THE VISION OF ALIENATION

An analytical approach to the works of Patrick White through the first four novels

by

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This study of Patrick White's work is chiefly concerned with the first four novels, but refers also to some poetry, the short stories, the plays and the three later novels. It traces the development of themes and techniques in these four novels in terms of artistic vision and the rendering of that vision.

The early, experimental works, up to *The Living and the Dead* are treated at considerable length, chiefly to show how the later developments are basically improvements and variations on the themes and techniques which have already been used. A second reason for the length of this part of the treatment is that, in the existing criticism of White, these early works are almost entirely ignored. There is need for reappraisal (over and above the original review articles which are about all that exist), and this study makes a modest attempt at this.

The middle period, to which belong *The Aunt's Story* and *The Tree of Man* (as well as one play and some stories), is presented as the high point of maturity, both of technique and of the vision which the technique embodies. The works have a high degree of structural integration and the vision is presented with great clarity and imaginative appeal.

The later novels, *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot* and *The Solid Mandala*, continue the use of developed techniques from the middle period. There is an imaginative boldness of design in these later novels, but the themes reveal a
vision which appears to be declining into personal reverie and dream. In this period White seems to lose the ability to maintain the stance of integrity-in-isolation which he has asserted in the two preceding novels, and appears instead to seek some kind of mystic communion for his heroes.

These interpretations of the later novels are suggested, but not argued in his study; they have been argued in several published articles. In part, it is this discrepancy between the mystical or basically symbolic vision of the later novels and the un-symbolic, essentially naturalistic vision of the earlier period, which has defined the limitations of the thesis presented. At the present stage of critical interpretation, the vision of the later period appears less significant than the earlier vision. In order that we may resolve the apparent differences between the two visions, it is necessary first to define the earlier vision. This study analyses the earlier works, for that purpose. In the final chapter, a suggestion is offered as to how the later novels might be approached in a way that would show the later vision to be a consistent development of the earlier vision, through a boldly symbolic technique.

Above all, this study concentrates on White's vision of the alienated state of man, as the central pre-occupation of his earlier works. It analyses the techniques by which this vision is rendered, examining the tests of the four novels more closely than has been done in any criticism published to date.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the arts we find the record in the only form in which these things can be recorded of the experiences which have seemed worth having to the most sensitive and discriminating persons. . . . The arts, if rightly approached, supply the best data available for deciding what experiences are more valuable than others. The qualifying clause is all-important however. Happily there is no lack of glaring examples to remind us of the difficulty of approaching them rightly. (I.A.Richards)

Between 1935 and the present time, Patrick White has published seven novels, four plays, a collection of short stories, two uncollected stories and a small book of poems in a limited edition. Much of his work has been ignored by the public and superficially recognised by critics, and his books appear to have been more talked about than read or understood. His first novel, Happy Valley (1939), won a minor Australian award which probably represented a patriotic gesture rather than a tribute to artistic merit. His fourth novel, The Tree of Man (1955), became an American best seller, and prompted Australian literary society to ask: "Who is this man who has returned so quietly among us". His fifth novel, Voss (1957), won the 1959 W.H. Smith £1000 prize, and the Miles Franklin prize; it became a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, and was issued as a paperback by Penguin. In England, the second and third novels, The Living and the Dead (1941) and The Aunt's Story
(1948), have recently been reprinted, and the latter has been issued in paperback form in Australia and America. Certainly by 1958 White's fame was growing to large proportions. In that year a reviewer noted that his name had already been coupled with those of Lawrence, Faulkner, Tolstoy, Hardy, Conrad and Jane Austen, and subsequent additions to this list include Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Pasternak and others. In Australia, White has been regarded for a decade or more as the most serious and important of local novelists, by artists and critics alike. And he has been given prominence in recent anthologies and writings on Australian culture. One English critic has predicted a Nobel Prize for White and his novels have been reviewed admiringly by many well-known literati, including Edwin Muir, James Stern, Walter Allen, Ted Hughes, Anthony Alvarez and others.

Alongside the streams of eulogy there has also been a steady flow of scorn and disparagement, both in the popular press and in scholarly journals. Meanwhile White has remained silent about himself and his art, except for one brief, factual article published in 1958. Nevertheless the published testimony of some of his acquaintances suggests that he is attentive to what is said about him and is frequently annoyed by published misinterpretations of his work.

In view of the strong interest which White has aroused in the literary world, and the fame which he has won at home and abroad, the state of criticism of his work is surprisingly inadequate. Although it is over thirty years since his first publication appeared, no one has yet produced a
book-length assessment of his achievement--and this des­pite the fact that his works appear regularly on the pre­scribed reading lists of several Australian universities. Two short pamphlets in the "Writers and their Work" and "Australian Writers and their Work" series have appeared, giving plot outlines and tentative, generalised pointers to his main artistic values. Most of the numerous maga­zine articles which have come out, are also superficial and generalised in their criticism. Of the dozen or so articles which make intensive analyses within a usefully limited scope, at least half avoid the central issues and either openly purport to give esoteric interpretations or else seek to place White in significant relationship to other literary or intellectual figures and movements. A small number of theses have been written or are in progress, but only one of these has so far resulted in a valuable contribution to published discussion.

Thus we have a situation in which a novelist is widely esteemed (and sometimes denigrated), and whose name is bandied about in critical discussion; but the fundamental nature of his works as a whole has never yet been clearly defined. As a first step towards such a definition, this thesis sets out to analyse the characteristics of White's vision as it is expressed in each of the novels considered.

The necessary analysis involves separate consideration of technical and thematic elements--an artificial division in some ways, but a useful one since it enables the analysis to be given a convenient form. Likewise, the use of the term "theme", though undesirable in dealing with such a
novelist, is unavoidable; it provides a convenient name for discussing the intellectual and emotional significance of each work, and of the whole canon. White's themes are never simply didactic. His work is mainly an exposition of his vision and therefore his meaning for the individual reader is determined by his success in sharing his vision, rather than in merely intellectual persuasion or narrative excitement. Thus in using the term "theme" we must not be seduced into thinking that White is making clear-cut statements about life. He has certain pre-occupations which he is concerned to portray in the light in which he sees them, and his portrayal is often logically enigmatic or incomplete. We might expect from the title, that The Living and the Dead, for instance, offers the reader a way out from death to life, or at least a clear definition of the two states, and most reviewers have read it with these expectations. But that novel, like almost all of White's work, presents little more than a record of the consciousness of its characters, without concluding how they can change for the better. The nature of White's vision will be considered fully in relation to each of the four novels treated.

And, because in reading almost any of Patrick White's works we are struck first by their somewhat unusual, and often unique technical features, it seems best, in discussing his works, to analyse techniques before elaborating the themes. Inevitably the two aspects are interdependent, so that by the end of each technical analysis, thematic aspects to be described are already largely apparent.
One of the chief problems in criticising White's techniques in that of terminology, particularly with regard to the complex field of symbolism. To separate White's first four, from his last three novels, according to a basic naturalism/symbolism dichotomy would seem, on the face of it, to be a reasonable critical proposition; but it becomes questionable in the light of such arguments as those of Ernst Cassirer which re-define the nature of symbolism. Nevertheless, at this stage in White criticism, it is convenient to use this apparent dichotomy, in order to separate out those novels in which large symbolic forms reveal a metaphysical perspective of the artist's vision. A more immediate problem is that of finding terms for the analysis of symbolic and rhythmic patterns (and the Heseltine quotation below, p.11, illustrates this difficulty). As a working solution, we can use the terms "pattern" and "rhythm" as they have passed into current discussion from E.M.Forster's Aspects of the Novel (and E.K.Brown's elaboration of Forster--Rhythm in the Novel). And we can distinguish broadly between symbol and motif, somewhat arbitrarily, as follows.

Symbols are metaphorical images. (As Tindall says, humanly, in his approach to a definition, "If symbol is analogy, it is related to metaphor, but the account of that relationship can wait awhile. For the present it is enough to say that the symbol seems a metaphor one half of which remains unstated and indefinite." Symbols are employed by the author to represent in brief, or in
essence, something which he has created or is about to create in a larger perspective in his work. Thus, when, in *The Tree of Man*, Ray Parker breaks a sapling, his action is symbolic. The breaking is an image of his violent destructiveness, and the sapling represents not only the natural world against which his destructiveness is aimed, but also himself. He is like the sapling and he will break himself through his life of violence and crime. Thus the breaking of the sapling is a symbol of Ray's character and the main thread of his story, as it is told in the novel.

Motifs are symbols of a particular kind which are always recurrent. There is no such thing as a motif which occurs only once. They are not a means of representing in brief something which is created in a larger perspective, but a means of relating different experiences and different sections of the novels to one another. The relationships thus created can have two principal effects. First, as in the case of the breast motif in *The Living and the Dead* (which is examined below), they establish a rhythmic progression in the sequence of events, unifying the parts of the novel in a manner which creates something larger than the sum of the parts. William York Tindall's words about a Faulkner novel deal with precisely this effect in another context:

*The Sound and the Fury* must be read twice or else, though moved, we may miss the devices that move us and create unity of effect from materials that might seem loosely joined. On second reading we find part linked to part by elaborated themes of tree, mirror, water and flower—to mention only a few.13
What Tindall here calls "themes" are what I call motifs. Secondly, when the relationships set up are between impressions (of the characters or the novelist) rather than between sequences of events, the recurrence of the motif helps to establish the fundamental nature of the artist's themes. Such motifs form part of the idiom of his sensibility. Thus in The Aunt's Story, the bones motif (also discussed below), persistently focusses the reader's attention on the ontological duality which is the essential characteristic of the particular vision of life which White is trying to render. 14

Before proceeding to analysis of the works, it is worth considering briefly, some points about existing White criticism. In this way we may come to appreciate the nature of the critical problem for which this thesis is offering one solution, and we may also note some of the assistance which is available to the reader. At the present time, of all that has been written, only three short articles can be said to offer really valuable approaches to White's art, and of these, only two attempt to trace some of the pre-occupations common to all the works. This fact would be less surprising, if his works were in need of no interpretation, and if they did not bear such striking resemblances to one another, both technically and thematically, as they do. The facts as they exist suggest three significant conclusions. First, White is a difficult writer to understand and needs elucidation, but the critics are happier to praise his works than to elucidate them. Secondly,
the timid and indirect approach of present criticism is likely to disguise White's achievement by relating it to other things, rather than illuminate it by revealing its innate qualities. Thirdly, unless criticism soon comes to grips with the problem of defining White's achievement by means of analysis grounded in the text of his works, his art is in danger of being lost to the present generation to whom his artistic vision is a valuable offering.

