning its way back through time to the other afternoon. (TSM, 281)

Each time the wheel-tree is re-introduced into the novel, its story becomes increasingly embellished. It represents a significant mandala, linking as it does past with present, and especially given the fact that both versions of the encounters in Arthur's section occur before dramatic events: the first before his life-affirming dance, the second before Waldo's demise.

White uses kinaesthesia to stage Arthur's ballet as mandala. It is a consummate performance which shows off White's flair for the dramatic as well as Arthur's capacity for feeling. It also shows how far White has progressed in his use of imagery. The dance follows a four-square pattern, celebrating first Arthur himself, then his love for Dulcie Feinstein, then for Mrs. Poulter, and, finally, for Waldo. This pattern happens to follow the order in which Arthur gives away his marbles. The dance manages to include all the elements of life important to Arthur. It is his life

he performs, "always prayerful" (TSM, 259), in which he opposes the gods dying to the discordant human voices below, after which he dances more familiar things like a simple wooden house in which people sleep, the icy moon and the orange sun. Arthur includes with Dulcie in her corner her own personal mandala, the Star of David. For Mrs. Poulter he adds earthy things like pears and pigs, and then he proceeds to act out the role of the child she never had. Waldo's corner sees conflict and Arthur's coming to the anguished realization that "He couldn't dance his brother out of him, not fully. They were too close for it to work" (TSM, 260). Finally, in the centre, where dwells the god, Arthur "danced the passion of all their lives, the blood running out of the backs of his hands, water out of the hole in his ribs. His mouth was a silent hole, because no sound was needed to explain" (TSM, 260-261).[20] This particular mandala is indeed a unifying symbol which allows Arthur to perform his entire range of experience. It unites their individual stories with the great cosmic one all in non-verbal fashion. This dance, ephemeral in nature as all performances are, and witnessed by only one other person, is however saved from complete oblivion because consigned to words, themselves solid mandalas.

Arthur discovers mandalas everywhere. Besides Dulcie's Star of David, Arthur recognizes a mandalic design in the centre of one of Leonard Saporta's rugs (shades of Henry James). Enjoying Mrs. Feinstein's tales of travels with her

aunt, Arthur conceives the idea that "'the world is another mandala!'" (TSM, 239) He would like to believe that his relation with Waldo is mandalic, but even the children skipping know better: "'One a one makes two, . . . One a one a one, . . . Two a two is never one'" (TSM, 194). Certainly duality is characteristic of the mandala, but, as Arthur comes to recognize by the end of his dance, two cannot ever entirely merge into one. Despite their common pain, Waldo and Arthur remain separate, a fact due in part to Waldo's inability to perceive or to understand the mandala.

Arthur's glass taws--four in particular--represent the most obvious and significant of the mandalas. There are no duplicates; each is unique.

> However many marbles Arthur had . . . he considered four his permanencies. There were the speckled gold and the cloudy blue. There was the whorl of green and crimson circlets. There was the taw with a knot at the centre, which made him consider palming it off, until, on looking long and close, he discovered the knot was the whole point. (TSM, 222)

They are what Arthur keeps and cherishes--polishing and peering into them in turn--in order to be able to give them away to those he loves and to those he considers worthy of them. Each marble seems destined for a particular person by virtue of its colour, or design. Predictably, Waldo's is the one with the knot inside, the one Arthur feels most attached to.

> Of all these jewels or touchstones, talismans or sweethearts, Arthur Brown got to love the knotted one best, and for staring at it, and rubbing at it, should have seen his face inside. After he had given two, in appreciation, or recognition, the flawed or knotted marble became more than ever his preoccupation. But he was ready to give it, too, if he was asked. Because this rather confusing oddity was really not his own. His seemed more the coil of green and crimson circlets. (TSM, 222)

He carries them with him everywhere, often taking them from his pocket to feel them roll about in his hand, or to squint into their brilliantly coloured depths. These mandalas keep Arthur in mind of all roundnesses: the completeness of life, the perfection of love, the splendour of the world, the beauty of the wheel-tree. The marbles--simple child's toys--prove in fact highly sophisticated, complex symbols which give back the reflection of whoever gazes therein.

Arthur's marbles function both symbolically as mandalas and realistically as tokens or toys. As things they shed their passivity to provide Arthur not just with their objective presence, but also with some sensory satisfaction. For instance touch, the most personal and perhaps most perfect form of communication, remains an important part of Arthur's relation with the marble mandalas. He caresses them a long while before he presents them to his chosen few. In giving them, Arthur offers both intimacy and enlightenment to the recipient. Those who accept the glass taws perceive this,

although they, like Arthur, remain incapable of articulating precisely what they share in these gifts.

> It was himself who was, and would remain, the keeper of mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light. As he went out of the room his lips were half open to release an interpretation he had not yet succeeded in perfecting. His body might topple, but only his body, as he submitted the marble in his pocket to his frenzy of discovery. (TSM, 234)

The marbles represent concentrated presence. Not only do they inspire touch, they also stimulate the visual sense.

Like White's many evocations of rose, the marbles dazzle those who search out the oracle within them. Arthur is himself as much a creature of light as the glass globes he fiddles with:

> As Venus said, in the old book Arthur came across years later: I generate light, and darkness is not of my nature; there is therefore nothing better or more venerable than the conjunction of myself with my brother.
>
> But darkness could descend by daylight in one black solid slab. (TSM, 223)

Arthur's mandalas, like their owner, generate light. Arthur finds their brilliance a source of comfort, as when, for instance, their mother lies dying: "he realized that the knot at the heart of the mandala, at times so tortuously inwoven, would dissolve, if only temporarily, in light. And it seemed as though the worst could only happen for the best" (TSM,

266). Waldo rejects the solace Arthur offers him in the knotted mandala, choosing instead to deny their mother's condition. Still, the marbles provide solace and inspiration to Arthur, Dulcie and Mrs. Poulter.

Arthur also finds his treasures touchstones for memories. Like the cabbages in The Tree of Man, Arthur's mandalas revive past scenes: he has only to touch them. Having long lost a post card Dulcie once sent him from Europe for example, Arthur "had only to revolve the marble in his pocket for Dulcie's lake with the crystal-studded castle to reappear" (TSM, 241). Because they represent such perfect means of communication for Arthur with himself as well as with others, they sometimes obviate the need for him to speak at all. The consigning of his agates to others comes to be one of Arthur's main responsibilities in life, the highest form of communication of which he is capable. Arthur collects his mandalas--earns them and trades for them, as it is specified--in order to be able to give them away. The first goes to dulcet Dulcie Feinstein: "It was the blue taw which Norm Croucher had traded for liquorice straps. The mists rolled up, to be contained by the perfect, glass sphere. . . . He had always known the blue mandala would be the one for Dulcie. Her beauty would not evaporate again" (TSM, 249). The second marble he offers to Mrs. Poulter after having performed his dance for her. Believing her worthy of it, he gives her "the gold one, in which the sparks glinted, and from which the rays shot upward

whenever the perfect sphere was struck by its counterpart" (TSM, 261). The third agate he considers giving to his mother, but realizes in time that she couldn't use it anyway. It is then he offers it to Waldo, with predictable results: "'If it would help I would give it to you, Waldo, to keep,' Arthur said. Offering the knotted mandala. While half sensing that Waldo would never untie the knot" (TSM, 267). But the marble Waldo rejects remains his anyway--Arthur keeps it in trust: "In his left pocket, certainly, he continued to carry Waldo's mandala, though for the most part he avoided taking it out. He preferred to contemplate his own, in which the double spiral knit and unknit so reasonably" (TSM, 274). It is his own he twirls in the Public Library while attempting to solve the conundrum of the words he reads; it is Waldo's he eventually loses down the sewer.

Arthur's life story coincides with the saga of his solid mandalas: of his four special taws he gives two away, loses one and ends up with one--his own. One is never two; two never make one. Although Arthur has long carried Waldo about inside himself, although he has long considered his brother at least half of himself, in the end, he fears he has lost him and wanders about incomplete. Except for the last remaining marble with the double spiral inside. The knotted mandala may be gone but the one that is left reminds Arthur that he still contains his brother within the whole circle of himself.

The mandala proves a powerful, versatile symbol White

returns to again and again. It shows up in various forms in other novels: roses, for instance, are the first mandalas, and appear in The Aunt's Story, The Tree of Man, Voss and The Eye of the Storm. The chandelier at Sunningdale in The Vivisector, jewels in The Eye of the Storm, the chariot in Riders and Ellen's wedding ring in A Fringe of Leaves all share mandalic characteristics of wholeness, completion, perfection, and all point to "another world . . . in this one," as the epigraph from Paul Eluard in The Solid Mandala so aptly puts it. Even the Eadie/Eddie duality in The Twyborn Affair, house in The Solid Mandala and body in The Eye of the Storm represent mandalas, where inner strives with outer, where there is unity in diversity and where the quaternary is subsumed by the circular whole.

5.

Objects

Arthur--the slow one, the dill--is the one who notices things. He lives close to the earth, and in close proximity to the things thereof. Arthur considers all objects as distinct and perfect as his solid mandalas. His simple philosophy, blurted out the day Waldo accosts him and humiliates them both in the Public Library, says "'Everybody's got to concentrate on something. Whether it's a dog. Or,' he babbled, 'or a glass marble. Or a brother, for instance. Or Our Lord, like Mrs. Poulter says'" (TSM, 192). These prove the very things Arthur most prizes throughout the book. But the most unlikely things also catch his eye and capture his affection--Mrs. Poulter's hair, for instance: "Warmed by the sun, it seemed to be leading a life of its own, like some kind of sleepy animal" (TSM, 258). In what is by now a not unrecognizable litany, Arthur names those things he knows as truest: "grain in wood, . . . bread broken roughly open, . . . cow-pats neatly, freshly dropped" (TSM, 221). These domestic, rustic things all belong to the most elemental kind of life--that lived on the land. Arthur, unlike Waldo, cherishes decrepit old things, whether they be his brother or pieces of furniture or the aged blue dogs: he "sat, and might have continued sitting, in that old leather chair with the burst

seat where mice had nested the other winter, the woodwork scratched by dogs reaching up to claim right of affection. Arthur sat in their father's chair" (TSM, 17). Well-worn, everyday things urge use and on-going life.

The only things Waldo appears to have affection for are an old icy satin dress and fan of their mother's, which he digs out of hiding in some closet, vamps around in and then discards when the whole ensemble fails to return the desired reflection to him from the mirror. Glassy memory does not serve Waldo well. In fact, all recollections of family life from the past seem to him poisoned. Waldo uses a most unsavoury image to illustrate his contempt for his eccentric relations.

> All this while the mutton fat was curdling round them in skeins, clogging corners, filling bowls with verdigris tints and soft white to greyish fur. You couldn't be bothered to empty the mutton fat out. Like a family, it was with you always. Set. (TSM, 195)

Waldo shows no special awareness of objects, even of the books he pretends to ruminate over. As a result he lacks the insight and humanity that his brother derives from even the simplest of objects.

Animals, dogs in particular, play an important role in The Solid Mandala. Not since Voss have dogs been so affectionately portrayed by White. The comic canine antics of Runt and Scruffy quaintly mirror those of the two old men

their masters, especially of Arthur:

> Only the old potbellied dogs appeared convinced of the mild pleasures they enjoyed, frolicking and farting, though somewhat cranky with each other. One of them--Runt--lifted his leg on a seedy cabbage and almost overbalanced. (TSM, 18)

Waldo, obviously too sophisticated to approve of the cavorting old mutts, distrusts and dislikes them, with the result that 'his' dog deserts him for Arthur's affection. Still, Waldo believes himself the master of a dog in Arthur, who is more than once referred to in canine terms. "If Arthur had been, say, a dog, he might have touched the back of his head. That hair" (TSM, 21). But Waldo claims to not believe in touching dogs because it gives them "a wrong sense of their own importance" (TSM, 21). Arthur, however, does not hold with Waldo's hierarchy: he delights in his dogs to the extent he would have them sleep with him. As in Voss, dog comes to represent love, and Waldo, like Voss, rejects that emotion. There is something about their reliable, affectionate nature that frightens him. It is just for this reason that Waldo dislikes Dulcie at first sight: "She had the eyes, he saw, of certain dogs, and he had never cared for dogs. They were something to be feared, for their treachery, or else despised for stupidity" (TSM, 86). Arthur, on the other hand, considers Dulcie's dog-likeness a virtue. "'Kick a dog, and hurt yourself'" (TSM, 277), as he intones to Waldo. Arthur

himself exhibits certain canine and even bovine characteristics from time to time--these being the animals he most admires and loves. Not that Arthur ever gets into the habit of personifying them: he recognizes them as "only dogs" (TSM, 173) after all, and always responds to them on their own terms. The day Arthur flees the house, leaving the dogs affectionateless and alone with only the corpse of Waldo, they take their grisly revenge. Dogs prove no substitute for the love denied Arthur by his brother. Instead, they end up devouring Waldo's impotent, consuming hatred.

Whereas Arthur relies upon his relation to his brother and with things like animals and marbles to articulate his being, Waldo, the bookish one, looks to words to say it all. "Words were not in Arthur's line. It was Waldo who collected them, like stamps or coins. He made lists of them. He rolled them in his mouth like polished stones" (TSM, 29). Although Arthur struggles with words his whole life through, he recognizes early that "'Words are not what make you see'" (TSM, 51). Waldo, the misunderstood would-be writer, feels "They did not grasp the extent of his need to express some thing. Otherwise how could he truly say: I exist" (TSM, 76). Like Elyot in The Living and the Dead and pre-Holocaust Mordecai Himmelfarb in Riders, Waldo goes through life convinced that words are necessary to expression. But they also provide him with the required distance between his superior self and the illiterates that surround him on

Terminus Road. Arthur, by contrast, considers words palpable but awkward objects: "He had difficulty with his words, chewing them to eject, but when he did, there they stood, solid and forever" (TSM, 19). This linguistic difference between the two brothers gives White a forum for airing much of the personal distrust for language he attempted to work through in this middle period of his writing.

Voss, Riders and Mandala all explore words as unwieldy, deceptive tools for self-expression. Whereas Elyot and Waldo (even White himself)--aspiring writers all--rely on language to express what is in them to express, the more spontaneous, intuitive characters like Theodora Goodman, Stan Parker, Mary Hare and Arthur turn from words about life to life itself. Like Voss, Arthur sees words as stony. As he says to Waldo:

> 'Tell Mrs. Musto I'm concentrating on words. The Word. But also words that are just words. There's so many kinds. You could make necklaces. Big chunks of words, for instance, and the shiny, polished ones. God . . . is a kind of sort of rock crystal.' (TSM, 81)

Words are mostly unreliable, resistant objects that clog up the mouth, making it impossible ever to express oneself adequately or appropriately.