The first of these points—that White is a difficult writer needs some elaboration. The cultural and geographic influence upon his sensibility make it difficult to place him in any distinct literary tradition. Brought up as a colonial of wealthy family, unhappily intruding upon the English Public School world, White hastened back home at the end of his schooling, aged seventeen, and spent two or three years working on farms. For the next fifteen years he was frequently on the move, subject to the influences of Cambridge, pre-war travel in Germany and other European countries as well as the United States, three years of "artsy" London life, and service in the war. He served in Palestine and Egypt, and finally, for a year, in Greece, where he almost decided to settle, "in the vaguely comic role of a Levantine beachcomber." After demobilisation however, White remained for a time in London, where his literary successes had given him the choice of staying and establishing himself in the intellectual world. But in 1946 he decided to return to Australia, and has lived there, quietly, avoiding publicity ever since. To the undoubted
influence on his sensibility of these places and events must be added those of his undergraduate study of modern languages, and his declared interest in music and the graphic arts. He admits to having always been "something of a frustrated painter and a composer manqué". Jewish mysticism and modern psychology have also taken up much of his attention, as various of his works reveal.

But if White is a complex writer, because of the unusual combination of influence to which he has been exposed, the very diversity of those influences suggests the futility of trying to understand his work primarily through one or other of them. The demarcation of influences and sources is likely to prove an interesting and valuable task for later criticism; at the present time, the essential objects of study are the works themselves.

A second source of difficulty is the boldness with which White conceives and employs his techniques. When he published his second novel in 1941, he already had behind him three novels discarded and one published, a book of poems, two published stories, and some success in writing for the stage—at the age of 29 he was a fairly experienced writer. With the confidence of this experience and (presumably) with reasonable financial independence to relieve him of the temptation to compromise his integrity by writing to sell, he was in a position to develop his increasingly personal artistic idiom, which is noticeable especially from *The Aunt's Story* onwards. In order to appreciate the effects of this idiom, there is no substitute for a close scrutiny of the individual works and the whole
canon. Criticism must offer guidance on this basis, and, with few exceptions, it has so far failed to do so.

Nevertheless, even some of the most questionable interpretations of White which do exist are valuable to present inquirers. For, in the absence of valid, central expositions, it is helpful with an original and difficult writer like White, to know at least what is the wrong way to read him, and why it is wrong. In the pool of interpretations there are several honest attempts on the part of Buckley, Brissenden, Dutton and others to argue the merits of various views. Such published arguments invite reasonable discussion, and it is partly by this means that I support ideas in this thesis. This kind of discussion is particularly useful in examining The Tree of Man—that deceptively "ordinary" book—which has received more general, critical analysis than any of the other novels.

The disputing of misinterpretations, despite its dangers, does at least provide the interested reader with a selection of different views and thus is probably a more profitable form of criticism than that of merely affirming the opinions with which one agrees. Still, it remains valuable to underline the names of critics whose opinions are felt to be valid and pertinent to the pursuit of true judgement. This is particularly true in a study of White, because it is only rather obscure critics who seem to have understood him in any depth and with accuracy. The short articles by Gzell, Heseltine and Loder (listed in the Bibliography) stand out as searching and detailed assessments, based solidly on White's texts and clearly argued
within the limits of their defined intentions. These three articles have two common features (which this thesis also purports to share): First, they insist on viewing each novel as part of a wider development which the canon represents, so that each work stands complete within itself, but acquires a much fuller meaning when seen as part of the whole. Secondly, they recognise that White is "a man obsessed with the images which constitute his sensibility" and that it is only when the reader grasps his use of the image in the symbolic and motival idiom which he creates to render his vision, that his themes can achieve the function of artistic communication. Heseltine is worth quoting on this:

From his very earliest work, there has been established in White's work a large fund of recurring interests which force their way into his prose as characters, situations, images. It is this fund of images, metaphors, verbal motifs, which is at the basis, not only of his sensibility, but of his style. White's whole career can be seen as the progressive explication of the materials of his sensibility into the patterned and evaluated elements of his mature style. In bringing the basic stimuli of his imagination more and more into the foreground of his judging mind, White has developed a rich vocabulary of feeling, emotion, and belief, an interlocking and consistent pattern of image and symbol. (62)

Critics aside, our primary concern must be, as I have said, with the text of White's novels, and the vision which they reveal. A vision of life arising in a complex and refined sensibility, and the rendering of that vision through a patterned and original artistic idiom, do not
make for easy reading. White's novels have often been called poetic, and some of T.S. Eliot's remarks are directly relevant to him:

Poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.¹⁹

To plumb White's meaning, we have to read and re-read; we have often to stop and think in order to try and appreciate a particular effect. Eventually, as we become more and more familiar with his methods and his vision, we are able to read him without interruption, and then the full force of artistic communication is achieved. There will always be some readers who are not "captured by the initial appeal of the texture" and who will therefore "resent having to hunt for the total meaning of a novel"²⁰. White's technical performance becomes, for them, an artificial and unexciting "exercise in the drawing-room"²¹. For others, the labour is decidedly worth-while, as it gives them a new and valuable way of seeing life; and the discovery of that significant vision through the closely woven patterns and rhythms of word and image is a source of surprising aesthetic pleasure. For such readers "the initial appeal of the texture" expands into a fuller satisfaction with each careful reading.

Finally, I should point out that in limiting this study
almost exclusively to the first four novels, two purposes are served—one practical and the other critical. The first is simply that of allowing enough space to each of the four novels, to be able to investigate it in sufficient depth. Significant elements of theme and technique are explicaded in detail. Often it has been desirable to dwell at great length on what might, at first sight, appear to be disproportionately slight details. Only thus have I been able to show how White achieves significant effects for a sensitive reader, through the most economical means. The critical purpose is that of stressing the relative importance of the earlier novels in the total canon. Two of these novels have had no specialised, critical attention at all, and all four tend often to be regarded as mere preludes to the massive achievement of Voss and Riders. Yet it seems to me that in these first novels White renders his vision most clearly (if complexly), and that the vision itself is more meaningful because it is not impaired by the metaphysical additions and the tendency to private bitterness which exist in varying degree in the three later books. This is not to depreciate the total value of the later novels, nor to suggest that the earlier four are White's most impressive work on all counts. For instance, Voss is the product of a much more controlled and mature technique than Happy Valley, while the range of interest in Riders is decidedly greater than that in The Aunt's Story. And the Himmelfarb section in Riders is a triumph by almost any definition of the moral function of the novel. However, in terms of significance of vision--of art as a vehicle
for the rendering of perception and sensation, rather than a tool of supernatural insight or the projection of dreams and hopes—the first four novels, especially *The Aunt's Story* and *The Tree of Man* are White's most considerable achievement. That, at least is the argument of this thesis, as far as it goes. In the brief, final chapter, I offer a new suggestion as to how the three later novels might be read as bold, new technical forms, embodying the consistent vision of the earlier period. This suggestion, however, derives little support from the diverse critiques which have so far appeared, and would require a separate thesis for its substantiation.
CHAPTER II

REGISTERING THE SICK WORLD

Here is no notion of keeping art free from middle-brow preoccupations like social reality; but an anguished concern to register a sick world and to make contact with something which might restore the springs of human goodness and vitality. (John Holloway on The Waste Land)

PART 1. HAPPY VALLEY

Throughout his novels, White is primarily concerned with man's state of alienation from the world in which he lives. In the later novels, the state of alienation is seen to consist in two conditions—ontological duality and individual isolation—and the experience of these conditions—life—is explored from several different points of view. In the first two novels, White does not see the components of alienation so clearly as he does later, and his point of view is limited to that of the highly self-conscious and articulate kind of person. He is unable to enter imaginatively into the consciousness of inarticulate or slow-witted people. As a result his treatment of the latter is somewhat confused and lacks moral realism. The characters of the two novels form a scale of the various possibilities of intellectual lucidity, of rational self-awareness; but White's sympathy is clearly with those at the upper end of the scale. His rendering of the conscious-
ness of inarticulate people is given from an external, largely satiric point of view, in which social criticism is mixed with intellectual snobbery. In the later novels, White distinguishes between intellectual dishonesty and intellectual retardation, and reserves his satire for the former, whilst the latter receives a great deal of sympathy. In *Happy Valley*, and (to a lesser extent) *The Living and the Dead*, the distinction is blurred in the general discontent with the nature of existence. This limitation of vision is the major defect of the two early novels just as the range of vision, and the clarity and force with which it is rendered are the major achievements of the two subsequent novels.

Despite their limitations of theme and technique (several of which are dealt with below), the first two novels are integral parts of the White canon. As such they have considerable value for the reader, both as separate works of art and as parts of the total *oeuvre*.

a. **HAPPY VALLEY: TECHNIQUE**

Stylistically, *Happy Valley* is a pastiche. In this novel, White reveals virtuosity in the use of a number of original and derivative methods, but he has not yet learned to resolve the various elements into an artistic unity. The formal unity which does exist is somewhat too artificial, somewhat too contrived, being simply an over-all structure imposed upon a hotch-potch of elements which are sometimes irrelevant and sometimes discordant. It is as though White did not realise the implications, for the work as a whole,
of what he has done in individual parts of it. The result is a somewhat disorganised linking together of unrelated or overplayed tours de force.