The narrator does have some fun with language, especially different languages. In this case, French provides the stumbling-block. With reference to Dulcie's hysterics over

the bottle of L'Amour de Paris she comes across in a Musto bathroom, she and Arthur mull over the prickly problem of translation: "'You are right . . . Amour is not the same as 'Love.' Amour has a different shape--a different meaning'" (TSM, 104). Language proves not only a barrier to those who attempt to wield it within a particular cultural framework, it is also a cross-cultural barrier. For instance, Waldo and Arthur disagree on the topic of which dialect of English to adopt:

> Waldo . . . preferred to speak English because, he said, it had a bigger vocabulary. Arthur did not care. Or he did. He developed the habit of speaking mostly in Australian. He wanted to be understood. He wanted them to trust him too. Waldo, he knew was suspicious of men, though Waldo himself was inclined to call them Australians. (TSM, 212-213)

Here White outlines the dilemma he has faced as a British-educated Australian writer. Words are used as weapons by Waldo in order to distance himself from a culture he fancies himself above, while for Arthur words represent an unavoidable means of communication with those unfortunate enough to need them.

And so Arthur, the natural, the physical, the one close to things, redeems Waldo the pretentious, the cerebral, the one who denies life in its many forms. Right from the beginning of each of the brothers' sections, differences in diction and syntax provide clues to their individual

temperaments. Waldo's section opens with his dry, bossy, old-maidish admonition to Arthur: "'Put on your coat, and we'll go for a walk . . . Otherwise you'll sit here brooding'" (TSM, 17). Duty and common sense dictate the rough manner in which Waldo piles Arthur into his coat and sets his cap upon his head. The two are here separate, distinct old men, held together seemingly by habit alone. In contrast, warm, fuzzy tones open Arthur's section:

> In the beginning there was the sea of sleep of such blue in which they lay together with iced cakes and the fragments of glass nesting in each other's arms the furry waves of sleep nuzzling at them like animals. (TSM, 209)

Here all is cozy, sleepy, womb-secure. It is a primordial scene Arthur remembers, of which the basic elements are the sea and animals. Even the words sound soft and snuggly in keeping with Arthur's first recollection of himself and his brother, unified, perhaps even before birth. For all the conflict between them, each is contained, mandalic-like, in the other. Dual, individual, and separate they are also one; together they form a mandala, together their stories form this novel, a mandala, and together their two halves of a house divided also form a mandala--solid mandalas all.

Notes

[1] Or vice versa. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in The Madwoman in the Attic, point to numerous examples from nineteenth-century literature where the attic is used to symbolize irrationality. Attic is the space where crazy women are locked up, like Rochester's secret, mad wife Bertha in Jane Eyre.

[2] Bachelard, p. xxxii.

[3] Bachelard, p. xxxiii.

[4] Bachelard, p. 59.

[5] Bachelard, p. xxxiii.

[6] Beatson, p. 163.

[7] Beatson, p. 154.

[8] Wolfe, p. 3.

[9] Scheick, p. 134.

[10] Beatson, p. 154.

[11] Beatson, p. 138.

[12] Karin Hansson, The Warped Universe: A Study of Imagery and Structure in Seven Novels by Patrick White, Diss. (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1984), p. 35.

[13] Hansson, p. 36.

[14] Brian Kiernan, Images of Society and Nature: Seven Essays on Australian Novels (Melbourne: OUP, 1971), pp. 137-

138.

[15] Kiernan, p. 138.

[16] Harry Heseltine, Acquainted With the Night: Studies in Classic Australian Fiction, Monograph 4 (The Townsville Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, 1979), p. 74.

[17] William Walsh, "Patrick White's Vision of Human Incompleteness: The Solid Mandala and The Vivisector," in Readings in Commonmwealth Literature, ed. William Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 424.

[18] Tindall, p. 229.

[19] McCulloch, p. 34.

[20] I am reluctant to insist on the Christ imagery, although, admittedly, it seems to be quite obvious here--especially as this novel follows Riders in the Chariot, in which Himmelfarb's immolation provides the novel's climactic scene.

V

Body

The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.--Luke 12: 23

I was given by chance this human body so difficult to wear.--No play

This life we prize so much, it is only to do with the conjugation of a verb.
--Zulfikar Ghose

Each human body is a complex, idiosyncratic, organic mechanism which absorbs nutrients from air, water and food, in addition to less quantifiable elements like ideas and sensations, utilizes--and in so doing transforms--them, and then returns them to the world. This intricate in/out balance goes on countless times each day with mechanical precision. Yet despite--or perhaps because of--its insistent physicality, the body proves all too vulnerable. Subject as it is to untold vagaries of circumstance and environment, it is the merest second, the thinnest hair's-breadth that can separate the body from its life. Still, it is all any of us has to wear. Body is the physical aspect of our essential self, so although it occasionally lets us down, we continue unceasingly to groom it, hone it, trust in it and revere it.

Body shapes the way we physically interact with the world. It is both barrier to and link with the teeming life around us, dictating that while alive we can never fully merge with the things of the world, yet also ensuring that we have as rich an encounter as possible with them. Each body is as unique as each experience of the world: an individual collection of fluid, muscles and sinews dictates how a person perceives his or her environment. They come down to bone, finally, and viscera--all our lofty ideas about ourselves and our place in the scheme of things. Body and world are mutually dependent: body is first aware of itself as existing only by means of its surroundings, and the world only becomes

real for us once our bodies become conscious of their own autonomous existence. Neither is viable without the other.

Body exists in both time and space; it is firmly rooted in the terrestrial, the temporal and the finite. Like tree it tends to grow straight upwards and out, and like house it both inhabits and is inhabited. Body remains the most animal part of all of us, delighting and embarrassing us in turn. Although common to everyone, body remains an intensely personal and private landscape, to be mapped only by the self or a few choice others.

No matter how euphemistic we would like to be about the human body, we are brought back to earth again and again. To cite Montaigne: "Sits he on never so high a throne, a man still sits on his bottom." What is the body but flesh and blood, viscera functioning in systems, the whole aquiver with sensations? Body is also warm and supple, dynamic and ever-changing, although ultimately subject to death and decay. Its design seems to have been based on the number two: the number of eyes, ears, lungs, kidneys, genitals, breasts, arms, hands, legs and feet attest to the binary nature of the body. Moreover, the physical configuration of the body also suggests four: consider the human physique in terms of left and right sides, upper and lower halves or north-south-east-west points. The body easily conforms, spread-eagled, to the shape of an X or, arms alone extended, to the shape of a †. Join the four points of the X or the † and you have a basic mandala with a

human being at the centre instead of a god. But what is it in talking about the fleshy human form that causes us to leap from the physical to the philosophical? It is difficult to stick with the corporeal self alone for very long altogether.

In any discussion about the human frame the un-physical is bound to creep in. Just as we talk about sensory organs and body parts in terms of binary and quaternary systems, so too does the vocabulary we use in describing the human figure attain to multiple meanings. This is because it is rarely possible to refer to the body alone without also including some of the rest of the whole person. To isolate the body for purposes of discussion we might just as well talk about a corpse; the human shape includes not only its anatomy but its mind, emotions and spirit as well. Thus, to say a person has heart is to suggest not just the vital, pulsing organ located in his or her chest, but it is also to imply that s/he has some compassion and generosity. It is these unverifiable qualities which set people apart from the animals they otherwise so clearly physically resemble. Body keeps the individual earthbound, while the soul it houses reaches ever upwards and out of its fragile shell. One is not greater than the other: relations between the two are interdependent--symbiotic, even. Each nourishes and balances the other: soul makes its material half seem greater than it is, while body, at least until its final failure, keeps soul tethered close to the ground. While yet alive, we can never escape their joint

tyranny: we are always both more and less than the sum of the two.

Looking beyond the noun 'body,' which refers strictly to the material or corporeal state of man, we see that the word boasts a large number of associations. Used in a phrase like "John's body," the word implies 'corpse.' But 'body' can also be used to denote the principal part of some structure or company--the 'corporate body,' say--or it can refer to a compact quantity or systematic collection of something--like a 'body of information'--or to a group of people in an organized society--a 'body politic,' for example. 'Body' may also suggest the substantial quality of something, as in 'full-bodied wine.' Above all, body connotes reality: substance, as opposed to representation or shadow--an entity that functions as the agent or cause of phenomena. Body can be used metaphorically to refer to that church of which Christ is head, and symbolically to the bread used to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper ("Take, eat, for this is my body which was given for you"). 'Body' also functions as a transitive verb meaning to incarnate ("embody"), to give consistence or strength to, or to draw up or form into a body, as in 'body forth.' As suggested earlier, it remains virtually impossible to keep the realm of the non-physical from intruding into the primary, purely physical meaning of the word 'body.'

1.

Whitean Bodies

Human beings possess five verifiable senses by means of which we experience the world. Whereas animals depend mainly upon olfaction and hearing to provide them with a sense of their surroundings, it is vision, arguably the most important, or most keenly developed, which is the primary sense in people. Although we also rely on the other four to varying degrees, they are not well enough adapted to alert us to much more than what is fairly close at hand. People live in a narrow world, assuming or guessing much, having sometimes to rely upon intuition--that slippery sixth sense they are never entirely sure they possess. We have come to depend a good deal upon mechanical devices for information about the world. While these provide the answers to many of the questions humans pose day by day, they also tend to atrophy our senses, substituting mechanistically derived facts for sensually verifiable knowledge and leaving no room for further developing our already timid extra sense. The technology we use denies the element of mystery in the world, while our intuition--whenever we give it free rein--affirms it. This debasing of the other-worldly, and our increasing incapacity for experiencing it, is what Patrick White addresses in his fiction. He insists upon the essential unknowability, the

lack of certainty about things in general and, in commenting upon specific objects (among which numbers body), he attempts to relocate that mystery back to within our sensual grasp. It is possible, he asserts, to know things through ourselves and our senses, to so attune the body that all senses resonate with the tenor of things. But can we withstand the impact of so much feeling? Not to attempt to do so, counters White, is to lead the life of the living dead. The mysterious, the ineffable, is not out there but within, and we can only ever know it through our senses, particularly through intuition--the most eccentric one. Body remains the ultimate link between us and our consciousness of the world; it acts as hinge between human beings and their environment.

A capacity for metamorphosis is one of the intrinsic qualities of body--indeed, of life in general. Throughout people's lives their bodies change as a matter of course. White frequently taps this ability and pushes it to the limit. Since body is but one part of a vast whole of which the many other parts are capable of taking on a variety of forms, White blurs the distinction between the parts, borrowing qualities from one and granting them to another. The result is a constant shifting of ground. Bodies in White's work undergo astonishing metamorphoses, frequently adopting the lyrical qualities of water or music, or the stilted positions of wood or metal. Body seems to take on texture which conforms to the state of its soul. Not that woodenness, for example,

necessarily implies an unworthy soul. Theodora Goodman is more than once pronounced stick-like, yet she is definitely one of White's more sympathetic and redemptive characters. As with everything in White's fiction, the textures of existence are ambivalent in nature; neither wholly good nor bad, they exist in the twilit area somewhere in between. Thus, characters' bodies evolve continuously in White's novels.

Body begins to come into its own with the publication of The Solid Mandala. Here Waldo and especially Arthur scratch, burp and fart their way through the text. Body suddenly becomes intensely physical in that novel and in the two which follow it, namely The Vivisector and The Eye of the Storm. Neither Hurtle Duffield nor Elizabeth Hunter makes a very savoury specimen, the former unkempt and deliberately scoffing at social niceties like presentability, the latter a feeble old woman by the time the reader gets to meet her, formerly impeccably groomed but presently not in complete control of either her faculties or her bodily functions. From slobbering Arthur in Mandala to hunch-backed Rhoda and nymphomaniacal Nance in Vivisector to lascivious Liz Hunter in Eye, body proves insistently physical. These three novels in particular see White focusing on the cruder aspects of the body. Peter Beatson's idea is that White's studied "concentration upon the uglier aspects of the body, and the choice of misshapen or ugly characters, may stem, at least at one level, from the belief that it is this aspect of the flesh, and not its

perfection, that is the most apt emblem for the condition of the 'descended' soul."[1] In other words, its necessary involvement with the body makes the soul vulnerable. Some critics complain that White deliberately reduces the physical to its most unlovely state, but it seems that his belief in the body's essential homeliness goes hand in hand with his equal insistence upon the repulsive in life. Mandala, Vivisector and Eye not only depict less than appetizing flesh, they also concentrate upon the seamier aspects of life itself, like garbage, bowls of mouldy mutton fat, used condoms and animal corpses that wash up on the beach. The living body, White seems to suggest, lies just this side of inevitable decay. Indeed, by virtue of the fact it exists, body necessarily participates in the inescapable corruption around it.

2.

Body Language

Body provides great opportunities for waxing metaphorical. There exists an entire vocabulary that deals with the body, which the writers of the Bible were among the first to explore. The New Testament in particular likens the body to the temple of God, to the soul made physical. Long gone were the lusty, vigorous days of David and Solomon, when men could live fully the life of the flesh and also give God His due. With the Gospels starts the down-playing of the physical. Christ admonishes his followers to give little heed to what they will eat or wear; concentrate instead, He exhorts them, on the inner, spiritual life. The example of Christ Himself redefines body altogether. For He represents the Word made Flesh, unlike Adam, who was formed from clay. Yet original humanity, too, sprang from the Word: in those early days God had but to will something, and it was so. Still, Christ first introduced the revolutionary idea of Incarnation and its attendant notions of transubstantiation and communion to language. But if Christ is God in the flesh, how then can mere mortal people be expected to deal with what this implies for their own lives? Only through the intermediary of Christ the androgynous man-god, who bridges these disparate poles of existence, can humankind reconcile itself to its vast distance

from the godhead and understand that there is as much of the godly in it as there is of the human in God.

Patrick White's men and women flounder between the two extremes. Ever conscious of their inability to measure up, to transcend their earthbound condition, the questers like Theodora, Stan, Voss and Laura, the four charioteers, Arthur, Hurtle, Elizabeth, Ellen, Eddie/Eadie and Alex Gray from Memoirs remain only too aware of the gap between their imperfect selves and their lofty aspirations. But as Beatson points out, "The essence of incarnation is that it is a defection from perfection."[2] Incarnation necessarily implies imperfection, which for Patrick White is never a negative state. Beatson again:

> Patrick White never loses sight of the contribution that the flesh makes to the destiny of the Word . . . he does insist that the only path to salvation lies in accepting all the implications of the soul's foster-home or prison in carnality . . . . The soul must flow out through the organism and into the phenomenal world, just as the One emanates into the Many, and experience totally the conditions of matter.[3]

The flesh turns out to be no liability but a blessing. Those like Voss who look for salvation by denying the importance of the flesh discover that it is only by embracing the offensive, unreliable flesh and experiencing all there is that men and women complete themselves. Oddly enough, the road to unity in Patrick White's universe lies broadly through the flesh.

In fact the body, despite its sometimes disgraceful moments, seems most emblematic of our true status in the world. For this reason Beatson calls White an inverted Platonist, going on to explain that "earthly beauty, like success, is an end in itself and may be spiritually limiting, while decrepitude, like failure, has an unearthly teleology."[4] Redemption presupposes failure; people work their way to grace through what they have been given--namely, their fleshy, defective selves. By the same token, those who rely only upon the physical are also incomplete. Witness the shallow, materialistic Misses Courtney, Flack and Jolley. Still, as Beatson charges: "The Word must, in every sense, be absorbed into and express itself through the flesh. Biology cannot be shirked."[5] And who would want to? Even Voss reluctantly comes to enjoy some of the pleasures the body permits.