The most striking of these defects is the over-indulgence of the stream-of-consciousness technique, which has the effect of allowing various characters—especially the main one, Oliver—to be conscious of too much for the state of development which they are supposed to have reached at a given point in the novel. Two examples will illustrate this.

In the two years or so in which the action takes place, Oliver Halliday goes through a number of experiences from which he apparently manages to derive a satisfactory attitude to life. This is presented in his thoughts at the end of the book:

A flux of moving things, like experience, fused, and Alys Brown, he felt, is part of me for all time, this is not altogether lost, it is still an intimate relationship that no violence can mortify. This is the part of man, to withstand through his relationships the ebb and flow of the seasons, the sullen hostility of rock, the anaesthesia of snow, all those passions that sweep down through negligence or design to consume and desolate, for through Hilda and Alys he can withstand, he is immune from all but destruction of the inessential outer shell. (p.327)³

Now this is a perfectly intelligible conclusion inasmuch as we have followed Oliver in his search for values and his discovery of them, through his experience with Alys, in terms now presented in this final passage. We notice how the passage begins in Oliver's consciousness and ends
indirectly, as though the narrator is speaking ("... he can withstand. . . ."), and from this we recognise that Oliver has now acquired the insight which the narrator has been leading him to in the course of the story: that human relationships are man's only source of strength and comfort in the world of violence and death. But much earlier in the novel, and even before Oliver had met Alys, White presents Oliver cogitating on the nature of life and showing that he has insight already. He recognises, on p.74, that his relationship with his wife is something that must be maintained, in spite of the decay of his romantic ideals, because it brings "order out of chaos." It would be no good to "tip the whole lot overboard . . . because Hilda and Rodney and George clung to the fragments, were founded on something that you thought had existed before" (p.74). So he already knows what he is seen to discover at the end of the book.

Again, when he is at Moriarty's bedside, only a third of the way through the book, Oliver reveals implicitly that he has already discovered that man's best course is "to withstand through his relationships the ebb and flow of the seasons etc. .":

I dare say most of us are afraid . . . and most of it rises out of a feeling of being alone. Being alone is being afraid. Perhaps one day we'll all wake up to the fact that we're all alone, that we're all afraid and then it'll just be too damn silly to go on being afraid. (pp. 124-5)

This last example is not, of course, a piece of stream of consciousness; but the first example is, and it is
typical of the way in which the defect emerges. One has the feeling as one reads, that White is so absorbed in the satisfying task of capturing meaning in words, particularly when there is an absence of formal restraint, such as stream of consciousness provides, that he loses sight of his over-all plan of development. The conclusion at the end of the book is artificial because it does not arise from a progressive clarification of understanding through experience. Yet it is undeniable that White planned the book with the intention of demonstrating this artificial conclusion: The epigraph from Ghandi prepares us for "Progress . . . to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone;" Oliver, as the central character, undergoes a course of suffering and finally makes the statement quoted earlier. But because Oliver's awareness does not develop with his suffering, we feel that the conclusion belongs with the epigraph and not with the novel.

A second technical defect of the novel has to do with a way in which Oliver does develop. What happens is that White apparently is seduced by his own success in handling an essentially Lawrentian technique for describing human relationships, so that the relationships begin to acquire too positive a value for the novel White is writing. We can see this in the way the Oliver/Alys relationship develops.

When he first visits Alys, Oliver feels that social convention acts as a barrier between them, preventing communication; but as the Schumann relaxes them, and melts their formal self-consciousness, we are told, "he was looking into her, at a core that he had not noticed as she
winced in the dispensary and pitied herself." Then he asks why she changed her name:

"I think I wanted to be different . . . . That's the only reason, I suppose."

"It's a pretty honest reply."

"You don't leave many loopholes," she said.

Looking into her face had been to look into an avenue that made him feel suddenly unfulfilled and cold. (p.103)

And from this he comes to realise that he has never "touched the kernel" in his wife:

All my present tranquility is nothing to her, it cannot reach inside and touch that kernel which, incidentally I have never touched and don't know how. (p.118)

From this kindling in Oliver of a sense of "otherness" of being White continues to develop the relationship in Lawrentian terms: Oliver and Alys become lovers and explore a new dimension of human relationship. They feel that their action is moral because they know it to be real by contrast with the mock love preserved by social custom, in a marriage which has died. Then, as a contrast to their relationship, the Sidney-Hagen-Kemble triangle is presented in a manner very reminiscent of St. Mawr. Sidney, like Lawrence's Lou, is the well-to-do young lady, highly critical of the men in her world, especially of the effete Kemble (equivalent to Lawrence's Rico) who finds it very trying to ride a horse out into the bush, and whose ideal women are "creatures . . . seen through the distance of a speech-day cricket match or a May Week haze upon the Cam." (p.140) Hagen, like Phoenix, is a sort of sexual scavenger, picking up anything he can get. And, just as in Lawrence's story, Mrs. Witt was determined to marry the groom Lewis,
when he defied her, so Sidney yearns to dominate Hagen when he becomes insolent towards her. Sidney's degrading act is presented as an immoral use of sex as an instrument of power.

But in the Sidney/Kemble/Hagen set of relationships, there is no St. Mawr, so that Lawrence's positive view of sex does not intrude on White's story. In the Oliver/Alys affair it does intrude, and this is where the defect becomes apparent. Indeed, when we realise how incompatible with the over-all theme of Happy Valley is the development of Oliver as a Lawrentian hero, saved by the recognition of "otherness" in himself and Alys, we are not surprised to find that White finally brings the development to a sentimental conclusion in order to escape from it. Oliver decides that his affair with Alys was a finding of himself not to be regretted, but that it must not go on:

The world makes its demand, I shall run away from myself because of Hilda, I shall close my eyes. This is the world, this is Happy Valley. This is also not the world. I stand here and it is cool, the stars are cool, and the rain which will not stop. It is a very long time since I have really been conscious of these things, felt their significance . . . people walking with upturned faces, looking for something which they do not find in themselves, always with faces upturned. I must remain conscious of these, he said. This is the world, that ignores itself, finding its experience in cleavage and pain, the not-world that demands I shall run away from myself, that I too shall be a creature of cleavage and pain walking with my eyes closed . . . . I am being apocalyptic, or just plain romantic, he said . . . but his mind was without qualm, rested on a certainty. (pp. 165-166)
This passage contains important ideas and we shall have occasion to refer to it again. But considering the attitude which Oliver adopts towards the ideas, as indicated in the first sentence, it is sentimental slush. Oliver, after all, is a thirty-four year old doctor who, forty pages previously, was shown comforting one of the people with "upturned faces" by explaining the essential cleavage of life into the reality of loneliness and the deceptive appearance of communication and sharing of the human experience. If he really believed that he could escape the cleavage and pain by not returning to the responsibilities of a husband and father, he would not return; or at least, not so readily. But White is not Lawrence, and although he has been unable to resist letting Oliver look into the avenue in Alys' face, he finally wrenches himself back to his proper course. Alys is reduced to a safe memory in Oliver's mind. White's handling of the Lawrentian method of describing relationships has led him into an involuntary assent to Lawrence's scale of values, but he finally reneges. The book, however, suffers disunity, especially as the Lawrentian presentation has often been convincing.

These two kinds of technical defect, which we have examined, form an important contrast to the successful integration of technical and thematic elements which is more characteristic of White's work than the defects, even in these early novels. (By the third novel, his maturity is such that defects are hard to find.) The reason why it is important to make this contrast is that White has been so severely criticised on technical matters that the reader
may be forgiven for being confused by the critics as to where real values lie. If we see clearly where White has failed, we are better able to see where he has succeeded. We can now turn to note some of the more successful techniques, which appear first in this novel, and are developed in later works.

Two recent critical articles have commenced the enormously important task of unravelling some of the strands of recurrent symbolism and meaningful association which go to make up rhythmic patterns in the individual novels and the canon as a whole—for the significance attached to symbols and motifs is generally consistent throughout all the novels. Happy Valley assumes a certain importance as the novel in which many of these first appear. Undoubtedly there will be readers and critics who will insist that each of these works stands alone and that White cannot expect us to read one novel as a complement of others. They do stand alone, but the fact remains that each work does also illuminate the others. Consider for instance how the significance of Theodora's hawk in The Aunt's Story is re-inforced for the reader from the memory of the hawk in Happy Valley. Here is Theodora's hawk:

The little hawk tore and paused, tore and paused. Soon he would tear through the wool and the maggots and reach the offal in the belly of the sheep. Theodora looked at the hawk. She could not judge his act, because her eye had contracted, it was reddish gold, and her curved face cut the wind. Death, said Father, lasts for a long time. Like the bones of the sheep that would lie, and dry, and whiten, and clatter under horses. But 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. (The Aunt's Story p.33)

Later she shoots the hawk, and White makes it clear to us that this is an act of self-abnegation; She would destroy that part of her which is like the hawk—an involuntary agent in the phenomenal world of nature.

She took aim and it was like aiming at her own red eye. She could feel the blood-beat the other side of the membrane. . . . After that Theodora often thought of the little hawk she had so deliberately shot. I was wrong, she said, but I shall continue to destroy myself, right down to the last of my several lives. (pp. 73-74)

Within the one novel, the recurrence of this motif forms a single and complete rhythmic strand (which develops a variation when Theodora shoots the clay ducks to dissociate herself from the natural world (pp. 124-125). But the rhythm acquires a valuable extension from the use of the hawk, in Happy Valley, as a symbol of the cruel, unfeeling world of nature. The main appearance of the symbol is in the context of a painful still-birth:

All its life [the hawk] would probably know no pain, not like Mrs. Chalker, writhing about on the bed at Kambala. The hawk was absolved from this, absorbed as an agent into the whole of this frozen landscape, into the mountains that emanated in their silence a dull, frozen pain while remaining exempt from it. (p. 18)

The hawk symbol is only one of many such centres of expanding association and significance which first occur in Happy Valley. Future compilers will annotate White's use of such things as colours,^4 music, especially organ
music and Chopin's piano music, and even such minute particulars as a crust of flies on an eyelid.

Characterization, in spite of the defects to which we have referred is another important aspect of technique in Happy Valley. In particular, there are the various personae of the artist's troubled self, Alys, Oliver, Amy Quong, Ernest Moriarty and Sidney Furlow, who, to a greater or lesser degree, exhibit a tormented consciousness of the state of alienation. And just as, say, Hardy's Henchard becomes a more significant figure when we know Jude, or as one El Greco face is emphasised for us in certain ways when we have seen several, so Alys Brown adds a dimension to Theodora, increasing the communicative effect of White's art. Moriarty and Walter Gage (The Tree of Man) are different impressions of the weaker, less resistant illuminatus who is also Clay (of the story) and Alf Dubbo of Riders, and others.

Then there are the victims of White's (not altogether harsh) satire. These are the inarticulate people, imprisoned within themselves and half wanting to communicate, but unable to do so. In general, White is unable at this point in his development, to get behind the faces of these people (as he does in The Tree of Man for instance), so that the satire, where it is good, is the only real value in these character presentations. Often it is rather artificial, but homorous; and not without interest:

[Mr Furlow] liked to sit with Sidney, sometimes alone, to know that she was there, physically at least. They understood each other, he felt, not that he would have
admitted this to his wife, nor that he would have
been able to explain the nature of this understanding,
or even on what it was based. Mr Furlow avoided
explanation as savouring of intellectual enterprise.
But it was there, this understanding, all the same.
He looked at her over his glasses and said:
How about some kidneys pet?
It was his contribution to the relationship.
(HV p.283)

Happy Valley is then, a rather patchy novel in which
various techniques are unassimilated in the total structure.
Judged on its technical aspects alone, it is a failure, for,
as Vincent Buckley says, "it proves unable to bear the weight
of its author's preoccupations." Yet the fact that those
preoccupations do come through to us, gives the book con­
siderable thematic interest, as we shall see.

b. HAPPY VALLEY: THEME

In Happy Valley, White presents his vision of the human
condition. This presentation constitutes the theme of his
novel, and it falls into two parts: On one hand there is
the attempt simply to render life, either impersonally as
narrator, or through the subjective consciousness of the
characters. This is the descriptive or mimetic aspect of
the presentation. On the other hand there is a certain
element of prescription in which the artist asserts his con­
cept of moral values and suggests how these may be attained.
In the former aspect White is revealing his own form of
realism; in the latter aspect, his response to the realities
which he sees. We may note from the outset that the thematic
development of White's work represents his attempt to find a satisfactory response to the realities of life as he sees them. It is a progressive attempt to find a means of resisting the anguish which the consciousness of alienation produces in honest and sensitive men.

The attempt to describe the reality seen beneath the appearance in Happy Valley is carried out with a youthful bitterness. The artist takes on the mask of rebel against society and intends to shock his readers into self-awareness. Life, says White, is not the Happy Valley that it appears to the casual observer, who sees only children happily at play, and smiling married couples discussing the weather and the races. (p.224) Rather, it is a "dull frozen pain" (p.18) emanating from the cruelty of nature. Unlike the hawk which appears to be exempt from pain, man must suffer because of his human consciousness. The creator is pictured as a malevolent "God making a clockwork toy, then scratching his head and seeing that it might work too well, so he put in an extra mechanism" (p.22). This mechanism is man's intelligence which enables him, through the consciousness of possibilities and the recognition of desires, to know the agonies of frustration and boredom--to recognise that the universe is alien to him. Happy Valley is presented as an epitome of man's state: It is that peculiarly tenacious scab on the body of the known earth. You waited for it to come away leaving a patch of pinkness underneath. You waited and it did not happen, and because of this you felt there was something in its nature peculiarly perverse. What was the purpose of Happy Valley if, in spite of its lack of relevance, it clung tenaciously to a foreign tissue, waiting and waiting for what? It seemed to have no design. You could not feel it. You anticipated a moral doomsday,
but it did not come. So you went about your business, tried to find reason in this. After all, your existence in Happy Valley must be sufficient in itself. (p.115/6)

Oliver, in whose consciousness this passage appears, does at least have the dubious advantage of knowing that he is aware of his state. He is like Samuel Johnson's Rasselas, who, bored by the Happy Valley in Abyssinia, comes to realise that "man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification," but who can also, perhaps, "receive some solace from the miseries of life, from the consciousness of the delicacy with which he felt and the eloquence with which he bewailed them." It is this "delicacy" and this "eloquence" which enable Oliver to create his exquisite world of memory and imagination as a refuge from reality. He is set up as the character with the greatest degree of self-awareness in the novel and he forms a contrast to the human cabbages at the other end of the scale. Moreover, Oliver's response to his dream world develops as the plot unwinds, and this becomes the major thematic statement in the novel.

Early on we find Oliver recalling his experience of transcendent rapture as he responded to the music in a Parisian church: The organ music "came rushing out of the loft, unfurling banners of sound," and making him cry.

You could feel a stillness and a music all at once. You were at once floating and stationary, in time, all time, and space without barrier, passing with a fresher knowledge of the tangible to a point where this dissolved, became the spiritual. (p.20)

This enthralling experience is repeated more intimately for
Oliver when Alys plays the piano in her home, and he is led to think that he can triumph over his confinement in the world of "cleavage and pain," by running off with Alys into a projected fairy-land of his hopes. This apotheosis eludes him, as we shall see, and he is left finally in an attitude of stoic acceptance of his conscious anguish.

At the other end of the scale of self-awareness are the Furlows and the Belpers. These people shuffle onwards towards death, filled with boredom and emptiness. They are dimly aware of their plight as human beings, but they are unable to see the issues clearly or to consider ways and means of winning through to fulfilment. Mr Furlow "never paused to ask himself if his life was based on anything at all" (p.83). "He hadn't a mind, only a mutual understanding between a number of almost dormant instincts" (p.83-4). He found fat stock prices "inexhaustible" even after several readings (p.82). And as for thinking, "Mr Furlow never thought, he relied on a process of slow filtration and trusted to providence to give the mechanism a jog" (p.87). His wife would often respond to the challenge of each new day by writing, "not that she had anything to write, but it was soothing to cover a clean sheet of paper with words" (p.82). And her other chief method for resisting sheer physical stasis is the playing out of her role of social pretentiousness, for "mentally, Mrs Furlow always wore a tiara" (p.81).

The Belpers resist the anguish of consciousness by sealing up every idea or experience that comes their way,
in a platitude. In fact Mr Belper is "a kind of Captain Cook of platitude" (p.105). He sticks to generalities like "the future of the country," "the national physique," and "the canalization of surplus energy" (p.107). This anaesthetic mode of speech is particularly effective in disguising for the Belpers, the moral issues involved in their financial problems. When Mr Belper has to explain to Alys his failure to invest her money wisely, he rests in the balm of an empty phrase:

It's the Crisis, her husband said.
Because often in the past platitude had helped him out of a conversational hole, was something to cling onto at home or at the club, where the Crisis was answerable for much, it gave you a feeling of being not altogether to blame. (p.315)

And when he suffers from the memory of the foolish handling of his own money, his wife helps him out in the Belper manner:

That was only a flutter I expect.
Yes, agreed Mr Belper, grasping at the opportunity and closing his mind to the rest. (p. 317)

Near the end of the book, White draws a contrast between the conscious and the unconscious individual, in the persons of Alys and Mrs Belper. The latter is said to have made her life "an endless stream of narrative," and Alys realises that she has done so in order to blur the vision of reality of which she has a sort of subconscious fear.

But to furnish your life with incident was no ultimate escape, except for a Mrs Belper perhaps. She had never moved in the current of Mrs Belper's stream, a pool rather, and you looked down, aware of the reflected images, frightening sometimes, but never distorted by the slurring of a stream. It was better
like this, the truth of the undistorted images.
There is nothing to fear, she said, even in con-
templation of the depths. (p.321)

In this last thought, Alys gives expression to a major
theme of the later novels, especially The Aunt's Story.
She prefigures Theodora living in "the solitary land of
the individual experience," and preferring the integrity
of her own clear vision to the haste, confusion and self-
deception which the world calls sanity.

Just as Alys holds onto her clear vision of truth,
without fear, so all the characters in Happy Valley seek
to attain or to grasp some kind of peace. The particular
form of "peace" which each will seek, will depend on the
degrees of moral integrity and self awareness in each in-
dividual personality. Clem Hagen and Vic Moriarty, for
instance, have a little self-knowledge, but they lack the
will to use it and become, instead of morally integrated
personalities, pathetic figures of conscious self-deception--
particularly Vic. They are both weary from the boredom of
their lives and they are drawn together by a common hope
for excitement in the novelty of a lustful adultery. The
deception of Ernest then becomes a hypnotic game of chance
for Vic, and this is part of the reason why she keeps the
affair going after Hagan has become repulsive to her.
Although she is aware of the moral injury she is inflicting
on her husband--especially at a time when he is oppressed
by physical weakness and a sense of social rejection--she
simply will not assume her responsibilities against the lure
of promiscuity. Her murder, and Ernest's quasi-suicidal
death are tragic in the strictest classical sense. She
knew what she was doing and guessed what might come of it, and this degree of consciousness made her a potentially heroic saviour of her sensitive husband; but the gods had simply not equipped her with the moral courage to turn and face the challenge of reality. Like Mrs Halliday, Vic is always thinking how things will be better in the future, "when we go to the North Shore," thus avoiding her need to come to grips with the hollow terror of life in the present. Oliver sums up the situation: when he describes the Moriarty house as a house filled with "the futility and pain of wilful destruction," (p.294) and "two people trying to escape from the inevitable."