Language, like body, also serves to incarnate ideas. Words make definite--within the linguistic possibilities of the 'real'--unformed notions. Figurative language in particular works to embody thoughts. William York Tindall offers the literary symbol as an example of just this tendency of language to incarnate the indefinite:

> The literary symbol, which presents knowledge of its own reality, may not communicate this knowledge, but by its form, which corresponds in quality to a nature of things, creates it. In so far as we apprehend the form we too are informed . . . it serves to discover the reality it shapes . . . [it is] not . . .

> a way of knowing but of embodying awareness or of conceiving in the sense of becoming filled with or pregnant.[6]

Words are analogous to form or body, and the concepts they represent are analogous to content or idea. Words would be lifeless were it not for the fact that the objects to which they refer animate them. As it is, words are mostly symbolic, embodying as they do both thoughts and feelings. Whereas symbol implies containment, other literary figures like metaphor imply equivalence. Language in general, however, like words, subscribes to the principle of containment, shaped by the two variables of signifier and signified.

Incarnation and embodiment focus directly upon the life of the body, demonstrating that sheer intellect or spirituality or physicality are insufficient to the best interests of the whole being. White explores the body as an entire language system which expresses not only the obvious, outer self, but also the infinitely more subtle inner life. Beatson agrees: "every part of the human body becomes a speaking symbol for emotional, moral or spiritual states. The body is the most important of the various language systems . . . through which White gives expression to the flickerings of the inner life."[7] He evolves an entire vocabulary of physical tics which signal much more about character than verbal statements about them could. The language of movement and being permits even inarticulate characters to express a good deal about

themselves.

Gestures, especially those made by the hands, speak volumes about characters. White focuses most frequently on hands (particularly on the hairy backs of men's hands), on the crotches of pursy gentlemen and on eyes. Touch is, as we have seen, a much more perfect means of communication than speaking or writing: it is how characters such as Theodora and Arthur best reveal themselves. Because to them much of life is ineffable, they therefore literally feel their way through it, trusting to their senses to deliver what is otherwise too precious to entrust to inaccurate, unreliable words. Yet none of these characters could in any wise be considered spiritually defective, either. Rather, their lifelong quest concentrates on finding the balance between the physical and the spiritual, and articulating it in non-verbal ways.

Communion/communication are thoroughly explored as interrelated themes first in Voss, then in Eye, and finally in A Fringe of Leaves. Eating and speaking overlap as functions in these three novels, to the extent that it is possible to view eating as a significant structural pattern in all of them.[8] It is also very useful to consider eating as a kind of dramatic focus linked to other activities like sex and death. Voss's final meal, a mass of sorts, serves as Extreme Unction: his beheading quickly follows. Ellen Roxburgh's participation in the cannibal rites of her captors--a mass of another sort--helps her transcend her basic disgust with the physical. And

The Eye of the Storm teems with examples of orally fixated characters and of food used as blackmail, as prelude to sexual encounters and as power. In all of these novels there are those characters who munch as well as those who refuse the feast. Whether the lips of ravenous personae part in order to ingest food, to receive the body of Christ or to utter sounds, they participate in a ritual communion/communication. Both food and words share similarly substantial qualities in White's fiction.

The Gospels offer the adage that man does not live by bread alone but by every word which proceeds from the Father. Patrick White mostly disagrees. Whereas words are exalted by characters like Elyot Standish, Waldo Brown and the pre-Holcaust Mordecai Himmelfarb, they turn to stone in the mouths of more searching, sensitive souls like Stan Parker and Mary Hare. White the writer's unresolved dilemma lies in trying to reconcile his basic distrust of words as bits of disembodied intellect with his equal fear of and respect for their substantiality. Thus he wavers between characters who live their lives through language, and those who never manage to get the hang of them. One issue White does resolve is that it is not flesh but words which represent us in our fallen state: what is needed is to restore flesh to language in order to realign subject and object, body and soul. We live by bread as much as we live by ideas; the two are inseparable.

White concentrates almost exclusively upon the physical in

The Eye of the Storm: the subject of words gets short shrift, except, of course, that there are so many of them in this lengthy novel. So this is a physical, substantial piece of work in the literal sense as well: all artifacts are. The novel in general can be seen as a body of language arranged in narrative form. Body is, in fact, an appropriate structural principle in terms of which to view the novel. According to Peter Brooks in Reading for the Plot, for example, reading is itself a kind of desire which spurs readers on through the plot, devouring page after page in their lust for an end to the tale. In fact, the very nature of narrative demands that it consume itself "as it projects itself forward, retracting as it extends, calling for its end from its beginning."[9] Consumed and consuming, narrative betrays itself as the desire of the narrator to tell and to be heard, and of the reader to gorge on all that the story provides.

> Narratives portray the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots, and they also lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire: the need to tell as a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust of a desire that never can quite speak its name--never can quite come to the point--but that insists on speaking over and over again its movement toward that name.[10]

The language of the erotic is never far from the vocabulary of consumption; the act of reading can in fact be seen as analogous to the sexual act where there is perfect, mutual

intimacy between reader and read.

The novel, then, is not simply an art object. It is an object of desire which leads to a kind of consummation between it and the reader. The novel is an object to be consumed, an article of commerce traded in silent transaction between the author and the reader/consumer. Finally, the novel is an object which shares itself with the reader in a private communion ceremony, and which also lends itself to be shared among many. Reading can be summed up as an activity in which the desire to listen, to feast and to communicate plays a large role. Analogously, writing can be seen as an activity induced by the desire to tell, to disgorge and to communicate. In each case, the language used to describe reading, writing and the object thereof is firmly grounded in the physical. Just as it is impossible to talk about the body alone without reference to its non-physical aspects so too does the same hold for the novel: it is physical but also not, just like the body. The novel itself is something of a cannibal; it boasts a history of having gobbled up features from other art forms such as drama, poetry, music and the visual arts. Consider then, the novel as body: an amorphous, flexible, organic form that manages to seduce and to nourish in turn. It is a private, intimate peep-show which exposes some (but not all) of the author to everyone, and which reveals some (but not all) of the reader to her or himself. The novel is a promiscuous plaything, a kind of good-hearted whore who

believes it incumbent upon him or herself to satisfy anyone with the necessary time and money to lavish. Reading is risqué business indeed.

3.

The Full-Bodied Novel

When first we meet Elizabeth Hunter, heroine of The Eye of the Storm, she is a rich, old woman whose deteriorating condition summons home her two children. Dorothy, the recently separated and thus impoverished Princesse de Lascabanes, flies to Sydney from Paris in order to have more immediate access to the fortune she will inherit as a result of her mother's death. Basil, the knighted, benighted and world-famous actor flies in from London in order to more directly scoop up his own inheritance. The siblings have little enough to say to one another, much less to their mother. Each harbours a personal set of grievances against the difficult, demanding, domineering woman they were born to. Also among the cast of characters are Mary de Santis, Flora Manhood and Sister Badgery (Mrs. Hunter's three nurses), Lotte Lippmann her cook, Arnold Wyburd her solicitor and Alfred her dead husband. The narrative moves between details of Elizabeth Hunter's final days and her own vivid memories of her long life.

In terms of its form, The Eye of the Storm shows a self-conscious awareness of its own role as both cannibal and source of nourishment. It borrows freely from art forms such

as poetry and drama, and makes reference to others such as music. The work is a lengthy, sprawling fiction which shifts from present to past and back again within a multiplicity of viewpoints. Numerous stories are related here, from the nurses' who care for Mrs. Hunter to her cook's, her lawyer's and her children's, to the old matriarch's herself. In terms of content, each tale focuses almost exclusively upon the physical. The visual, the alimentary and the sexual come in for a good deal of attention altogether. Food imagery in particular consistently defines character motivation, although prominent objects such as jewels, birds and flowers also provide certain similar nutritional qualities. Elizabeth the Hunter craves sensual enjoyment from her jewels as much as from Lotte Lippmann's delicacies, and even Mary the Saint's appetite for roses betrays a less than ascetic nature. The Eye of the Storm is all about hunger and the quest for its appeasement and chronicles the stopping-up of numerous gaping voids within its characters. As a novel it proves the ultimate in feasts for the eye.

A) The Visual Feast

Patrick White's space in The Eye of the Storm is dominated by the physical. The theme of consumption wears a variety of guises; besides food and eating, vision, light and reflection also betray characters' appetites. If Elizabeth Hunter seems something of a faded glamour queen to those who

tend her, she continues to startle them all with "that milky stare which at times still seemed to unshutter glimpses of a terrifying mineral blue" (TEOTS, 12). Mrs. Hunter's infamous burning blue stare serves throughout her life to pierce the veil of others' pretensions. Few can stand up to it. She remains the one character who always sees herself and others clearly, even in blindness. Elizabeth Hunter is blessed with pure vision throughout her long life, in contrast to characters like Basil and Dorothy, who are forever peering into mirrors hoping to catch a glimpse of their true selves. They suffer a sort of purblindness that cripples them more than her cataracts do their mother. But one eye more demanding or consuming even than Elizabeth Hunter's is that of the storm, in which she herself becomes swallowed during the most fulfilling moments of her life. The coming together of eye/I/aye proves the ultimate experience for a woman who has always striven to see to the bone.

The aging doyenne faces days when her sight fails her, forcing her to linger inside her skull rather than outside. The reason for her diminished vision is not mere age but the fact that a stroke has caused a blood vessel to break behind one of her eyes. Hence she joins the small club, started in The Vivisector, of those stroked by God. But because she can will almost anything, the long awaited day her children arrive she awakens to good vision. "'I shall see them!'" she exclaims triumphantly (TEOTS, 12). She comes to wield her

sometime sight as an advantage against those who consider her nothing but "this old blind puppy" (TEOTS, 39); Elizabeth Hunter proves herself perfectly capable of lethal accuracy in her observations of those around her, even in her official half-blindness. For as greedy as she has always been to experience everything possible, so too has "she always enjoyed seeing what there was to see" (TEOTS, 35). Her gaze has disconcerted many upon whom it has been turned: "She had always seen too clearly, it seemed: opaque friends had been alarmed by it" (TEOTS, 16). The fact is that Elizabeth Hunter has been incapable of simply looking: her tendency has been to gobble others with her eyes. It is this extraordinary greed, this maniacal desire to possess, which so causes those who gather around her during her final days to resent her. For even on her deathbed she continues to play the cannibal with her eyes.

And what eyes. Variously described as "blow-torches" (TEOTS, 333), "splintered sapphires" (TEOTS, 12) and "flashes of lightning" (TEOTS, 246), Elizabeth Hunter's now-clouded orbs once penetrated everyone. Even now hers is a "blind yet knowing stare" (TEOTS, 102). If people like Dorothy claim that her mother "always saw: she saw the worst in everyone" (TEOTS, 268), others credit her with affecting how they themselves view things. Even unimaginative Nurse Badgery feels her patient "'makes a person see things in a different light from day to day'" (TEOTS, 329). For more receptive beings like

Flora Manhood, her idol's eyes prove capable of startling revelation:

> In spite of her desire to worship, the younger woman might have been struck with horror if the faintly silvered lids hadn't flickered open on the milkier, blank blue of Elizabeth Hunter's stare. Then, for an instant, one of the rare coruscations occurred, in which the original sapphire buried under the opalescence invited you to shed your spite, sloth, indifference, resentments, along with an old woman's cruelty, greed, selfishness. Momentarily at least this fright of an idol became the goddess hidden inside: of life, which you longed for, but hadn't yet dared embrace; of beauty such as you imagined, but had so far failed to grasp . . . and finally, of death, which hadn't concerned you, except as something to be tidied away, till now you were faced with the vision of it. (TEOTS, 110)

If a piercing stare, hers is also at times a generous one. Always, though, a glance from Elizabeth Hunter proves more than a mere passing flicker; it is an act of volition which she perfects and which she trains as intensely on others as she does on herself.

Memory remains one space Mrs. Hunter continues to see into without difficulty. Physical blindness does not prevent her seeing her past distinctly, and so, as she replays her story, it is with eyes closed: "On the dark screen her lids provided the picture show continued flickering" (TEOTS, 90). Her personal movie projector proves especially alarming to those who, like daughter Dorothy, it forces to relive

embarrassing moments like those on Brumby Island when both women vied for the amorous attentions of one Norwegian scientist. As she herself acknowledges, "The past is so much clearer than the purblind present. Every pore of it" (TEOTS, 487). But Elizabeth Hunter's hindsight is not always entirely selective in her own favour: regrets about her treatment of husband Alfred and about her various lovers like Athol Shreve clearly shine through. In fact, her gropings toward the horizons of her past emerge as expiations of foibles which she makes without so much as moving from her bed. Dorothy and Basil, on the other hand, go so far as to attempt to recapture their past physically; their visit to Kudjeri, however, only leaves them resenting their mother the more. Whereas memory swallows them whole, their mother succeeds in swallowing memory whole and regurgitating it for restorative purposes.

All this ogling definitely carries some sexual connotations. Lingering over the Brumby Island affair, Elizabeth Hunter recalls that at one moment Edvard Pehl "was looking at her more with his teeth, it seemed, than with his eyes" (TEOTS, 350). The allusion to devouring links food with sex; for Elizabeth Hunter there really exists a kind of visual copulation. Mrs. Hunter proves no stranger at all to the power the eyes hold to entice: she is remembered by Anne Macrory as being a "'flirt. With either sex. And although you knew what she was up to, it didn't matter. You let her seduce you with her eyes'" (TEOTS, 466). Man and woman alike

fall under her spell; the huntress's eyes function splendidly as instruments of conquest--one of their more insidious uses.

Basil and Dorothy, themselves stung at times by their mother's glances, attempt to deploy similar techniques themselves. But whereas Elizabeth Hunter could see through people--in fact through mirrors and beyond--her children's looks bounce back when they encounter glass. Dorothy and Basil live off reflections--from shiny surfaces or from the eyes of acquaintances--without aspiring much to the self-reflective. They both peer anxiously into looking-glasses, hoping to receive back true glimpses of themselves, but manage to see only what appears most obviously to others. They look, but don't perceive. Their mother knows that "reflections can be worse than faces" (TEOTS, 14), that they represent surface without dimensions of any kind, yet they are what her children strive for. Dorothy, upon her arrival in Australia, feels somewhat alien: "The briefest glance at her own reflection ought to restore her confidence if it were to falter. As it did. And her impeccable reflection let her down" (TEOTS, 46). Time and again she investigates mirrors as possible sources of solace, but anxious, neurotic Dorothy "wasn't consoled by her own reflection" (TEOTS, 61).