By contrast, Oliver realises that there is no escape. The realities of life include pain and endless suffering as well as a responsibility for others. No amount of running away will exempt man from these changeless conditions, as Oliver realises when, setting off with Alys, he is halted by Ernest Moriarty's body in the road. And White goes on to present, in Oliver, his positive answer of 1939, to the problem of living. By the end of the book, Oliver has developed three philosophical characteristics.

First of all, he is utterly a realist in terms of rational and courageous agnosticism. He realises that there is only one way in which man can alter the conditions of his existence: by dying. The conscious individual must either kill himself, as Ernest Moriarty has done indirectly, or else he must take a personal stand of some kind in order to endure with dignity (or at least with a measure of self-content.)
The Moriartys have tried to cut off the insuperable. They have broken themselves, he felt, and Alys and I slipping down the road, headed for what vague dream, are just as irrational perhaps. (p.278)

Because you cannot cast off the ways and customs, except in death, as Moriarty has. You substitute fortitude . . . and call it a moral victory. (p.278)

The way in which this "fortitude" is to operate comes home to him at the end, in a passage already quoted: "This is the part of man, to withstand through his relationships . . . for through Hilda and Alys he can withstand." (p.327 see p. 17 above.)

The second characteristic of Oliver's position by the end, is his acceptance of personal, moral responsibility, issuing from the fact of human interdependence. His sense of duty to his wife and children has never deserted him, even in the deepest point of his involvement with Alys. We have already seen how, earlier on, he "wanted to tip the whole lot overboard, only that was impossible, because Hilda and Rodney and George clung to the fragments, were founded on something that you thought had existed before" (p.74). And lying in bed with Alys, in the temporary peace of sexual fulfilment, he retains a lucid conscience, together with a sense of overall frustration in his life:

I ought to feel sorry, but there is no regret, which is perhaps a perversion of the moral sense, if finding yourself is a perversion, because this is what I have done . . ., but the world makes its demand, I shall run away from myself because of Hilda, I shall close my eyes. This is the world. This is Happy Valley. This is also not the world. (p. 165)
Later Oliver debates within himself the whole problem of what he calls "cleavage" in which the tension arising between the responsibilities of the individual to himself and to society threaten to drive him to despair. His answer is a compromise revealed in his act of leaving the Valley and Alys for the sake of his family responsibilities, while retaining the memory of his relationship with Alys as an active moral stimulus in his life.

This last statement brings us to the third characteristic of Oliver's position: his belief in the joy and the power to survive which the individual can derive from meaningful personal relationships. He articulates this belief in the passage at the end of the book which we have noted twice already. But he has already acted or tried to act on this belief, earlier. On page 127, for instance, he feels impelled to do for Moriarty what Alys has done for him: to break through barriers into the isolated consciousness of another person by some vital act of communication.

He must send medicine to Moriarty, though more, he wanted to give him more, he wanted to give so many people the impossible through the existing wall that somehow the human personality seems to erect. Only she played Chopin and it crumbled to non-existent brick and they looked at each other, each time for the first. (p. 127) 12

The paradox in which this theme is here stated—the value and at the same time the virtual impossibility of achieving human relationships—is a central and persistent aspect of White's vision. It may be considered more fully in relation to the later works.

The thematic content of Happy Valley is valuable in
itself, as well as forming a useful starting point for an understanding of the later, more significant developments. It is revealing to notice, however, at least one particular in which this novel already marks an advance on some work which was published earlier. I refer to the poem "When Thoughts Are Still and Formless," first published in a limited edition in 1935, and anthologised in 1946, and to the story "The Twitching Colonel," which appeared in the London Mercury in 1937. From a comparison of these works, we can see how Oliver Halliday's search for integrity of being and the partially satisfying resolution of his problem spring from a developing artistic vision.

The poem shows us the artist registering a conscious impression of the duality in the human condition—subjective and objective reality, the actual limitations of existence and the imagined possibilities, "the world," and "the not world," of Oliver's "cleavage." White begins his poem with a strange and elusive comparison:

There are days when thoughts are still and formless as the old people sitting on benches in parks: It is the description of these people that interests us here:

  Stoop-backed, whiskered, chin on hand;  
  And pale window-thoughts blinking at the glare.

In the next lines he gives a judgement on the external appearance of their lives, from the point of view of an objective observer:

  There is no reason for their being,  
  For their heaped up existence on benches in parks;  
  But immediately he detects evidence of another aspect of their lives, beneath the unattractive exterior; he recognises the individual, subjective consciousness,
incorporating perhaps dreams, hopes, memories, desires:

Yet sometimes between the slits of their eyes,
Out of a moth-ball stupor, of jet bonnets and mustiness,
Flickers the glimpse of another worlds:
The smooth drift of sunlight through the trunks of trees,
And cowslips starred with tears.

The absurd duality of man--his physical limitation _versus_ the expansiveness and freedom of his imagination, "the moth-ball stupor, of jet bonnets and mustiness," _versus_ "the smooth drift of sunlight through the trunks of trees"--is one main feature of White's persistent vision. In this poem the vision is expressed within the limitations of pure statement and an imagist technique.

In "The Twitching Colonel" we pass directly into the consciousness of one of the old men who might have been sitting there in the park. The Colonel's external appearance will be revealed as that of a deteriorating relic. ("Colonel Trevellick is breaking up, see how he sits, how the face twitches, the red and the blue, as he sits. . . .") Children follow him with ghoulish fascination, waiting for the twitch. His landlady gently dissuades him from loitering in pubs. ("With all those medals it's a shame, and you a colonel and a gentleman.") His daily routine has become an automatic, habitual monotony. But endless reminiscence of his life in India, parts of which, even Mrs Whale finds worth the hearing:

Tell me about the trick, asks Mrs Whale, and it is Saturday night and Pimlico, the pungent voice of Mrs Whale, of geraniums in pots. Tell me about that trick, the one with the rope, and what they do with those snakes, you tell it so well. (p.606)

And by now the Colonel is dependent on his memories to shut
out the sordid realities of bodily decay, and the giggling children, and the voices that "murmur with a lack of consequence or actual meaning, the parrot voices . . . the unintelligible blur of sound, of syllables confused and clinging beyond the envelope of mist" (p.605). Like Mrs Moore in Forster's *Passage to India*, he has been sensitive to the spiritual mysteries of India. Unlike the other officials who exhibit "a recoiling from that which is feared or half understood while not willing to understand but watch at a distance in mocking safety," (p.606) and unlike Maud "throwing a hawser round empirical reality and headaches and cups of tea so that she is attached to herself beyond escaping," (p.607) Colonel Trevellick is ready to give up the "certain certainties" of his milieu, in order to seek some kind of apotheosis in his experience of the Orient. In the dance of the rope and the snake he has known the "activity that discards hands, shaking off the surcharge of flesh," and, in contrast to the English "extension of a lie that is eating and drinking," (p.605) and Maud's "hawser" he has seen the Oriental mystery, "the rope ascending into space," (p.605) and heard "the cry of release achieving transformation" (p.605).

At first, his memory of these things is sufficient sustenance for the Colonel. But, in due course, he needs something more tangible than a vicarious memory:

I shall strip myself, the onion-folds of prejudice, till standing though conscious I see myself complete or else consumed like the Hindu conjurer who is translated into space. (p.606)
So, finally, he creates his own magical transformation, by setting fire to the lodging house and dancing on the roof until he ascends in the "tendril, pressing against the sky."

By this resolution of his story in suicide, White reveals a lack of maturity which we see corrected in the story of Oliver Halliday. As a serious answer to the problem, the Colonel's suicide appears rather negatively sentimental. It is too much of a dramatic contrivance and it must be seen chiefly as a rebuke to a society which drives its sensitive members to despair. In *Happy Valley* Oliver realises that death is a retreat from the problem, and the point is driven home in the shockingly unsentimental deaths of the Moriartys. Oliver too had had experiences of transcendence—in this case through music. He too thought to realise his dream—by running off with Alys. But by this time, White's realism over-rode his sentimentality, and so Oliver turns around and comes back home. It is interesting that White actually suggests this later realism in "The Twitching Colonel": We notice that the incongruous funeral pyre becomes a source of "musical" rapture for the watchers:

The pizzicato crackle of glass, the trombone undertone of wood that groans and percussion of a falling beam, so the senses sway, so the bodies sway in time, the faces held to receive a golden rain with a sighing relief. (p. 608)

But this dream-like trance is soon broken, and what the faces actually receive is the sight of their neighbour "dancing"
on the blazing roof. The story ends with sombre realism:

We go into our houses. We close our doors. The fire is exhausted. We creep away. It is something we do not understand. We are afraid.

The thematic evolution from "When Thoughts Are Still and Formless" to *Happy Valley* then, is one in which White learns how to communicate his vision through his art, as the vision itself becomes more real to the artist. In the poem he presents the idea of life as a painful duality, through statement and image. In the story, he begins to give life to the idea and the image--to embody them; but his satiric intention is too crudely thrust upon the art which consequently loses some of its power to convey artistic vision.

The vision is still mainly a set of philosophical concepts. Only with the creation of Oliver Halliday, developed with consistent realism and given added dimension by contrast and similarity with other characters in the novel, does White bring his vision to powerful artistic expression. So, for all its faults, *Happy Valley* remains a novel worthy of attention, even apart from White's other work, because of its capacity to exercise the moral imagination of the reader, through the consciousness of Oliver.
PART 2. THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

It is hardly possible to get through a first reading of *The Living and the Dead* without feeling to some extent disgruntled and weary. Almost all the reviewers in 1941 had such reactions: "Egotistically mannered," "boring," "too much thoughtfulness, not enough life," "ultra-realism," and so on. One reviewer started to psycho-analyse White ("the book is a childish attack on mother,") and another was reduced to smearing: "Sex for Three."