Like his sister, Basil constantly searches out his own image. He is ever the egoistic, on-stage performer, and his reflection reveals very little about him: all he ever really sees is a mask. Basil's imperfect vision hobbles him on more

than one level: for instance, "He looked in a mirror and tried to remember his mother, but couldn't distinctly: his own reflection got in the way" (TEOTS, 124). Not only is his hindsight blurred, so too is his day-to-day viewing. Basil cannot succeed in looking anyone in the eye. Especially with women he needs a mirror as intermediary. When Flora Manhood pops into his hotel room, ostensibly to discuss Mrs. Hunter, Basil communicates with her by facing the mirror: "He stooped a bit, so that his reflection could stare back at her. Without turning, he gave her a look of what she suspected was --commiseration?" (TEOTS, 279) The conversation flounders, and the two proceed to meatier issues. With Sister de Santis Basil does not have the opportunity to avail himself of a mirror, but neither does this particular nurse fare better than Manhood as a result. For a famous actor, Basil has not managed to perfect looking at those whom he addresses: "He seemed to be looking at her intently; till she realized he wasn't at all, and perhaps hadn't been from the beginning. . . . He was looking through her . . . she could only close her eyes and drink up the bitter dregs from her glass" (TEOTS, 309). The truth is, Basil searches out glimpses of himself in everyone he meets. They exist for him not as persons but as two-dimensional surfaces which will faithfully reflect back to him his favourite view. Both Basil and Dorothy stumble along with impaired vision: hers is myopic and his "had retired behind a legerdemain of technique and the dishonesties of

living" (TEOTS, 246). The Princesse suspects, "clear vision . . . is something you shed with childhood and do not regain unless death is a miracle of light; which she doubted" (TEOTS, 268-269). Her mother knows better.

Death itself teaches Elizabeth Hunter that it is indeed a "miracle of light." But she comes to believe the same long before, during her pseudo-death in the eye of the storm. At the time she cannot even contemplate the notion of her own demise: "She could not visualize it. She only positively believed in what she saw and was . . ." (TEOTS, 380). The reversal of letters between "saw" and "was" illustrates how perfectly seeing is being for Elizabeth Hunter. In fact existence is never more exquisite for Mrs. Hunter than when most tentative, as she is gripped in the eye of the cyclone:

> She was instead a being, or more likely a flaw at the centre of this jewel of light: the jewel itself, blinding and tremulous at the same time, existed, flaw and all, only by grace; for the storm was still visibly spinning and boiling at a distance, in columns of cloud, its walls hung with vaporous balconies, continually shifted and distorted. . . . All else was dissolved by this lustrous moment made visible in the eye of the storm . . . (TEOTS, 381)

This remarkable passage brings together all of those objects and entities which have been most crucial in the crafting of this fiction. Elizabeth Hunter, stripped of her various social roles, finds herself only a 'being'--that is, elemental

humanity. But where she herself has often been likened to a precious jewel, she is here outshone by one of far greater brilliance. The beauty queen turns into the "flaw" at the centre of a more splendid gem still--one so lustrous that it blinds her. About her hovers the angry storm, like some malevolent palace of doom, but without its precincts, Elizabeth Hunter basks in the tranquillity of something more nurturing, more magnificent than herself. She is literally swallowed alive by it (the sexual and alimentary associations are obvious here), and survives to be eventually spewed forth, whole yet fetus-like, into the debris that is the world. Her almost-death, then, yields renewal and rebirth.

It is 'by grace' that Mrs. Hunter has her experience at all, and it leaves her convinced that she is somehow elect--that she will once again face the eye. As indeed she does: death itself turns out to be the eye, which focuses upon her and draws her to it. "There was the question of how much time she would have before the eye must concentrate on other, greater contingencies, leaving her to chaos" (TEOTS, 492). Exerting the last of her extraordinary will, Elizabeth Hunter goes forth to meet the eye, protesting only at the end: "don't oh DON'T my dark birds of light let us rather--enfold. Till I am no longer filling the void with mock substance: myself is this endlessness" (TEOTS, 492). The passage, replete with paradox, demonstrates the dying soul's immense desire for life giving one last tug before acquiescing to the will to die.

The messengers of death are "dark" birds of "light" which do not destroy but rather enwrap their passenger. Finally, the novel-long obsession with the filling of gaps is inverted so that Elizabeth Hunter, no longer substantial, no longer taking up space, comes to be limitless.

Elizabeth Hunter's eyes, then, prove to be but chips off the greater eye which ultimately comes to claim her. Her entire being stands exposed in those eyes which sparkle and crackle like jewels, fire and ice. Her stares pierce rather than bend; she always sees clearly, even when blind--unlike her children who cast oblique glances at others and never manage to perceive much. Her eyes remain orifices as consuming and as devouring as her mouth, which brings vision into close thematic proximity to eating.

B) Food For Thought

The Eye of the Storm spends a good deal of time and space detailing the individual eating habits of its characters. The narrative lingers lovingly over the culinary creations of Lotte Lippmann, parodies dinner parties such as the one Dorothy attends at Cherry Cheeseman's and contrasts these with the grisly, gristly tale of meat pies and frizzled lamb chops --Australian specialties the Hunter children rediscover at Macrorys'. Food defines character: those who come to the feast, such as Elizabeth Hunter, Flora Manhood and Basil are contrasted to those who decline, such as Arnold and Lal

Wyburd, Lotte and Dorothy. Interest in food becomes the gauge of involvement in life: those who participate are the questers while those who do not possess shallow vision. At least as much literal devouring goes on as metaphorical munching; that is, food, in both its real (fictively speaking) and its metaphorical manifestations appears to a variety of ends in the novel. Food nourishes and thus bears much of the responsibility for prolonging life. But eating is also an undeniably pleasant activity which, when shared with others, promotes social interaction. Metaphorically speaking, eating bears close resemblance to love-making, and provides a graphic basis for exploring both sexual and familial relationships. This figurative consumption, also rampant in The Eye of the Storm, becomes a kind of cannibalism at which female characters like Elizabeth Hunter and Flora Manhood seem insidiously adept. It seems to me no accident that A Fringe of Leaves follows this novel, with its central episode of cannibalism/communion/communication. Eating, then, outlined with fervent gusto throughout the novel, serves not only to delineate characters but also to expose the power politics between them.

Among those who masticate their way through The Eye of the Storm, few are more appreciative than Mrs. Hunter and her trio of nurses. All relish the gourmet creations of that arch-feeder Mrs. Lotte Lippmann, who explains her devotion to the kitchen thus: "'So now I cook. That too is an art--a

creative one, I tell myself--though I should be doing it in some huddle of Jews--all together mortifying ourselves and remembering the smoke from the incinerators of Germany'" (TEOTS, 76). Dishing up delicacies for an adoring audience becomes her way of expiating the fact that she survived the ovens which killed her family. Having escaped their consuming fire, Lotte now uses ovens to creative and life-affirming ends: she even rejects Jewish dietary laws to do so. She does not, however, appear to taste of her own concoctions. She claims: "'I enjoy myself to feed other people'" (TEOTS, 134), but, as she later adds, it is not so simple as that. About Flora she confesses "she would have liked to start at once stuffing this pretty young thing with food, because it was the only way in which she could express her belief" (TEOTS, 291). Lotte so identifies with her role as cook that, once that comes to an end with the death of her employer, she extinguishes her own life.

Flora Manhood proves one of the less inhibited consumers of chef Lippmann's fare. Pictured "scoffing the scrambled eggs, slithery with too much butter, in their cornets of smoked ham," she greedily eyes the next course: "'Ohh! Yummy yummy!' Flora Manhood squealed, her eye on the Torte. 'You've given away the milshig-fleishig today, Lottie!'" (TEOTS, 75) Flora, much like her patient Elizabeth Hunter in her unabashed desire to taste of everything possible, rejects food only twice during the novel: when she breaks with boyfriend Col

Pardoe and his inevitable mutton chop, and when she believes herself pregnant (hence already full, in a sense) by Basil Hunter. Otherwise Flora appears perfectly at home in her young woman's flesh. Sister Badgery, on the other hand, indulges yet protests continuously the richness of Lotte's delicacies, proving herself hypocritical: "Surprisingly, Sister Badgery had an appetite, though in manoeuvring the food past her lips her fork implied disparagement . . . What she could not disguise was a stomach like a small melon under the starched uniform . . . " (TEOTS, 75). The narrator has little sympathy for one who betrays her very obvious appetite. Finally Mary de Santis, although never actually depicted at table, reveals a past defined largely by particular kinds of food: "Most excellent are the soudzoukákia of Anastasia de Santis--Papa would pretend to gobble, to emphasize this excellence, though Greek food is fodder beside the subtleties of Bologna, Torino, not forgetting little Parma" (TEOTS, 142). She vividly recalls defying her mother's order not to pick her father's basil plant and then crushing it so completely that its scent anaesthetizes her: this action synaesthetically conjures up her beloved father's presence for Mary. It is as close as she ever comes--except for her disastrous encounter with Basil in the flesh--to shedding her naturally ascetic nature. Still, the book ends with the good Sister turned provider: she feeds the birds in Elizabeth Hunter's garden, spilling "an excess of seed" (TEOTS, 544) she would not

otherwise spare as a woman.

Elizabeth Hunter's two children seem more piranha-like than any of those clustered about her. Dorothy and Basil exhibit far different eating habits, yet both are basically as voracious as they accuse their mother of being. "Do-rô-ti" (TEOTS, 53)--delightfully denunciatory in French--proves herself inadequate to the task of facing the lamb chop she orders when first she arrives in Australia. Not only does she never enjoy her own food, she resents others who seem to delight in theirs. Hence her unfortunate meal at Cheesemans' (where she is offered the parson's nose in deference to her rank as visiting royalty) and her sergeant-major routine at her mother's house. Determined to put a stop to her mother's nurses feasting on the premises, Dorothy lowers herself to the role of domestic bloodhound, rooting amongst the coffee grounds and cabbage stalks and stirring up quite a stench as she does so, all in order to justify her suspicions that her mother is being sucked dry. And find evidence she does: "as much as two whole kilos of good filet de boeuf on the point of putrefying . . . As things were, the princess stood a moment by the bin to taste the flavour of an ironic outrage which was also her own triumph, while the wrist of the hand holding the parasol twitched to her thoughtfulness, and as it twitched, the beef fillet revolved limply, a silent klaxon attached to the ferrule" (TEOTS, 206). This absurd woman, a titled yet impoverished one, indulges not and doesn't permit anyone else

to, except grudgingly. Her idea of a delightful meal is "an oeuf à la coque on a tray, and bread and butter as thin as only nuns know how" (TEOTS, 259). Only twice does Dorothy attempt to cook, once an omelet for Edvard Pehl (which he rejects, with the result that she rejects the fish her mother prepares for Pehl in turn) and later an authentic Australian breakfast of refried chops and cabbage for her brother Basil. Dorothy, despite her obvious greed for the funds which will restore some of her faded dignity, is neither nurturer nor partaker.

If his sister is an impoverished soul, Basil is also one, although in a vastly different way. He, like Dorothy, privately confesses to the same kind of desire to be taken care of. For Basil this fantasy involves regressing to infancy: "He would have liked to flop down, feel the tape closing round his neck, the clean, soft, white bib settling below his chin, then a detached hand feeding him slowly but firmly with spoonfuls of sweetened bread and milk" (TEOTS, 114). Basil attributes many of his inadequacies to the fact that his mother never breastfed him, a crime to which he returns in his dreams to accuse her of. When he is not bemoaning this loss of nurture, however, Basil proves himself capable of tucking in with the best: "enjoying vegetable status in the city to which he no longer belonged" (TEOTS, 246), he strolls about, eating "a pound of cooked prawns . . . he was illustrious and foreign enough to make a pig of himself

in public" (TEOTS, 245). Unlike Dorothy, Basil recognizes that he hungers for more than his inheritance, although he is at a loss to guess what: "For substance perhaps, for permanence" (TEOTS, 227). Thus their trip to Kudjeri, and the meat pie episode along the way. As if recapturing his boyhood were as easy as gobbling a gristly pie, Basil does so with abandon, but is left with only "A sombreness . . . in the depths of his stomach. He converted a belch into flatulent silence" (TEOTS, 421). Basil, while seldom squeamish about filling his belly, never quite manages to appease the hunger which gnaws at him. Neither food nor woman allows him a glimpse of what he seeks.

Basil comes by his lust for food honestly. Elizabeth Hunter, even in her invalid state, still smacks her lips over Lotte's delicacies. "'Feed the spirit'" (TEOTS, 154), remains her motto. For substantial, wholesome food nourishes the soul as well as the body: according to Mrs. Hunter "(souls have an anus they are never allowed to forget it)" (TEOTS, 176). And so her lips continue to bulge out and suck up whatever life offers: " . . . the neck worked; the lips reached out, and supped uglily at the water. The lips suggested some lower form of life, a sea creature perhaps, extracting more than water from water" (TEOTS, 23). Less graceful than when in her prime, Mrs. Hunter still extracts the essence from everything she encounters, as she once vowed to do: "I shan't feel happy till I've tasted everything there is to taste and I don't

intend to refuse what is unpleasant--that is experience of another kind" (TEOTS, 327). She adores eating right until the end of her life: "she loved food; if she could have remembered what she had eaten she would have spent more time thinking about it as she lay and waited" (TEOTS, 81). So Elizabeth Hunter the arch-devourer passes through life indulging her taste for food; only near the end does she manage to turn her hobby into a less selfish pastime, for her gluttony provides Lotte the arch-feeder with a reason for living.

Mrs. Hunter fails early in life as provider and nurturer. Well into middle age, her son resents the fact that his mother never breastfed him, and even that indomitable matron recalls the fact with some guilt: "poor little Basil sucking first at one unresponsive teat then the other the breasts which will not fill in spite of the nauseating raw beef and celery sandwiches prescribed" (TEOTS, 380). Only twice does she rise to preparing food for others: once for her poor dying Alfred when she offers him--as if in atonement--a perfect, golden pear he can no longer enjoy and second when she cooks a fish for Edvard Pehl and, incidentally, for Dorothy. Her presentation of the fish is superb, as her daughter does not fail to notice: "she had grilled it, and laid it on a bed of wild fennel, and strewn round the border of a fairly common, chipped dish a confetti of native flowers" (TEOTS, 358). But neither mother nor daughter fully enjoys the feast, and this latter soon finds herself wondering about who or what the

object of the repast really is. The fact that Elizabeth Hunter has never performed any act not calculated for effect leaves Dorothy no choice but to abandon her own plans for Pehl and relinquish him as prey for her mother.

The quarry, however, comes to seem of little significance as Elizabeth Hunter enters on the central experience of her life. Just prior to the advent of the storm, the socialite pauses to commune with nature: "'And taste!' She did actually taste a chip from the tree, and might have dropped this transmuted wafer as quickly as she could . . . " (TEOTS, 375). No less sacramental than Voss's grub of a wafer was in that earlier novel, Mrs. Hunter's prepares her for further redemption: " . . . she licked the back of her hand, sucking up her own salt together with what she liked to think the axeman's sweat, and went sweltering or weeping through the glare off sand and ocean" (TEOTS, 376). Fully shriven, she enters the eye of the storm, and her own propensity to consume vanishes as she is herself absorbed in the greater hole/whole.