Since that time, no critic seems to have got to the heart of the novel. Most appear to have been deflected by the cover blurb into misinterpretations. They have looked for a thesis or at least a clear pattern in which X is an epitome of the living and Y of the dead. Thus:

Cover blurb: The chief characters are brother and sister, Elyot and Eden Standish. It is Eden who represents the living . . . . Her brother . . . never really touches the world.

Buckley: Its theme (for it is, in a wavering way, a *roman à thèse*) is the way in which emotional death is communicated from one generation to another. The dead, represented chiefly by Catherine Standish and her son Elyot, possess the earth and reduce it; yet the living, represented chiefly by Elyot's sister Eden, may inherit (and renew?) it.¹

Brissenden: . . . ultimately there seems to be no striking difference between the living who know themselves and have learned to live with the knowledge, and the dead who know nothing.²

Buckley. (substantiating an earlier version of Brissenden's above statement): The reason is clear;
the prose, so remorselessly and glitteringly intent on diagnosis, fails in fact to create the discrimination insisted on. Thus we have a novel which is not only boring in the first instance, but is also—according to the critics—thematics unsuccessful.

I shall try to show that *The Living and the Dead* is a well integrated work of art, and that it has considerable value for the reader who is willing to approach it unhurriedly, and without preconceptions as to the nature of its theme. It is a book which requires more than one reading for a fair appreciation, and this is undoubtedly a disadvantage (though it places White in some good company—James, Joyce, Woolf—). Furthermore, one or two features of characterization in this novel are certainly poor (especially the sometimes unconvincing attempts to render the mentality of Joe, cabinet-maker). But beyond the difficulties and defects lie artistic rewards, both for students of White and for readers generally. For the reader who seeks more than easy entertainment in a novel, I contend that the rewards justify the difficulties and outweigh the defects. Our present concern is to observe values, using the categories already established: techniques and themes.

**a. THE LIVING AND THE DEAD: TECHNIQUE**

The outstanding technical characteristics of *The Living and the Dead* are White's rendering of stream of consciousness and his handling of structural devices which Forster and
E.K. Brown call pattern and rhythm.  

Stream of consciousness is used more extensively and more successfully in this novel than in Happy Valley. Throughout the book, the story is told almost exclusively through the consciousness of characters, usually one of the Standishes. The impersonal narrator intrudes briefly, from time to time, but never exceeds his function of providing objective, narrative statements, as the following complete paragraphs illustrate:

His hands shook. (p.14)

Later on, it was the spring, Maynard left for the United States. A job with commercial artists that took him to New York. (p. 151)

Elyot spoke of selling the house. (p. 329)

White's failures to separate and to develop progressively the consciousness of his characters, which we noted in Happy Valley are overcome in The Living and the Dead. Each personality is carefully and consistently individualised. Eden's first appearance (apart from the initial scene) on p.63 where we are introduced from the beginning both to her emotional nature and to comparisons and contrasts between her and her mother and brother (the consciousness here is Mrs Standish's):

She was darker, smaller than the boy. Her small, intense face wrinkled often in emotional storms. You were conscious early of her watching eyes. In a moment of romantic stress, her mother decided on the name of Eden. There was no particular reason for this . . . . Mrs Standish decided on the name. Behind it perhaps a sense of her own frustration. But she never pinned this down.

At three the little boy was a solemn, sturdy child. (p.63)
Every other indication of the children's characters given in the novel is an extension and development of these faint renderings. There are no inconsistencies. Elyot remains "solemn" as he was on his first appearance five pages previously ("And the baby looked at her solemnly, sometimes too solemnly, she thought" p.58). He never has an "emotional storm". Indeed, even as he witnesses the running down of the drunk, he remains morbidly static, involved mentally but not emotionally:

I must do this, his mind shouted, tossed out into the screaming of the bus. The lights spun. The whole neighbourhood moved, except his feet. He was anchored where he stood. He was the audience to a distant pantomime. (p.14)

On the other hand, the promise of violent emotionalism in the "storms" of the infant Eden's face is increasingly realised as she develops. At the first abortionist's she suffers"a wave of nausea" from which, by contrast with Elyot's experience just noted, her mind is left static while her body surges into action involuntarily:

Now, he said, advancing. Let me see.
Now, she said, the face, this face, floated on a wave of nausea, jerked forward on the leaping nerve. . .
No, she said.
She heard her heels startling the chair.
Not--not now, she said. I didn't exactly realise. I didn't know. Perhaps a little longer, she said.
Perhaps. Perhaps. Her own feet, they went plap, plap, she heard them plap plap, after her in the passage, moving in the now static dream. She could feel his face rooted there under the electric bulb.
Then her nails were on the shut door.

This meticulous consistency of characterization is typical
of White's work from this novel onwards.

But beyond mere consistency of rendering, what gives real value to White's use of the stream of consciousness technique is the quality of its images. One might say that White has helped to bring into the modern stream-of-consciousness novel, clarity, economy and concreteness, as the Imagist poets did into modern poetry. And it is in The Living and the Dead that this feature of White's is seen most extensively, for it is in this novel that he makes the least concessions to that "primeval curiosity" of the reader which demands the perpetual "and then..." "and then..." of a story. This novel is White's most refined work, in the sense that he uses an imagistic technique to record minute impressions on a huge canvas. In later works the impressions tend to be larger and more emphatic, losing detail where they gain in appreciability.

The concreteness of White's detailed impressions in The Living and the Dead may be illustrated by contrast with the more abstract rendering which we find, at times, in Virginia Woolf:

Woolf (To the Lighthouse): She liked Charles Tansley, she thought, suddenly; she liked his laugh. She liked him for being so angry with Paul and Minta. She liked his awkwardness. There was a lot in that young man after all. And Lily, she thought, putting her napkin beside her plate, she always has some joke of her own. One need never bother about Lily. She waited. She tucked her napkin under the edge of her plate. Well, were they done now?

We notice here that Mrs Ramsay's memories are of qualities in people, which are merely named--"his laugh," "Being so
angry," "awkwardness," and so on. The concrete details concerning the napkin establish the physical reality of her existence, as opposed to non-physical consciousness, and her handling of the napkin suggests her impatience underlying her conscious thoughts; but the thoughts themselves lack imaginative appeal. They remain abstractions, whose significance does not expand. They do not suggest anything beyond their generalized conception.

Against this we can set almost any passage from the White novel:

Oh dear, sighed Eden, or the last wave of sleep, as it curved, broke, became the bus she would soon take, the early morning coughs of the business men on buses, and cold, smooth pennies in her hand. (p. 327)

And even Elyot's thoughts about his conception of Connie are given to us in image impressions:

But Connie's face persisted, altered by a sudden storm, and Connie sitting crumpled by the skirting board. Intensity of passion in Connie Tiarks surprised more than it repelled. There was no end to the unsuspected. Connie was a different person. When you had made for yourself the abstract, selfless Connie, all neatly docketed out of your own intellectual conceit. Then the pressure of the eiderdown. (p. 322)

It is not that White removes abstraction entirely from the stream of consciousness--which would be unreal--but that he constantly focusses the impressions of consciousness in clear, sensory images.

Some of the best images occur when White uses a single impression (often recurrent) to render the essence of a personality:
...Connie Tiarks. He remembered her chiefly as a creature of transit, an incident on a sofa, another under a mulberry tree. Connie Tiarks would always be this. Her hands were always on the verge of reaching for gloves. (p.142)

There was no end to the poverty of certainty in the life of Connie Tiarks, she was inevitably always reaching for her gloves. (p.143)

I am an old maid, she said. She fell asleep playing bezique with old ladies in terraces.

If only had begun to be written on Connie's lumpy face. (p. 316)

Then there is Wally Collins, described abstractly as "rootless by achievement", and presented more directly in images of rootlessness:

Wally Collins was at home in crowds, the slick and gaudy places where you lived high, round about Leicester Square and Piccadilly, the Metropole at Brighton, Broadway and 52nd, or Atlantic City. He got around. Because Wally Collins was a rootless one, an amoeba in the big green pond. His grips were always only half unpacked, the ties hanging out ... . . . (p.222)

The images which White creates with such effect in this novel are inter-related within the stream of consciousness. Even on a first reading one is aware of certain recurrent images and motifs and upon closer scrutiny the reader discovers a most intricate series of patterns. We see, for instance, aspects of Mrs Standish perpetuated separately in her two children, and this development of character is pinned down at various stages by the recurrence of such motifs as solipsism, presented through images of living in a box, or an envelope, or of the pulling of bedsheets around
one's body. There is the central White motif of the lonely, uplifted face, standing out from the sea of people. As in all the other novels responses to music serve as indices of the emotional states and the personalities of characters; and at the trivial end of the scale we find brooding, house-caged women sponging dust off potted plants (pp.21, 79) as in The Aunt's Story (p. 51). The extensive patterns and rhythms in which these and other motifs are woven, and which have such an instant and enduring aesthetic appeal when they are recognised and their manner of operation is grasped, cannot be explicated either quickly or with comprehensive coverage. We can make generalizations and consider minor examples. To do more would require volumes.

Pattern is evident in such things as the circularity of the plot in The Living and the Dead. As in Moore's Esther Waters, a paragraph in the last chapter is a word-for-word repetition of one in the first. Then too, all but one of the love affairs in The Living and the Dead follow a set pattern; physical attraction, the growth of antipathy, mutual frustration intellectually, then physically; finally disgust, decay and the death of the relationship leaving the individuals isolated, weary and with a painful sense of guilt.