Anthropophagy proves to play as great a thematic role in this novel as it does in A Fringe of Leaves. The three central characters in particular--namely Mrs. Hunter, Dorothy and Basil--are discovered throughout the work in various cannibalistic postures, both in their sexual as well as in their familial relationships. Elizabeth Hunter is shown time and again preparing to devour either children or husband or current lover: Alfred "she could have eaten . . . at times,

from gratitude" (TEOTS, 33). Arnold Wyburd proves just as delectable during their one indiscretion: "At his climax, she took his head with her hands, and tried to press into his mouth the admiration with which she was running over" (TEOTS, 37). Even brutish Athol Shreve seems irresistible: "she only took quick bites, at the cratered skin, the heavy hands, concentrated eyes, and hair so thick and stiff you knew how it felt without having to touch" (TEOTS, 86). Their encounter proves quite an orgy; afterwards Athol "[seems] inclined to return to picking at a meal he thought he had finished" (TEOTS, 91), which metaphor recurs later on when Basil and Floradora begin their affair.

The unlikely romance between these two floundering souls is described almost entirely in alimentary terms. Sir Basil the gullible nibbles his way through the liaison, and Sister Manhood submits, garnishing herself carefully in anticipation of their repast. From the succulent beginning, Basil can barely speak for "eating his way along her shoulder" (TEOTS, 282), and for "trying . . . to drink her eyes" (TEOTS, 284). His wandering thoughts prove as hungry as his impulses: he first recalls those lines from de Montherlant's The Master of Santiago, where Alvaro commands "'Drink and let me drink of you!'" and Mariana responds: "'I am drinking and being drunk of, and I know that all is well'" (TEOTS, 287). This metaphorical quaffing is followed swiftly by more love-making, then by Basil's reminiscence of his mother's voice: "I was

never a natural mother--I couldn't feed. But that--you see, darling--hasn't deprived you of--of nourishment" (TEOTS, 288). He repeatedly turns to his Flora Nightingale for that missed suckling relationship.

> So that, from being at first only her patient, he became her baby. He could have been wanting that. He did in fact nuzzle at those breasts overflowing with kindness and--and 'nourishment,' unlike the reluctant official tit recoiling from his importunity.
>
> As he sucked, and made all the sounds of gratified fulfilment. . . . (TEOTS, 290)

From this unsavoury entanglement, [Wo]Manhood emerges victorious. Basil reveals himself a feeble old man: "he had let out a short fart, his buttocks quivering and hesitating, before he came; she had felt the elderly lips tasting her eyelids, bunting at her breasts" (TEOTS, 296). He also reveals a juvenile, regressive streak when next he encounters Flora: "To make it sound less like a meal, he added, 'I even felt we cared a little for each other'" (TEOTS, 390). Their courtship has brought about a complete role reversal: Flora plays mother to the old man, even while hoping for a child from their union. The incest motif is strong and culminates later in Dorothy and Basil's alliance.

The Flora-Basil affair illustrates the extent to which sexual relations are all-consuming--the ultimate in the desire to possess. Woman swallows man during the sex act, hence

man's distrust of her as potential castrator. The fruit of such union is also a swallowed being, and its birth represents a kind of evacuation. But from the moment of this spewing forth man tries to fight his way back into the womb--hence the irony of the encounter between Basil and Flora. For he tries to make his way back into the wrong womb, and Flora rejects his big baby routine. Later she even ends up rejecting his baby. Flora has rivalled the mother for the son because her younger womb remains the fruitful one. But even nurturing Manhood eventually refuses to suckle the wronged child. By the end of the novel, lusty Flora comes to appreciate the extreme irony of all heterosexual love: inasmuch as the female devours the male, she has also to deal with "that great red angry club, enslaving and enslaved" (TEOTS, 81). Even her brief homosexual encounter with cousin Snow proves frighteningly rapacious--in love gourmandise seems to be the rule.

Familial relations are as consuming as sexual encounters. Early in the novel, an exchange between Sister de Santis and Lotte Lippmann sets the tone for much of what follows when first Mary says "'Families can eat you,'" followed swiftly by Lotte's resigned "'Something will always consume: if not the family, then it's the incinerators'" (TEOTS, 22). Later Flora, musing on her employer's power over her, thinks: "She'd sucked the living daylights out of all the people she'd killed: that husband for instance; or half-killed: Princess

Dorothy you could see at a first glance had almost been swallowed" (TEOTS, 98). Even the grande dame herself admits to an appetite for more than just food or drink.

> She was greedy, always had been, though they hadn't guessed when she was younger because she had been so careful of her figure. Instead they accused her of devouring people. Well, you couldn't help it if they practically stuck their heads in your jaws. Though actually you had no taste, or no sustained appetite, for human flesh. There was this other devouring desire for some relationship too rarefied to be probable. (TEOTS, 83)

Elizabeth Hunter, cyclone-like, draws people into her orbit in her search for the something more. Only near the very end of her long life does she acknowledge herself somewhat replete: "'I've experienced enough. Brumby Island alone would have satisfied anyone less--voracious'" (TEOTS, 387). Meanwhile, her children carry on the quest for fulfilment and find it, temporarily, in each other. In Basil Dorothy "thought she saw the husband she had failed to devour" (TEOTS, 237). Later she joins him in a nauseating meat pie, tucking in "with a guilty voluptuousness as though biting into her own flesh" (TEOTS, 420). Which of course she does. Basil too recognizes the necessarily masochistic element in love: "Perhaps the grater instinctively loves the cheese. Wives don't love: they swallow you. And most mistresses are in it for calculated reasons" (TEOTS, 471). Despite their misgivings, Basil and Dorothy end up comforting each other in their parents' bed,

thus bringing full circle the devouring begun therein.

C) The Body Betrayed

The legacy left by The Vivisector is evident in The Eye of the Storm: beauty lies uncomfortably close to corruption and is in fact inseparable from it. As in the preceding novel, garbage, the unsightly and the unseemly play a considerable role. This is mainly evident in the graphic descriptions of Elizabeth Hunter's declining physical state, although it is also present in some rather grotesque looks at Australian society. Acceptance is all: the ugly cannot be shunned any more than can the lovely.

In Elizabeth Hunter White creates a woman whose once sterling beauty is now only legendary. Still she possesses the power to command, leaving the many who knew her when to recall her exquisite elegance and those who care for her now to only guess at it. We never see the former Mrs. Hunter directly; the only glimpses we get of her concern her jewels or her dress, never her face or her hair. We can only assume because of her memories of her effect on other people that she was indeed a charmer. No such faith is required in our picture of the aged paragon: she comes to us in all her wrinkles and sags. Variously described as an old creature or a giant baby, she is reduced to "a desiccated carcase, blotched with brown, streaked with yellow, scarred by knives: the body from which they had sprung to force their purposes on

life" (TEOTS, 20). This repulsive woman insists at times upon making herself even more bizarre-looking; Sister Manhood the make-up artist skilfully transforms her client into a variety of personae, including the Lilac Fairy, which is the disguise in which Elizabeth Hunter chooses to greet Basil. The metamorphoses from beauty to decay to the ridiculous emphasize the tentative nature of life in general and of the body in particular. Each stage represents only "one of the many envelopes of flesh" (TEOTS, 27) she will wear during her lifetime. The notion of body as something to be peeled away, onion-skin-like, time after time, is a staple of White's fiction from The Aunt's Story on. Hence "this almost chrysalis" (TEOTS, 11) prepares to give up her latest cocoon on her flight towards a new stage of being.

The less savoury aspects of caring for a chronically ill patient receive the greater emphasis in order to contrast with the incredible beauty of the soul about to leave its last terrestrial home. Although a "bundle of creaking bones and acerbated flesh," (TEOTS, 106), Mrs. Hunter is also "a soul about to leave the body it had worn, and already able to emancipate itself so completely from human emotions, it became at times as redemptive as water, as clear as morning light" (TEOTS, 13). This mind/body, spirit/flesh dichotomy pervades every aspect of the novel: no matter how separate they seem at times they are also inextricably joined, if not symbiotically related. Spirit sanctifies the flesh just as body fouls the

mind: " . . . remember any stench is sanctity the odour of each time a panful I lie again if I'm lucky in the arms of my DEAR LORD . . . sin won't come out in the bedpan like what the walls call shit I like Kleenex best Sister it's softer . . . " (TEOTS, 178). However imperative the needs of the body, they still rank secondary to those of the spirit; following a not uncommon accident during her reunion with Dorothy Elizabeth Hunter muses privately: "better disgraced by the body than by the mind" (TEOTS, 48). And so, on a par with myriad details about farts and bed-wettings and dribbles during meals come evocations of a woman's still-indomitable, irresistible spirit. The one detracts nothing from the other.

In the tradition of The Vivisector, The Eye of the Storm contains two memorable garbage scenes. Each of Mrs. Hunter's children figures in one: the first involves finicky Dorothy's escapade amongst the rubbish bins in her mother's kitchen, where she revels in the stench and putrefaction she discovers, and the second occurs near the end of Basil's luncheon with hopeful Mary de Santis at a seaside restaurant. The scene is brilliantly laid out, if not delightfully wicked. The camera moves first over the disordered remains of their seafood lunch, picking up "crumpled napkins, lipstuck glasses, the skeletons and shells of fish" (TEOTS, 316). Basil, already disgusted with his part in what is turning out to be a botched seduction, calls up his best performance in order to draw attention away from the debris of the meal and to direct it

towards the sea. Miscued, his glittering oration is delivered to grotesquely ironic effect:

> Now he was sucking on his words, audibly, though he would have liked to think it was one of the businessmen at work on a lobster claw behind him. The sun had gone in besides, behind a drift of dirty cloud. And once your vision is withdrawn from you, there remain the lapping shallows, the littered sand, one competing with the other for the sludge to which the human spirit can sense itself rendered: an aimless bobbing of corks which have served their purpose, and scum, and condoms, and rotting fruit, and rusted tins, and excrement.
>
> 'Yes, isn't it glorious?' murmured Sister de Santis from memory. (TEOTS, 316-317)

The exquisitely awful scene continues with the appearance of "something black drenched swollen and obscene rolling slightly in imitation of life" (TEOTS, 317) upon the sand in front of them. Basil turns hysterical in his denunciation of the atrocity--not of the animal's tragic death (only the good Sister notices the wire eating into the dog's neck), but of the fact that it has chosen this unfortunate moment to wash ashore--and splutters on about filth and barbarism. In the meantime we, like de Santis, not only see but also smell the poor dead creature, and remain haunted ever afterwards by "the gelatinous sockets where the dog's eyes had been" (TEOTS, 317). Basil stands condemned for his own over-acting and shallowness; it seems no accident that he plays host to the novel's most indicting scene. Fair meets foul to unsettling

effect throughout The Eye of the Storm in order that they be taken as two parts of one whole. Mary de Santis learns this lesson from Elizabeth Hunter; following her demise Mary deliberately seeks out another difficult, desperate case to which she can devote herself.

4.

Objects

The concentration upon body as both subject and object means that other objects come in for less attention than in earlier novels. Still, Elizabeth Hunter's house and furnishings on Moreton Drive, as well as birds, flowers and jewels, demonstrate White's continued reverence for the object itself. They offer tempting glimpses of another, more perfect life inside this one.

Her house on Moreton Drive remains Elizabeth Hunter's work of art. It is her personal landscape, a museum of what her life has been. Atmosphere and environment are what she strives to create out of the myriad of objects inside: "She was not interested in possessions for the sake of possessions, but could not resist beautiful and often expensive objects. . . . Her argument was: if I can't take your breath away, if I can't awaken you from the stupor of your ugly houses, I've failed" (TEOTS, 32).[11] However, others consider it "an ugly, ostentatious one . . . furniture choked even the landings and passages: presses and consoles and cabinets which could not be crammed into the rooms" (TEOTS, 17). Dorothy and Basil both recoil on seeing their mother's ungainly house again because it brings to mind recollections of less-than-perfect childhood. They do not see past the memories to the object

itself, where "Doubts seldom arose at night, because love and usage will invest the most material house with numinous forms and purposes, from amongst which an initiate's thoughts will soar like multi-coloured invocations" (TEOTS, 18). If others residing in the house find it strange, threatening even, and if the Hunter children refuse to spend a single night in it, opting instead for the anonymity of hotel rooms, the house still knows its mistress. For instance Lotte needs no one to inform her of the death of Mrs. Hunter: as she says when they come to tell her, "'The whole house already knows'" (TEOTS, 502).

Furnishings in this overcrowded mansion appear as precocious as always. Mostly it is Sister de Santis who encounters them: a door into the pantry, for instance, "sighed like a human being; it might have felt like one too, if she had allowed herself to think so" (TEOTS, 21). The use of the conditional tense, endemic to White's style, implies the preponderance of possibilities. There is always so much potential for the might-have-beens. As the night nurse, Mary roams the house during its more mysterious hours, exploring and observing. "In a wire safe she found the basin of fat Mrs. Hunter knew about: the green fur sprouting from the skin. There was a knot in the kitchen table polished by her own hand as she sat at night eating sausages and left-over scraps of potato" (TEOTS, 156). This is in accordance with her admitted belief in common objects: "If you depend on something to any

extent, you might as well learn to respect it; so she never kicked the furniture or threw the crockery about" (TEOTS, 154). Instead Mary gets nudged by the leather arms of chairs, hugged by the chairs themselves and clutched at by the iron spikes of the banister. Even the furniture recognizes an ally. No wonder she is given charge of the house following its owner's death until it comes to auction.

Jewels play a large part in the private furnishings of Mrs. Hunter. Their lustre outshines even her, and so she comes to revere them. Even as a dying woman she still requests that she be decked out in all their glory: " . . . if life were present, it was the life generated by jewels with which the rigid claws were loaded" (TEOTS, 44). Others come to worship at the altar of this made-up, bewigged, bejewelled, still-enthralling old idol: "The old girl was lolling there, her smouldering fingers scarcely part of her, and on that thumb a nest of plaited gold surrounding what might have been a cross, but out of plumb; the whole effect was thoroughly heathen" (TEOTS, 43). It is their pristine beauty which Elizabeth Hunter appreciates in diamonds and emeralds; they complement her own only slightly more fragile loveliness. She also admires their stunning ability to glitter despite whatever flaws lie hidden in their depths. She once half-remarks, half-queries: "'An emerald isn't less beautiful, is it? for the flaw in it?'" (TEOTS, 203), thereby setting the stage for her own forthcoming role as flaw at the centre of

the jewel of light which is the storm on Brumby Island. The flaw is in both cases a necessary, inseparable part of the gem.

If jewels epitomize light, clarity and perfection, they can also be seen as cold, hard and comfortless. Dorothy Hunter muses on her mother's similarly double-edged impact:

> To have loved her in the prime of her beauty, as many had, was like loving, or 'admiring' rather, a jewelled scabbard in which a sword was hidden: which would clatter out under the influence of some peculiar frenzy, to slash off your ears . . . And yet we continued to offer ourselves, if reluctantly. As they still do, it appears: to this ancient scabbard, from which the jewels have loosened and scattered, the blind sockets filled instead with verdigris, itself a vengeful semi-jewellery, the sword still sharp in spite of age and use. (TEOTS, 68)

The metaphor is cuttingly apt for Elizabeth Hunter, as she herself is only too well aware. She spends much time ruminating over the flaws in the centre of her own light and wondering why it was given her to experience the eye of the storm--the novel's central jewel.

We encounter few of Mrs. Hunter's jewels during the course of the action. Still, it comes as some surprise when, near the novel's end, the Princesse de Lascabanes declares that her mother's jewels "were bizarre rather than beautiful" (TEOTS, 522). She appears reluctant to take them, as Arnold Wyburd suggests she do. Towards the end of her life, Elizabeth

Hunter bestows a few of her lesser gems on some of those close to her. Guilt prompts her to remember Lal Wyburd with a necklace which manages to bring out all the sallow, freckled features of that poor woman's skin. To Flora Manhood she insists on giving a pink star sapphire in honour of the nurse's non-existent engagement to long-suffering beau Col Pardoe. Flora, meanwhile, bitterly scorns what she takes to be her employer's scheming attempt to buy her and the grandchild Flora is convinced she is carrying. The most disreputable motives are attributed to the old lady--just when she is at her most honest. Finally, it is exquisitely, fittingly ironic that trusted lawyer Arnold Wyburd steals one ring--a blue star sapphire--from his client's cache of jewellery. Ironic because of all her gems, Elizabeth Hunter claims to care least for the star sapphires: "'too much like lollies,'" (TEOTS, 295), she confides to Flora. So, gloating over his painfully glowing treasure in the solitude of his home library, and knowing that it must continue to blaze away in secrecy, Mr. Wyburd thrills in his dishonesty. The blue of the stone reminds him of her eyes, and the star at its centre symbolizes for him her luminous qualities. Elizabeth Hunter could hardly have endowed it more appropriately had she tried.

Not surprisingly, Elizabeth Hunter lusts after other exotic objects capable of reflecting great beauty back to her. Roses and swans--thoroughly luxurious objects both--flourish throughout The Eye of the Storm. Mrs. Hunter confesses at one

point: "'I was drawn to the more spectacular flowers'" (TEOTS, 173) and so, to her dying day, roses are heaped upon her by admirers and adherents. Nurse Mary de Santis becomes the keeper of her lady's rose garden, and in fact succumbs to their extravagance herself. One memorable scene finds Mary in the garden at dusk, about to snip a tribute of roses for her mistress. Her inhibitions suddenly depart and Mary, like Theodora, Amy and Laura before her, responds drunkenly to the glorious flowers about her.

> Encouraged by the rites of innocent sensuality in which she was invited to take part, she tore off a leaf, sucked it, finally bit it to reach the juicy acerbity inside . . . she began to snatch like a hungry goat. Dew sprinkling around her in showers. Thorns gashing. . . . When she stooped to cut into the stems, more than the perfume, the pointed buds themselves could have been shooting up her greedy nostrils, while blown heads, colliding with her flanks, crumbled away, to lie on the neutral earth in clots of cream, splashes of crimson, gentle heart-shaped rose rose. (TEOTS, 189)

Mary's simple chore turns into an obsession, a vice, a "trance of roses" (TEOTS, 189), before she finally gathers them into a jug and presents them, resplendent, brilliant and aromatic, to Herself. It comes all the more as a blow, then, when such perfection is so undermined: "the roses sparkled drowsed brooded leaped flaunting their earthbound flesh in an honourably failed attempt to convey the ultimate" (TEOTS, 191).

At least one critic--namely, Patricia Morley--has latched on to this final phrase and used it to sum up her own response to the novel. Perhaps White has dropped it in amongst the blossoms in order to provide a clue to his own aesthetic dilemma. For what does this fiction grapple with throughout its lengthy run but the ultimates: life, love and death? These concepts--broad, slippery ones all--define the parameters of our experience: beyond them we can scarcely travel. And so while we look earthwards, it is on those symbols of perfection such as gems, flowers and birds that our eyes light. If even a rose, in all its transitory perfection, fails to convey the ultimate, how much less can the novelist, sculpting a vision by means of clumsy, inadequate language, hope for from his mighty, meagre efforts? And so White creates in this novel a flawed heroine who still reaches out to grasp the ultimate on every occasion, be it a rose, an emerald or a swan. By some unexplained grace it is given her to experience the ultimate of which human beings are capable, short of death: the eye of the storm. The eye focuses upon her, chaos enwraps her and she experiences pure meaninglessness in the great meaningfulness. Nothing before or after comes close to those moments when, suspended between life and death, she sheds her most useless selves to offer bread to the proud, hissing swans riding the stormy waves.

Swans figure mainly in the cyclone scene on Brumby Island, although Elizabeth Hunter in her mind's ramblings

frequently replays her encounter with them. So enthralled by the exotic bird is she that one indispensable item of furnishing--her commode--is fashioned in the shape thereof. The item was formerly used by Alfred during his fatal illness, Elizabeth recalls how he would polish the arms--shaped like swans' heads--as he clung to the seat. Much has been made of the fact that Mrs. Hunter dies on the throne, as it were, but what more appropriate location could be conceived? The commode transports her, Leda-like, to the farthest horizon even as dark birds of light enfold her. These black birds are the same she first encounters during the storm.

> Interspersed between the marbled pyramids of waves, thousands of seabirds were at rest; or the birds would rise, and dive, or peacefully scrabble at the surface for food . . . She was on her knees in the shallows offering handfuls of the sodden loaf the sea had left for her. When they had floated within reach, the wild swans outstretched their necks. Expressing neither contempt nor fear, they snapped up the bread from her hands . . . (TEOTS, 381)

This woman who has never nourished anyone humbly offers food as if in expiation of her admitted failings. Fitting, then, that the swans, her self-appointed confessors, return to carry her off--consume her, even--at the end.

The Eye of the Storm charts Elizabeth Hunter's eventual emancipation of her central buried self. For each person contains many selves and many layers thereof; the various

lives, though--as we learned in The Tree of Man--always add up to the number one, a unity, a totality. The whole, on the other hand, is made up of many: unity is enriched by fragmentation and multiplicity. Mrs. Hunter's nighttime ramblings come to this very conclusion over and over: "Only de Santis realized that the splinters of a mind make a whole piece . . . know yourself to be a detail of the greater splintering" (TEOTS, 85). And a little later: "We are never the one they think; we are not one, but many" (TEOTS, 95). It is left to the oracular Mitty Jacka to reiterate the novel's central wisdom: "'A man develops only one of his several potential lives. There's no reason why he shouldn't live them all--or at least act them out, if he can liberate himself'" (TEOTS, 224). Her notion of the "unplayed-I" corresponds directly to Elizabeth Hunter's more intuitive grasping after many sorts of experience. Still, discarding the superficial selves in order to get to the kernel-hard core that matters is hard work. Except for Elizabeth Hunter, that is: she passively accepts what others--like Voss and Hurtle Duffield--strive for endlessly.

Just as many of the characters munch and crunch their way through The Eye of the Storm, so do we as readers. We remain the ultimate partakers of the text--faithful communicants to the novel's host. But the narrator's obsession with the physical--with aspects of beauty, aging, the decline into death, ingestion, digestion, evacuation and with the role the

senses play in all these stages--serves to highlight the highly non-physical nature of what they seek. If gluttons they be, they also--even the unregenerate ones like Dorothy and Basil--aspire to the something greater they suspect lingers just beyond their envelope of flesh. Elizabeth Hunter, the only one who knows of the something more for a certainty, still gobbles and glugs her way through old age, only occasionally recalling the moment of utter stillness and rest she experienced in the eye of the storm. Still, she determines to walk out to meet the moment when it returns for her. The decrepit body provides her vehicle to death. Body proves the ultimate object in White's repertoire, containing as it does so many selves and fragments thereof. It is only through body that we come to the soul, only through the literary text that we come to meaning. 'Feed the spirit,' as the old lady herself is fond of saying.

Notes

[1] Beatson, p. 105.

[2] Peter Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye: Patrick White's The Eye of the Storm," Southerly, Vol. 34, No. 1 (March 1974), 226.

[3] Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye," p. 220.

[4] Beatson, "The Skiapod and the Eye," p. 227.

[5] Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala, p. 108.

[6] Tindall, pp. 18-19.

[7] Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala, p. 107.

[8] See two articles on this subject: Don Anderson's "A Severed Leg: Anthropophagy and Communion in Patrick White's Fiction," Southerly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1980), 399-417 and my own "Food For Thought in Patrick White's Fiction," World Literature Written in English, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Autumn 1983), 197-212.

[9] Peter Brooks, Reading For the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 52.

[10] Brooks, p. 61.

[11] It seems to me Elizabeth Hunter's credo summarizes White's artistic purpose: he aspires to, and often succeeds in, taking our breath away with passages of virtuoso writing which reveal the still life of things.

VI

Conclusion

> But I am this black, bubbling pool. I am also this leaf rustling in the early light on the upper terrace of our garden. In the eyes of God, the Eye, or whatever supernatural power, I am probably pretty average crap, which will in time help fertilise the earth.
> --Flaws in the Glass

Our age lacks magic--not wizardry or sorcery so much as a taste for the numinous. Surrounded as we are by a superabundance of things of every conceivable origin and usage, we experience little but their surfeit. Technology assures us we have only more practical, efficient things to look forward to, yet as they accumulate around us, they lose individuality and potency. Still, we remain precariously dependent upon things, using and discarding them according to a utilitarian code which discourages the intrusion of the aesthetic or personal. The times have banished glamour and radiance from the ranks of simple, humble, workaday objects. Quantity is to be desired; things have become the measure of man.

Admittedly, there is little to excite us in the shape or design of a useful, common item like a disposable pen, say. Less messy, more reliable and not as bulky as its forebear the fountain pen, the plastic ballpoint represents the height of efficiency. No more ink-stained fingers or unsightly blots upon the page: the basic transparent bic goes so far as to let its owner know when its own usefulness is about to expire. Why, then, despite its obvious superiority over the nib pen, do we still return to the latter, using it not for everyday writing, perhaps, but for leisurely jottings or personal correspondence? There is something about being a part of what one uses, and the plastic plume denies us such fun. This is no nostalgic hankering after times past but rather a desire to

rediscover the relation of user to used. So intent are we on labour-saving devices that, having won the leisure we desire, we have lost the facility to connect. All adrift, we flounder in a sea of alien things.

But back to the hastily discarded ballpoint. Perhaps we were premature in relegating it to the ranks of the unworthy after all. For if we take the time to examine the utensil, we will notice that it is unexpectedly not entirely like the one next to it. Although mass-produced, each disposable has a story of its own to tell, as evidenced by the smudge here or the scratch there on the clear plastic exterior. The point is that these less-than-noticeable, or even noteworthy, items which crowd our lives do exhibit signs of individuality. If we do not notice such manifestations of uncommonness amongst ordinary things, we miss an entire world within this harried, eminently pragmatic one. Of course, one could go quite mad exploring every thing for its possibilities, but one can still embark on a voyage of discovery for some things.

Why should we, with so many obviously important things to accomplish, lavish time and energy on the banal? Because we constantly need to rediscover and reinvent reality--otherwise we stagnate. Life contains many layers, of which the mundane is not least. Yet we live in an age where we ignore what we do not see and sentimentalize what does manage to intrude upon our senses. Moreover, we the ultimate egoists have the habit of wanting to see everything in our own image.

Consider that each individual thing leads its own life, in the sense that it possesses properties which make it unique. Consider further that each thing is also inhabited by an equal and opposite self--that is, the non-thing. This evidence of things unseen brings us round to the nebulous realm of magic, where the natural brilliance and resplendence of ordinary objects blazes forth. Things are more than what they seem; they are riddles, conundrums, clues to another sort of reality. We miss rich, unplumbed depths of possibility by not knowing what goes on in those things with which we surround ourselves. Attention must be paid--to echo the twentieth century cry--to both the persons and things crowding our landscape.

Patrick White is one explorer who sees the large in the small. This is not to imply that he is an adamant disciple of domesticity; rather, White chooses common objects in order to say uncommon things about man and his relation to himself, to others and to God. White searches out and relocates the extraordinary within the ordinary: for him, everyday objects harbour mystery all their own. Once plucked from the stream of daily activity and brought under the sharp gaze of the novelist, they shed their ordinariness and become alien: surprising and obvious all at once. Knowing one thing well is tantamount to knowing the secret of all matter; less demanding and less complex than characters, objects provide vital clues to the realm of the impersonal.

White's is a discourse of intimacy, of interiority, where one's personal space includes a community of things. Roses, trees, cabbages, dogs, swans, jewels, chairs and tables are not only spotlit in all their individuality, but they also serve to illuminate those characters who notice or use them. Hence certain objects or qualities thereof become associated with particular characters: for example, Theodora Goodman with the red-eyed hawk, Amy Parker with her cabbages, Arthur Brown with his dogs, Elizabeth Hunter with her collection of gems. Not that White assigns things to particular characters, or even to certain novels: objects are apportioned to various characters throughout his works. The significant thing is that White pauses, chooses, and recreates objects which would otherwise escape our notice.

One result of this applied phenomenology is renewed vigour of language. White's style is dense and its impact highly emotional. His way of drawing on incongruous images and bizarre combinations of words and sounds, his use of the conditional tense and his ungrammaticality all contribute to refreshing, demanding reading. His is a rejuvenated language which attempts to narrow the gap between word and thing, subject and object. If I never think of a cabbage in the same slumbering way again, it is thanks to <u>The Tree of Man</u>. White proves that objects are as vibrant as words: they both pulse with life and meaning. But neither is ever entirely penetrable, nor should they be: as Zulfikar Ghose puts it,

"The knowledge that we cannot know is exhilarating."[1] Mystery is a desirable state.

White employs objects not so much for their symbolic value as for their weighty presence as things. That is, they exist as individual elements with all due autonomy and integrity. Occasionally objects such as the mandala carry mostly symbolic weight: the mandala is historically symbolic, although it also appears in certain very real manifestations, such as in Arthur's glass marbles. All objects are capable of symbolic intent to a certain degree; it is to White's credit that he presents, particularly in novels like The Tree of Man, objects somewhat relieved of their literary responsibility. A cow, a piece of wood or a flower can exist merely as themselves. This is not to suggest Tree lacks symbolic content entirely: universal symbols like flood, fire, drought and the seasons evoke a variety of abstract notions. At times, objects like the rose do double duty: White presents us with a particular thorny bloom only to expand it later into a sign of love or beauty. He tends to be wary of too much symbolizing because objects presented as symbols frequently descend to the clichéd. Kept alive as themselves, things are inordinately expressive in exciting, challenging ways.

White comes to this realization slowly. Objects in his first two published novels, like the cyclamen in Happy Valley or the staked dog in The Living and the Dead, suffer from symbolic excess. But The Aunt's Story shows an artist going

through a process of discovery to emerge with a new mode of imagery, a sort of realistic symbolism. Along the way, White rediscovers unfamiliar kinds of imagery such as kinaesthesia and synaesthesia. When Julia Fallon's hands round to the shape of a bowl, when Theodora Goodman sheds her clothes to float in a stream in order to know what a stick feels like, or when Arthur Brown dances his own personal mandala, they are all through muscular effort attempting to participate in the still life of objects. When Dorothy and Basil Hunter's indulgence in meat pies dredges up memories from their youth, or when Amy Parker looks at her cabbages and recalls past mornings, all are making connections between sense-impressions and associated mental images, namely memories. The works from The Aunt's Story to A Fringe of Leaves reveal a remarkable progress of imagery in White's development as a writer. However, later novels such as The Twyborn Affair and Memoirs of Many in One show decreasing concern for objects themselves and more interest in multiple, fragmented identities.