As the symbols and motifs are carried over from one pattern to another so the patterns become inter-related in a progressive comparison which acquires its own artistic life and creates what Forster calls a "rhythmic effect" in the novel. We can see a clear example of this in the way White uses breasts as a symbolic index of the nature and
development of relationships in two separate love affairs, that between Elyot and Muriel, and that between Catherine and Wally.

When Elyot first sees Muriel we are told that "he found her repulsive. Her voice cut. She was reduced to voice, and the steely texture of her dress, that moved with her body, metal plated. He could see the nipples when she turned to him" (p.199). After a few drinks, "even the steeliness, the Muriel Raphael, flowed, the little patches of molten steel or quicksilver in the glass of claret" (p.200). Now he sees more than the metal-plated nipples: "The volatile mesh of steel no longer hid, you knew by heart the contour of a molten breast." Fourteen pages later, in a second meeting, he is intellectually repelled by the talk from her mouth, "the small erection of white lacquer," but the sensual attraction of her breasts persists:

A parting of the ways, only just visible in fur, gave up a scent of violets. It was the strange, ridiculous convention, Elyot felt, that your mind and eyes were able to make obvious comment on the physical fact, this was accepted, though under cover of irrelevant words. The breasts of Muriel Raphael were quite irrelevant to words. Her smile, her eyes . . . openly acknowledged this. (p.214-5)

Knowing her weapons, Muriel embroiders a scarlet nipple on the dress she wears when Elyot takes her out, thus managing to prolong a relationship which has already degenerated into mutual boredom at the intellectual level ("Food, said Elyot. . . . The unsurprised waiter was suggesting quail . . . Quail Muriel? Elyot asked. Oh yes, she said remotely."
Quail" (p.245). And although Elyot already finds "that there was no excitement in the contact of flesh," (p.246) when their hands meet, nevertheless under the drug of music, he allows the scarlet nipple to recall the original, sensual attraction of her breasts: "She had the deep voice of saxophones. She had a scarlet nipple. Oh where, oh where can my little dog be, it was still the same party. . . ." (p.247). And so to the taxi where, as the talk drifts on, "there was no visible hesitation in the rise and fall of the scarlet nipple" (p.252). Finally to bed, where he could possess the whole of Muriel with his hands" (p.252). However coitus leaves him with "a bitter mouth," (p.252) and as he leaves her smoking on the bed, he observes, as a sordid finale to the relationship, that "ash had fallen between her breasts" (p.253). "Outside," we are told, "... he was sick of his bones, and the stubble on bones that he touched, he half suspected two hollows in his skull" (p.253).

Meanwhile the relationship between Catherine and Wally is already developing. Mrs Standish is too old to have breasts as appealing as Muriel's. Wally observes however that despite being "a bit of a back number in the face, she still got through nicely on the bust, had a bit of carriage to her name, you remembered you wasn't exactly addressing the wall" (p.227). So in the awkward moments when each of the strangers is deciding whether to try and make a relationship out of the chance meeting, Mrs Standish "watched the hand, the little black hairs below the cuff" (p.228)
(thus extending a rhythmic strand which began with Willy's hands on p.31) and Wally "measured with his eyes the evidence of bust" (p.228). From here on the progress of their affair is measured, and its quality suggested, by White's presentation of the respective consciousness of bust and hands. Wally's high point arrives: "She was that sincere, moved, the way her bust, that you put out a hand. Sometimes it made him sweat, just how it happened, and a dame of her class" (p.265). Then Catherine's: "He came up and took her from behind, his hands upon her breasts. She closed her eyes. Her face sagged. He was leading her, anywhere, she let him, all she desired was a complete surrender of the will" (p.268).

The decline in this relationship begins when he sees someone else: "His eyes rested on the cleavage of a blond bust that blossomed from the contours of an armchair" (p.272). A page later she notices "the moist stare that betrayed in Wally the concentration on the physical," and almost immediately the ash symbol returns: "She felt the soft give of the ash-trodden carpet . . . . She looked nowhere in particular, into a marble wasteland" (p.274). Later, when Wally telephones her after a long silence, her body's natural decline is indicated through the returning motif of the breast: "The body spread without symmetry in the bed, dropped, the breasts, at eleven o'clock, the body had not yet taken on shape" (p.294). Wally's interest, naturally enough, has turned to "the blond bust that blossomed" and the image of her is given in a veiled recurrence of the breast motif: "In those pyjamas with initials on the doings,"
"an A.D. in satin near where it showed through" (pp. 295-6). Soon Mrs. Standish is dead.

The use of the breast motif, in these and other instances in the novel, creates rhythmic effects beyond the significance of its individual occurrences. It marks the rise and fall of a number of sexual relationships; and it links these relationships to one another so as to suggest the repeated and inevitable recurrence of an archetypal pattern. And the particular choice of the breast as the functional symbol is valuable, beyond its appropriateness to the theme of sexual relationships, because it allows a further layer of meaning to be presented, namely the impermanence of natural, phenomenal reality. For Mrs Standish's breasts droop as she approaches death, and the ageing Wally transfers his attentions to the young, bosomy blonde. Thus White reveals the transience of beauty and of human satisfaction. The motif becomes a complex but direct means for the rendering of vision.

b. THE LIVING AND THE DEAD: THEME

Once again, it is in terms of vision that the theme of The Living and the Dead must be described. It can be seen as a wasteland novel in which "living" and "dead" are not so much choices available to man as they are aspects of existence seen to be inevitable and complementary. All men are both living and dead, and though we may choose different ways in which to "be alive" yet a complementary state of death is inherent in all possible choices. The
irony at the centre of White's vision is the inseparable wedding of the defining polarities of existence. And the irony is given added dimension in the fact that although it operates in spite of human choice, choice remains desirable. Whether we resign our capacity to exercise choice, and simply drift in the currents of social convention, like Mrs Standish, or whether we commit ourselves to a chosen course of action, like Joe, the end is the same: frustration and death. Yet, paradoxically, commitment to a chosen course still appears to have value. Consequently, the choice of non-commitment within the areas of choice currently available (which is as far as Elyot gets), is seen to be superior to the commitment of Joe and Eden because theirs is involuntary and irrational, motivated by passions beyond their control. They have not exercised choice in their commitment, whilst Elyot remains free to choose, and still seeking. His superiority is ironic, however, for it provides no obviously better state of life than Joe's or Eden's or Mrs Standish's. We find Elyot at the end repudiating the "living dead" (p.331) which his mother had become through resignation of her will, and repudiating also the "protest of self destruction" which Eden and Joe exemplify, in favour of something unattainable, "an intenser form of living." In the commencement of this nebulous quest he feels "like someone who had been asleep, and had only just awoken" (p.335). Awoken to what? is the unanswered question. Elyot remains one of the living dead, even though he seeks to achieve some better state.

These paradoxes are presented through the total
structure of the plot, to which the consciousness of Elyot acts as a key. It is with his consciousness that the novel opens and closes, and it is from his point of view that the final vision of life emerges. Elyot's consciousness is developed as a limited persona of the novelist, whose vision it embodies. The consciousness of all the other characters are developed in counterpoint, or harmony, to the main theme (Elyot's consciousness), so as to give the vision depth and scope. In fact, to borrow the language of music criticism, the main theme is stated in the ten pages of the first chapter, and the other 315 pages are a sort of symphonic development of the statement through several movements, concluding with a brief re-statement. On page 19, for example, the total significance of Eden's and Mrs Standish's lives are given in imagistic capsules which are expanded through the course of the novel. Thus Eden:

She sat with her face in her hands at dusk. She sat beside anemones. These, still huddled in their brittle frills, were not quite dead. They rustled like a kind of immortelle. They wore the intense and used up expression of Eden's face, persistent in her struggle against conventional procedure.

In the novel, Eden's life is unfolded to reveal her endless persistence in this struggle. When Julia wants Connie to sleep in Eden's bed,

Eden screamed. They would not touch her. It was a resistance of passion, like everything she did, the dark, emphatic face that failed to contain its own emotions. She sat there screaming with passion in bed. (p.91)

From school, she writes home
This place is hell, the last terms. Do you ever feel that you will suffocate just from being cooped up with so many useless women? . . . Sometimes I can get away on my own. If I'm careful. And damn what happens anyway. (p. 134)

Her interest in Marxism, her affair with Joe and her affair with Maynard are all motivated primarily by her rebelliousness. She allows Maynard to take her to bed as a gesture of defiance when he accuses her of "holding back" (p.146). This experience of sex disgusts her ("the sense of aching nausea, the dead weight," p.147) but she agrees to go off to Dieppe with him because he presents it as an opportunity to toss out all conventional reserves. (p.148)

Her Leftist activities are initially acts of rebellion against English society, but she soon finds that Marxism requires intellectual discipline from her, so she rebels against this aspect of it:

She had a belief in her passion. She looked at her hands and tried to ignore the voice of the Bloomsbury intellectual spilling statistics from Russia, from Spain. Her passion was something apart from economic equations. (p. 180)

She is attracted to Joe, who turns out to be amiable enough and also a rebel. He enjoys his work,

But behind all this, the habit, the substantial detail, there was much that he hadn't accounted for. You still had to reckon with a kind of shapeless force. It made you wonder. It was a force of opposition that showed itself in moments of pain, injustice, and hunger. You resented the dictatorship of something that you didn't understand, even if it hadn't yet touched you personally . . . . So that Joe Barnett, in his more thoughtful, selfless moments considered a possible existence free from this abstract dictatorship. He could not formulate the details of his
desired utopia. But he was conscious inside him of a strange, peaceable, physical sensation that persuaded him a state of rightness must exist, that rightness must predominate. (p. 186)

It is in this spirit of utopian escapism that he goes to make his "sacrifice" in Spain. Eden is left hollow by his absence, and when he dies, she can do nothing but set off on a final, suicidal protest against fate. This is no more an affirmation of brotherhood or commitment than is Joe's empty death.