Along the way, White has left us a catalogue of remarkable, unforgettable objects. There is the recalcitrant pen Mary Hare struggles with at the beginning of Riders in the Chariot: "All was hat, and a hand extended from it, having trouble with a pen. The pen appeared to be resisting" (RITC, 11). There are the innumerable tables and chairs that even minor characters such as Willie Pringle in Voss appreciate: "So he would look at the heartbreaking beauty and simplicity

of a common table or kitchen chair, and realize that in some most important sense their entities would continue to elude him unless he could escape from the prison of his own skull" (V, 64). Then there are those almost invisible things which Ellen Roxburgh in A Fringe of Leaves points out to us: "If she opened her eyes, nothing was so insignificant that it failed to amaze. She would stare at the whorl in a worn floor-board, the necklace of wax on an extinct candle, a pool of light lying thick and yellow as the egg-yolk of earlier . . . " [my emphasis] (AFOL, 313). White makes obvious to us the life of the chandelier in Vivisector, of the feathered fan in Riders, of the shawl in Fringe of Leaves, of jewels in Eye of the Storm, of bowls of mutton fat, umbrellas, tools, houses, and rocks. Of the special qualities of vegetation like trees and roses, of animals like hawks, goats and dogs, and of words.

White concentrates upon objects in order to make us more sensitive to and observant of the life around us, to enrich us even if that life takes us no farther than our own back yard. He offers not an alternative reality, but this same one we 'know,' only enhanced and deepened. He attempts to expose and to alter our mostly passive attitude to our surroundings. To this end, White introduces opposing characters like Mary Hare and the Misses Flack and Jolley: the former enjoys a visceral response to things and the latter two a merely superficial one. In the end, the sensual, emotional and instinctive triumph over the merely acquisitive, even if that triumph

cannot be measured in worldly terms. In each of White's novelistic worlds, less is more; those characters who strip down in order to experience life at a more elementary level (Theodora Goodman, the Parkers, Voss, Mary Hare, Himmelfarb, Arthur Brown, Hurtle Duffield, Elizabeth Hunter, Ellen Roxburgh and Eddie Twyborn as jackeroo) lead not more settled existences but rather more creative ones. And White's exploration of their creativity is essential to our humanity.

I chose to explore The Tree of Man, The Solid Mandala and The Eye of the Storm at some length, not only because they represent early, middle and later White respectively, but also because it is possible to see in them the outlines of certain common objects such as tree, house and body. Not that tree or river are the only long, linear things which come to mind when I read The Tree of Man, but it seems to me that their shape and what they are as objects inspire not only the structure but also the content and style of that particular novel. If house and body can be seen as structural analogues for Mandala and Eye of the Storm, they also inform the style and thematic concerns of each of those works. Reading the novels in terms of those objects is my way of figuring what White is about novelistically. It is but one approach to understanding White's complex literary method; what is left is to come to terms with why White does what he does. What is he trying to show us, and why should we listen? How do we reconcile his striving for totality of vision with his obvious conviction

that life is and should be discontinuous, fragmented and ruled by dichotomies?

How should we read Patrick White's novels? With attention to detail and nuance, allowing his objects and images to stimulate our visceral, as well as our intellectual faculties. More important, why should we read White's books? Because he recognizes that by shaping the things of the world anew he can reshape the way we connect with them. What White deplores and desires to change is our dedication to surface; his novels he offers up as antidotes to this apathy. Of the future he writes: "[Manoly] and I won't breed another generation unless those who read and understand my books. I believe that books <u>could</u> breed future generations in spite of the pressures on Australian children to choose illiteracy and mindlessness, or if home-bred totalitarians and foreign invaders do not destroy our tentative Australian literature" (<u>FITG</u>, 201-202). Reading White's works enlarges and enriches the space we inhabit.

Patrick White has set himself the unenviable task of saying the unsayable. He constantly presses against the limitations of language in order to deliver the extralinguistic, in order to open up the enclosed novelistic form. As Italo Calvino has written, "The struggle of literature is in fact a struggle to escape from the confines of language; it stretches out from the utmost limits of what can be said."[2] White's creation of new literary worlds of

characters and things through language represents nothing less than a triumph of vision over form.

Notes

[1] Ghose, The Fiction of Reality, p. 26.

[2] Italo Calvino, "Readers, Writers and Literary Machines," The New York Times Book Review, September 7, 1986, p. 30.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

White, Patrick. "After Alep." In Bugle Blast: An Anthology from the Services. Third Series. Eds. Jack Aistrop and Reginald Moore. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1945.

----------. The Aunt's Story. 1948; rpt. New York: Avon, 1975.

----------. Big Toys. Sydney: Currency, 1978.

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

----------. The Cockatoos. 1974; rpt. London: Penguin, 1983.

----------. "Cocotte." Horizon. 1 (1940), pp. 364-6.

----------. Collected Plays. Vol. 1. Sydney: Currency, 1984.

----------. The Eye of the Storm. 1973; rpt. New York: Avon, 1975.

----------. "Fête Galante." Meanjin. Vol. 36, No. 1 (May 1977), 3-24.

----------. Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait. New York: Viking, 1982.

----------. Four Plays. New York: Viking, 1966.

----------. A Fringe of Leaves. 1976; rpt. New York: Avon, 1978.

----------. Happy Valley. London: George G. Harrap, 1939.

----------. The Living and the Dead. 1941; rpt. London: Penguin, 1983.

----------., ed. Memoirs of Many in One. By Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray. Toronto: Irwin, 1986.

----------. Netherwood. Sydney: Currency, 1983.

----------. The Night The Prowler. Victoria: Penguin, 1978.

----------. The Ploughman and Other Poems. Sydney: Beacon, 1935.

----------. "The Prodigal Son." In Australian Letters. Vol. 1, No. 3 (1958), 37-40.

----------. Riders in the Chariot. 1961; rpt. New York: Avon, 1975.

----------. Signal Driver: A Morality Play for the Times. Sydney: Currency, 1983.

----------. The Solid Mandala. 1966; rpt. New York: Avon, 1975.

----------. The Tree of Man. 1955; rpt. London: Penguin, 1983.

----------. The Twyborn Affair. New York: Viking, 1980.

----------. The Vivisector. 1970; rpt. Middlesex: Penguin, 1973.

----------. Voss. 1957; rpt. London: Penguin, 1981.

Secondary Sources

Akerholt, May-Brit. "Story into Play: The Two Versions of Patrick White's 'A Cheery Soul.'" Southerly. Vol. 40, No. 4 (1980), 460-472.

Alexander, John C. "Australian Image: (3) Vision in Depth." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 21, No. 3 (1962), 328-335.

Anderson, Don. "A Severed Leg: Anthropophagy and Communion in Patrick White's Fiction." Southerly. Vol. 40, No. 4 (1980), 399-417.

Anderson, D. and S. Knight, eds. Cunning Exiles: Studies of Modern Prose Writers. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974.

Argyle, Barry. Patrick White. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1967.

Astley, Thea. Three Australian Writers: Essays on Bruce Dawe, Barbara Baynton and Patrick White. Monograph 5. The Townsville Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, 1979.

Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Trans. Willard Trask. New York: Doubleday, 1957.

Aurousseau, Marcel. "Odi Profanum Vulgus: Patrick White's Riders in the Chariot." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 21, No. 1 (1962), 29-31.

Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1969.

Baker, Robert S. "Romantic Onanism in Patrick White's The Vivisector." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 203-225.

Barbour, Judith. "Cheery Souls and Lost Souls: The Outsiders in Patrick White's Plays." Southerly. Vol. 42, No. 2 (1982), 137-148.

----------. "Privileged, Authentic, Transcendent, Arcane: Limits of Naturalism in Some Contemporary Australian Plays." Southerly. Vol. 37, No. 1 (1977), 77-92.

Barnard, Marjorie. "The Four Novels of Patrick White." Meanjin. Vol. 15, No. 2 (Winter 1956), 156-170.

----------. "Seedtime and Voss." Meanjin. Vol. 17, No. 1 (Autumn 1958), 94-100.

----------. "Theodora Again." Southerly. Vol. 20, No. 1 (1959), 51-55.

Barnes, John. "New Tracks to Travel: The Stories of White, Porter and Cowan." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 25, No. 2 (1966), 154-170.

Barthes, Roland. Image - Music - Text. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1979.

----------. Mythologies. Trans. Annette Lavers. London: Granada, 1981.

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

----------. "The Skiapod and the Eye: Patrick White's The Eye of the Storm." Southerly. Vol. 34, No. 1 (March 1974), 219-232.

----------. "The Three Stages: Mysticism in Patrick White's

Voss." Southerly. Vol. 30, No. 2 (1970), 111-121.

Berg, Mari-Ann. Aspects of Time, Ageing and Old Age in the Novels of Patrick White, 1939-1979. Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1983.

Beston, John B. "Alienation and Humanization, Damnation and Salvation in Voss." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 30, No. 2 (June 1971), 208-216.

----------. "The Making of the Artist in Patrick White." Commonwealth Novel in English. Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1982), 86-93.

Bibliography of Patrick White. Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1966.

Björksten, Ingmar. Patrick White: A General Introduction. Trans. Stanley Gerson. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976.

Bliss, Carolyn Jane. Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure. London: Macmillan, 1986.

Bloom, Harold, et.al. Deconstruction and Criticism. New York: Seabury, 1979.

Bradbrook, M.C. Literature in Action: Studies in Continental and Commonwealth Society. London: Chatto and Windus, 1972.

Bradley, F.H. Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay. rev. 2nd ed. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1908.

Brady, Veronica. A Crucible of Prophets: Australians and the Question of God. Sydney: Australian and New Zealand Studies in Theology and Religion, 1981.

----------. "A Fringe of Leaves: Civilization by the Skin of Our Own Teeth." Southerly. Vol. 37, No. 2 (1977), 123-140.

----------. "Glabrous Shaman or Centennial Park's Very Own Saint? Patrick White's Apocalypse." Westerly. Vol. 31, No. 3 (September 1986), 71-78.

----------. "In My End Is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of Voss." Southerly. Vol. 35, No. 1 (1975), 16-32.

----------. "Patrick White and the Question of Woman." In Who is She? Ed. Shirley Walker. St. Lucia: University

of Queensland Press, 1983.

----------. "The Artist and the Savage God: Patrick White's The Vivisector." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 33, No. 2 (June 1974), 136-145.

----------. "The Eye of the Storm." Westerly. No. 4 (December 1973), pp. 60-70.

----------. "The Novelist and the New World: Patrick White's Voss." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 169-185.

----------. "Why Myth Matters." Westerly. No. 2 (June 1973), pp. 59-63.

Bray, J.J. "The Ham Funeral." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 21, No. 1 (1962), 32-34.

Breton, André. Surrealism and Painting. Trans. Simon Watson Taylor. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

----------. What is Surrealism? Selected Writings. Ed. and Intro. Franklin Rosemont. New York: Monad, 1978.

Brissenden, R.F. Patrick White. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1966.

----------. "Patrick White." Meanjin. Vol. 18, No. 4 (1959), 410-425.

----------. "The Plays of Patrick White." In On Native Grounds: Australian Writing From Meanjin Quarterly. Ed. C.B. Christesen. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1968.

Brooks, Peter. Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Buber, Martin. I and Thou. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.

Buckley, Vincent. "Towards an Australian Literature." Meanjin. Vol. 18, No. 1 (1959), 59-68.

Burrows, J.F. "Stan Parker's Tree of Man." Southerly. Vol. 29 No. 4 (1969), 257-279.

Cantrell, Leon, ed. Bards, Bohemians, and Bookmen: Essays in Australian Literature. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976.

----------. "Fiction Chronicle." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 30, No. 1 (March 1971), 125-139.

Chapman, Edgar L. "The Mandala Design of Patrick White's Riders in the Chariot." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 186-202.

Clancy, Patricia. "The Actor's Dilemma: Patrick White and Henry de Montherlant." Meanjin Quarterly. No. 33 (Spring 1974), pp. 298-302.

Coe, Richard N. "The Artist and the Grocer: Patrick White's The Vivisector." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 29, No. 4 (1970), 526-529.

Colmer, John, ed. Approaches to the Novel. Adelaide: Rigby,1966.

----------. Patrick White. London: Methuen, 1984.

----------. Patrick White's Riders in the Chariot. Victoria: Edward Arnold (Australia), 1978.

The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Modern Library of the World's Best Books.

Core, George. "Poetically the Most Accurate Man Alive." The Virginia Quarterly Review. Vol. 53, No. 4 (Autumn 1977), 766-772.

Docker, John. Australian Cultural Elites: Intellectual Traditions in Sydney and Melbourne. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974.

----------. "Patrick White and Romanticism: The Vivisector." Southerly. Vol. 33, No. 1 (1973), 44-61.

Dutton, Geoffrey. Patrick White. Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1962.

----------, ed. The Literature of Australia. Victoria: Penguin 1976.

Dutton, Geoffrey and Max Harris, eds. The Vital Decade. Melbourne: Sun Books, 1968.

Dyce, J.R. Patrick White as Playwright. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1974.

Eco, Umberto. The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979.

----------. The Name of the Rose. Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Edelson, Phyllis Fahrie. "The Hatching Process: The Female's Struggle for Identity in Four Novels by Patrick White." World Literature Written in English. Vol. 25, No. 2 (Autumn 1985), 229-240.

Edgecombe, R.S. "No Gift for Words: The Role of Miss Hare in Patrick White's Riders in the Chariot." World Literature Written in English. Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring 1985), 52-66.

Erlich, Victor. Russian Formalism: History - Doctrine. 3rd ed. The Hague: Mouton, 1969.

Evans, Patrick. "Alienation and the Imagery of Death: The Novels of Janet Frame." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 32, No. 3 (September 1973), 294-303.

Foucault, Michel. This is Not a Pipe. Trans. and Ed. James Harkness. Illus. and Letters René Magritte. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Frye, Northrop. The Great Code: The Bible and Literature. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.

Ghose, Zulfikar. The Fiction of Reality. London: Macmillan, 1983.

----------. "The One Comprehensive Vision." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 260-279.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.

Gordimer, Nadine. Burger's Daughter. New York: Penguin, 1890.

Gras, Vernon W., ed. European Literary Theory and Practice: From Existential Phenomenology to Structuralism. New York: Dell, 1973.

Green, Dorothy. "Queen Lear or Cleopatra Rediviva? Patrick White's The Eye of the Storm." Meanjin Quarterly. No. 32 (December 1973), pp. 395-405.

----------. The Music of Love: Critical Essays on Literature and Life. Australia: Penguin, 1984.

Hadgraft, Cecil. "The Theme of Revelation in Patrick White's

Novels." Southerly. Vol. 37, No. 1 (1977), 34-46.

Hansson, Karin. The Warped Universe: A Study of Imagery and Structure in Seven Novels by Patrick White. Diss. Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1984.

Hardwick, Elizabeth, intro. A Susan Sontag Reader. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982.

Harris, Wilson. Fossil and Psyche. Austin: The University of Texas, 1974.

Hassall, Anthony J. "Patrick White's The Cockatoos." Southerly. Vol. 35, No. 1 (1975), 3-13.

Healy, J.J. Literature and the Aborigine in Australia 1770-1975. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978.

Heltay, Hilary. "The Novels of Patrick White." Southerly. Vol. 33, No. 2 (1973), 92-104.

----------. "Patrick White in German." Southerly. Vol. 33, No. 4 (1973), 421-427.

Hergenhan, Laurie. Unnatural Lives: Studies in Australian Fiction About the Convicts, From James Tucker to Patrick White. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983.

Herring, Thelma and G.A. Wilkes. "A Conversation with Patrick White." Southerly. Vol. 33, No. 2 (1973), 132-143.

Herring, Thelma. "Patrick White's The Vivisector." Southerly. Vol. 31 (1971), 3-16.

----------. "The Solid Mandala: Two Notes." Southerly. Vol. 28, No. 3 (1968), 216-222.

Heseltine, Harry. Acquainted With the Night: Studies in Classic Australian Fiction. Monograph 4. The Townsville Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, 1979.

Heseltine, H.P. "Fiction Chronicle." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 20, No. 4 (1961), 474-477.

----------. Review of The Burnt Ones. Southerly. Vol. 25, No. 1 (1965), 69-71.

----------. Review of The Living and the Dead. Southerly. Vol. 23, No. 3 (1963), 211-213.

----------. "Patrick White's Style." Quadrant. Vol. 7, No. 3

(Winter 1963), 61-74.

Heydon, J.D. "Patrick White." The Oxford Review. No. 1 (1966), pp. 33-46.

Hoban, Russell. Riddley Walker. London: Pan, 1983.

Howarth, R.G. "The Imago." Southerly. Vol. 11, No. 4 (1950), 209-210.

Husserl, Edmund. The Idea of Phenomenology. Trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian. Intro. George Nakhnikian. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964.

Johnson, Manly. "A Fringe of Leaves: White's Genethlicon." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 226-239.

----------. "Patrick White: The Eye of the Language." World Literature Written in English. Vol. 15 (1976), 339-358.

Johnston, Grahame, ed. Australian Literary Criticism. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1962.

Jung, Carl G., ed. and intro. Man and His Symbols. New York: Dell, 1983.

Jurak, Mirko, ed. Australian Papers: Yugoslavia, Europe and Australia. Ljubljana: Edvard Kardelj University, 1983.

Kiernan, Brian. Images of Society and Nature: Seven Essays on Australian Novels. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1971.

----------. Patrick White. London: Macmillan, 1980.

----------. "Treble Exposure: Patrick White's Self-Portrait." Southerly. Vol. 42, No. 2 (1982), 165-173.

Klee, Paul. "Creative Credo." In Paul Klee: Watercolors. Drawings. Writings. New York: Harry Abrams, 1969.

Knox-Shaw, Peter H. "'The Country of the Mind': Exploration as Metaphor in Voss." Commonwealth Novel in English. Vol. 1, No. 2 (July 1982), 202-225.

Kramer, Leonie. "A Visit to White's Sacred Sites." Quadrant. No. 226, Vol. 30, No. 9 (September 1986), 66-67.

----------. "Patrick White: 'The Unplayed I.'" Quadrant. No. 87, Vol. 18, No. 1 (January/February 1974), 65-68.

----------, ed. The Oxford History of Australian Literature. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1981.

Kruse, Axel. "Puzzles and Word-Games: Patrick White's Night on Bald Mountain." Southerly. Vol. 35 (1975), 403-417.

Laing, R.D. The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness. London: Penguin, 1975.

Lawson, Alan. "Meaning and Experience: A Review-Essay on Some Recurrent Problems in Patrick White Criticism." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 280-295.

----------. Patrick White. Australian Bibliographies. Gen. Ed. Grahame Johnston. Melbourne: OUP, 1974.

----------. "Unmerciful Dingoes? The Critical Reception of Patrick White." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 32, No. 4 (December 1973), 379-392.

----------. "White for White's Sake: Studies of Patrick White's Novels." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 32, No. 3 (September 1973), 343-349.

Lindsay, Jack. "The Alienated Australian Intellectual." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 22, No. 1 (1963), 48-59.

----------. "The Stories of Patrick White." Meanjin Quarterly. No. 99, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1964), 372-376.

Loder, Elizabeth. "The Ham Funeral: Its Place in the Development of Patrick White." Southerly. Vol. 23, No. 2 (1963), 78-91.

McCulloch, A.M. A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983.

McDougall, Robert L. Australia Felix: Joseph Furphy and Patrick White. Commonwealth Literary Fund Lecture. Canberra: Australian National UP, 1966.

MacKenzie, Manfred. "Apocalypse in Patrick White's The Tree of Man." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 25, No. 4 (1966), 405-416.

----------. "'Dark Birds of Light': The Eye of the Storm as Swansong." Southern Review. Vol. 10 (1977), 270-284.

----------. "Tradition and Patrick White's Individual Talent." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2

(Summer 1979), 147-168.

McLachlan, Noel. "Australian Image: (4) The View From London Bridge." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 21, No. 4 (1962), 469-476.

Maack, Annagret. "Shakespearean Reference as Structural Principle in Patrick White's The Tree of Man and The Eye of the Storm." Trans. J.T. Swann. Southerly. Vol. 38, No. 2 (1978), 123-140.

Macainsh, Noel. "A Queer Unity - Patrick White's The Twyborn Affair." Southerly. Vol. 43, No. 2 (1983), 143-154.

----------. "Nihilism, Nature and A Fringe of Leaves." Quadrant. No. 188, Vol. 27, No. 4 (April 1983), 36-41.

----------. "Patrick White's Myth of the Artist: Dionysos as Vivisector." Quadrant. No. 217, Vol 29, No. 11 (November 1985), 77-81.

----------. "The Character of Voss." Quadrant. No. 177, Vol. 26, No. 5 (May 1982), 38-43.

Magritte, René. Secret Affinities: Words and Images. Rice University: Institute for the Arts, 1976.

Martin, David. "Among the Bones." Meanjin. Vol. 18, No. 1 (1959), 52-58.

Mather, Rodney. "Patrick White and Lawrence: A Contrast." The Critical Review. No. 13 (1970), pp. 34-50.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Phenomenology of Perception. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.

Mishra, Vijay. "White's Poetics: Patrick White Through Mikhail Bakhtin." SPAN. No. 18 (April 1984), pp. 54-75.

Moore, Susan. "The Quest for Wholeness in Riders in the Chariot." Southerly. Vol. 35, No. 1 (1975), 50-67.

Moore, T. Inglis. Social Patterns in Australian Literature. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971.

Morley, Patricia A. "Doppelganger's Dilemma Artist and Man: The Vivisector." Queen's Quarterly. Vol. 78 (1971), 407-420.

----------. The Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White. Montreal: McGill Queen's UP, 1972.

Myers, David. The Peacocks and the Bourgeoisie: Ironic Vision in Patrick White's Shorter Prose Fiction. Adelaide: Adelaide University Union Press, 1978.

Narasimhaiah, C.D., ed. An Introduction to Australian Literature. Mysore, India: Jacaranda, 1965.

Narasimhaiah, C.D. An Introduction to Australian Literature. Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons, 1982.

----------., ed. Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature. New Delhi: Sterling, 1978.

New, William H. Among Worlds: An Introduction to Modern Commonwealth and South African Fiction. Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1975.

----------. "The Island and the Madman: Recurrent Imagery in the Major Novelists of the Fifties." The Arizona Quarterly. Vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter 1966), 328-337.

Niven, Alastair, ed. The Commonwealth Writer Overseas: Themes of Exile and Expatriation. Liège: Revue des Langues Vivantes, 1976.

Noyes, Russell, ed. English Romantic Poetry and Prose. New York: Oxford UP, 1976.

Oliver, H.J. "Patrick White's Significant Journey." Southerly. Vol. 19, No. 1 (1958), 46-49.

----------. "The Expanding Novel." Southerly. Vol. 17, No. 3 (1956), 168-170.

Pagels, Elaine. The Gnostic Gospels. New York: Random House, 1979.

Panichas, George A., ed. The Simone Weil Reader. New York: David McKay, 1977.

Perkins, Elizabeth. "Escape With a Convict: Patrick White's A Fringe of Leaves." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 36, No. 2 (July 1977), 265-269.

Phillips, A.A. "The Solid Mandala: Patrick White's New Novel." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 15, No. 1 (1966), 31-33.

Pratt, Mary Louise. Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977.

Ramson, W.S., ed. The Australian Experience: Critical Essays

on Australian Novels. Canberra: Australian National University, 1974.

Read, Herbert, ed. Surrealism. London: Faber and Faber, 1936.

Riemer, A.P. "Eddie and the Bogomils - Some Observations on The Twyborn Affair." Southerly. Vol. 40, No. 1 (1980), 12-29.

----------. "Landscape With Figures - Images of Australia in Patrick White's Fiction." Southerly. Vol. 42, No. 1 (1982), 20-38.

----------. "The Eye of the Needle: Patrick White's Recent Novels." Southerly. No. 1 (March 1974), pp. 248-266.

Riffaterre, Michael. Semiotics of Poetry. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978.

Robinson, Marilynne. Housekeeping. Toronto: Bantam, 1984.

Roderick, Colin. "Riders in the Chariot: An Exposition." Southerly. Vol. 22, No. 2 (1962), 62-77.

Rorke, John. "Patrick White and the Critics." Southerly. Vol. 20, No. 2 (1959), 66-74.

Ross, Robert. "Patrick White's The Twyborn Affair: A Portrait of the Artist." Commonwealth Novel in English. Vol. 2, No. 2 (July 1983), 94-105.

Sandrow, Nahma. Surrealism: Theater, Arts, Ideas. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

Scheick, William J. "The Gothic Grace and Rainbow Aesthetic of Patrick White's Fiction: An Introduction." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 131-146.

Schmitt, Richard. "Phenomenology." The Encyclopedia of Philosophy. rpt. edn. 8 vols. London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1972.

Scholem, Gershom. Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. New York: Schocken, 1969.

Scholes, Robert. Semiotics and Interpretation. New Haven: Yale UP, 1982.

----------. Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction.

New Haven: Yale UP, 1974.

Semmler, Clement, ed. Twentieth Century Australian Literary Criticism. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1967.

Shepherd, R. and K. Singh, eds. Patrick White: A Critical Symposium. Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978.

Singh, Kirpal. "The Fiend of Motion: Theodora Goodman in Patrick White's The Aunt's Story." Quadrant. No. 101, Vol. 19, No. 9 (December 1975), 90-92.

Smith, Derek. "Patrick White's Poetical Motivations: Imagery and Colour in Voss." Adelaide ALS Working Papers. 1, No. 2 (1975), 68-77.

Smith, Terry. "A Portrait of the Artist in Patrick White's The Vivisector." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 31, No. 2 (June 1972), 167-177.

Spiegelberg, Herbert. Doing Phenomenology: Essays on and in Phenomenology. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975.

Stacy, R.H. Defamiliarization in Language and Literature. New York: Syracuse UP, 1977.

Steiner, George. After Babel. New York: OUP, 1976.

Stewart, Douglas. The Broad Stream: Aspects of Australian Literature. London: Angus and Robertson, 1975.

Stow, Randolph. Visitants. London: Pan, 1981.

Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. The Field of Zen: Contributions to The Middle Way, the Journal of the Buddhist Society. Ed. Christmas Humphreys. London: The Buddhist Society, 1969.

----------. An Introduction to Zen Buddhism. Foreward: C.G. Jung. 2nd Ed. London: Rider, 1957.

----------. Studies in Zen. Ed. Christmas Humphreys. New York: Dell, 1955.

Tacey, David. "The Secret of the Black Rose: Spiritual Alchemy in Patrick White's The Aunt's Story." Adelaide ALS Working Papers. 2, No. 2 (1977), 36-78.

Tasker, John. "Notes on The Ham Funeral." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 23, No. 3 (1964), 299-302.

Taylor, Andrew. "Patrick White's The Ham Funeral." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 32, No. 3 (September 1973), 270-278.

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. The Heart of Matter. Trans. René Hague. London: Collins, 1978.

----------. The Phenomenon of Man. Trans. Bernard Wall. Intro. Sir Julian Huxley. New York: Harper & Bros., 1959.

Thévenaz, Pierre. What is Phenomenology? and Other Essays. Ed. and Intro. James M. Edie. Trans. James M. Edie, Charles Courtney, Paul Brockelman. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962.

Thomson, A.K. "Patrick White's The Tree of Man." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 15, No. 1 (1966), 21-30.

Tiffin, Chris., ed. South Pacific Images. Queensland: South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 1978.

Tindall, William York. The Literary Symbol. New York: Columbia UP, 1955.

Todorov, Tzvetan, ed. French Literary Theory Today. Trans. R. Carter. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982.

Torczyner, Harry. Magritte: Ideas and Images. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977.

Wallace, Jo-Ann. "The Modern Psyche: The Female Quest in the Novels of Patrick White." M.A. Diss. York University 1979.

Walsh, William. A Manifold Voice: Studies in Commonwealth Literature. London: Chatto and Windus, 1970.

----------. "Fiction as Metaphor: The Novels of Patrick White." Sewanee Review. Vol. 82 (1974), 197-211.

----------. Patrick White's Fiction. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.

----------. Patrick White: Voss. Great Britain: Edward Arnold, 1976.

----------, ed. Readings in Commonwealth Literature. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

Weigel, John A. Patrick White. Boston: Twayne, 1983.

West, Paul. "In Defense of Purple Prose." The New York Times Book Review, 15 December 1985, pp. 1, 29, 31.

Whaley, Susan. "Food For Thought in Patrick White's Fiction." World Literature Written in English. Vol. 22, No. 2 (Autumn 1983), 197-212.

Whitman, Robert F. "The Dream Plays of Patrick White." Texas Studies in Literature and Language. Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 240-259.

Wilkes, G.A. "An Approach to Patrick White's The Solid Mandala." Southerly. Vol. 29, No. 2 (1969), 97-110.

----------. Australian Literature: A Conspectus. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970.

----------, ed. Ten Essays on Patrick White: Selected from Southerly (1964-67). Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970.

---------- and J.C. Reid. Australia and New Zealand. Ed. A.L. McLeod. University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1970.

Williams, Mark. "Countries of the Mind: Patrick White's Australia, Malcolm Lowry's Canada." World Literature Written in English. Vol. 25, No. 1 (1985), 127-137.

----------. "Remittance Bards: The Places, Tribes, and Dialects of Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry." Diss. The University of British Columbia 1983.

Wilson, Richard. "'The Splinters of a Mind Make a Whole Piece': Patrick White's The Eye of the Storm." In K.G. Hamilton, Ed. Studies in the Recent Australian Novel. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978.

Wolfe, Peter. Laden Choirs: The Fiction of Patrick White. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983.

Wood, Peter. "Moral Complexity in Patrick White's Novels." Meanjin Quarterly. Vol. 21, No. 1 (1962), 21-28.

Wright, Willard Huntington, intro. The Philosophy of Nietzsche. Transl. Thomas Common. New York: The Modern Library, 1937.