Mrs. Standish, on the other hand accepts the life which fate hands out to her, with pathetic docility. On page 19 she too is disclosed in an image:

I have brought some lilies, said Mrs. Standish, we must have a party, lilies and people, and what shall we have to eat. The excitement of his mother's voice refreshed by an inspiration, as it came in on a September evening. Eden's groan.

She is the obverse of Eden. An "inspiration" for her amounts to an item in the conventional, social routine suggesting itself to her mind. She will be occupied for days with formal details, and the inherent value of her activities is never considered.

The decline of Mrs. Standish into this state of moral abdication is one of the novel's most skillfully handled strands of development rendered through rhythm and pattern with recurring motifs. The central development can be sketched briefly.

As a young girl, Kitty Goose, exhibits none of the drooping weariness of the later Catherine Standish, but is carried along on impulses of vitality:
Kitty Goose stepped down into the street. She could not pull too hard at a hesitant door, almost jerking from its socket either knob or arm. (p.21)

But she rapidly develops a nagging sense of meaninglessness as she acquires an increasing self-consciousness, or lucidity, in the existentialist sense:

She was a teacher, she told herself, with a little start of amazement, of fear, for she was no different in the glass, unchanged from the face that swept directionless on a wave of Swinburne in the room at home. And still directionless, the teacher in the lane, in spite of official mornings at a raised table watching her superior hands underline in red ink, she was the blown grass in country lanes. (p.29)

This disturbing process of self discovery is soon overlaid for her by her involvement in social relationships. Her beau arrives, having kept her waiting in the cold of winter and self-scrutiny, and we are told, "she dissolved in gratitude" (p.29). And she learns to dispel the anguished thoughts which trouble her, by posing in some social role or another.

You played the charade for all you were worth, ignoring the moments of uncertainty. (p.35)

As a young bride,

It was fun, in a world of endless possibility created when she married Willy. (p.39)

And later, when this role palls, as a mother:

She was actually going to have a child. It made her feel rather solemn. It invested her with dignity. (p.45)

And she enjoyed this, her new possession. It was a safeguard, she felt unconsciously, against the expressionless malaise. (p.47)

As one excitement after another grows to a climax and
then fades out, and as they grow less and less frequent, she learns to fill her life with the mere forms and processes of social convention, and so she continues, with an occasional, dim recurrence of the old lucidity. She yawns at herself in mirrors and is forever picking flowers apart—a major motif of the novel, this, found also in, for instance, T.S. Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady". She has a last, pathetic fling with Wally, and sinks into death. She is one of the possibilities of existence open to Elyot. She is rendered with great skill technically, and is made memorable through the moral realism which informs White's vision of her:

Her nails blanched against each other, fastened against a strand of hair, almost as if she suspected lice. Or perhaps not. Perhaps more probable that Mrs Standish was bored, bored, BORED, though if she had expressed it herself, she would certainly have said: *j'ai des ennuis, mon cher.* (p.182)

Out of this pattern of the possibilities of living death and suicidal life, Elyot emerges as an alienated figure, tormented by his lucid consciousness. At the end, when his mother and sister have left him and he has "no longer even the tyranny of a personal routine," (p.334) he climbs into a bus "bound nowhere in particular," and passes on through the wasteland hoping dimly for some means of establishing a living relationship with his fellow travellers, "like the voices of people who wake" and find they have come to the end of a journey, saying: Then we are here, we have slept, but we have really got here at last."
For those readers who can identify with Elyot Standish, *The Living and the Dead* is an important novel, presenting, with skillful complexity, an honest and vivid experience of life in its mysterious and paradoxical nature. Those who find Elyot unworthy of sympathy will probably not make the effort to comprehend the novel. For one reader at least, Elyot stands with Theodora and Himmelfarb and Stan Parker, as a representative human figure, conceived in truth and rendered with great aesthetic appeal.
PARTICIPATION AND SURVIVAL IN THE ALIEN WORLD

YOUNG MAN (yawning, addressing the audience) I have just woken, it seems. It is about . . . well, the time doesn't matter. The same applies to my origins. It could be that I was born in Birmingham . . . or Brooklyn . . . or Murwillumbah. What is important is that, thanks to a succession of meat pies (the gristle-and-gravy, cardboard kind) and many cups of pink tea, I am alive! Therefore . . . and this is the rather painful point . . . I must go in soon and take part in the play, which, as usual, is a piece about eels. As I am also a poet . . . though, to be perfectly honest, I have not yet found out for sure . . . my dilemma in the play is how to take part in the conflict of eels, and survive at the same time . . . becoming a kind of Roman candle . . . fizzing for ever in the dark.

(Patrick White, prologue to The Ham Funeral)

PART I. THE AUNT'S STORY

The titles of White's first three published novels are an index to the development of his concern as an artist—to his selection and treatment of subject-matter. It is a development from the general to the particular, a clarification, a narrowing down of focus, with increasing attention given to the depicting of individual character and consciousness. An early, unpublished novel is recorded with the general, abstract title "No More Reality" (1935). Then comes Happy Valley (1939), dealing with society at large, as represented in the fairly wide range of characters peopling
a small town. The Living and the Dead (1941), presents a smaller number of individuals and is designed to reveal certain limited states of consciousness as embodied in the three Standishes; the rendering of consciousness is narrower in range and more intense in texture, than in Happy Valley. In The Aunt's Story (1948), White's vision is focussed even more exclusively and more intensively on a single main character.

We see then that the development is from society, to a small number of individuals, to one individual. The canvas remains of constant size (about 110,000 words in each case) whilst man, the subject, is magnified until a single image almost fills the picture. The portrait of Theodora, constantly expanding through the time dimension of the novel, so fills The Aunt's Story as to make it a vividly intense product of White's vision, more so than any other novel, from Happy Valley to The Solid Mandala. In the four later novels, beginning with The Tree of Man, White once again reduces the size of the central images, in order to fit more on to the canvas. And although The Solid Mandala and, to a lesser extent, Riders in the Chariot achieve intensity through the parallel presentation of complementary or similar characters, it is a complex intensity, achieved at the expense of the vivid simplicity of The Aunt's Story.

But the image of Theodora must not be taken to represent a belief on White's part that essential human values reside in only one kind of person, let alone in a single individual. Theodora is by no means an ideal figure, tormented as she is by the lucidity that brings her finally to a mental
asylum. She is, rather, by natural endowment and the accidents of biography, a person in whom self-awareness is accompanied by extreme anguish. White's realism prevents him from minimizing the anguish, in revealing the integrity of her lucid state.

The same realism enables him to see that the people who exist on lesser planes of self-awareness than Theodora's have the same claims on his moral interest as an artist, as she does. That they are different from Theodora and from one another, is clear; but it is also clear that they are fellow-sufferers of hers in the world of cleavage and pain. Furthermore, White sees that, even for these less conscious individuals, it is only by striving to apprehend "the mystery and the poetry," which lie beneath "the inessential outer shell," that they can "make their lives bearable." All this comes through to us in The Tree of Man, which is in some ways a complementary volume to The Aunt's Story: The extreme form of lucid self-awareness, in the peculiar image of Theodora, is balanced by the unexceptional, average figures of Stan and Amy Parker. What strikes us is not so much the obvious differences between the Parkers and Theodora, but the generic similarity of their reactions to their life experiences--the compulsion to see and understand the mysteries of their environment, as far as they are able, and the growth of a tormenting sense of alienation. Both novels are affirmations of the right (or perhaps even the duty), and the power of the individual to accept what he can see of the facts of existence, and to survive with that vision.
Yet another aspect of White's realism is to be found in these two novels of the middle period: The anguish of the central figures having been recognised, it is in no way sentimentalized. That is to say, the problem of anguish is not resolved in some manner which puts a strain on the reader's credence. White simply renders the state of man with the honesty of his vision and does not attempt any theoretical solution. Although Theodora and Stan do come at last to states of personal resolution and peace, the means of attaining these states is inscrutable in the novels. White presents them through psychic manifestations rather than philosophical argument of the Rasselas variety. Two later novels, *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*, are marred by their strange attempts to suggest the possibility of a spiritual or supernatural communion, which relieves the sense of isolation from the anguish of the conscious individual, and which, in *Voss*, enables one person to exercise a certain spiritual influence on another. In *The Solid Mandala*, White dispenses with mysticism, but his concern to delineate certain psychological type-divisions tends to cloud his vision of the fundamental problems of existence.

The relative weaknesses of theme in the later novels are not actually surprising, when we come to consider how much is achieved in *The Aunt's Story* and *The Tree of Man*. In this middle period, White has more or less exhausted his main theme; he has given artistic embodiment to the chief perceptions which make up his vision. In subsequent work he can amplify and vary (e.g. We may consider Laura, Miss Hare, Anthea, Waldo and others, as variations and
developments of the character of Theodora, and Harry Robarts, Mrs Godbold, Arthur Brown and others, as similar extensions of Stan Parker.) He can also branch off in certain new directions (e.g. The anti-Nietzschean aspect of Voss.) The later works also show an increasingly satiric intolerance of moral blindness in society. (One thinks of the "crucifixion" of Himmelfarb, and the portrait of the "Cheery Soul" in the play and story.) But in the two novels of the middle period, the crucial products of White's vision as an artist are presented most directly and with a matured technique. These novels are, so to speak, his gospels.

The maturity of technique in these novels is evident in a number of ways which will be considered at length. In The Aunt's Story the development of consciousness is handled skillfully through the overall structure and the internal patterns. In The Tree of Man the sense of incompleteness and dislocation in the prose becomes a means of rendering the mental inadequacy and inarticulateness of the characters. In both novels, the web of images and motifs is less finely woven than in The Living and the Dead, and this makes for a clearer and more emphatic rendering, at the expense of the more minute impressions. Rhythmic strands and patterns of motif are reserved for the expression of the most central aspects of theme. For instance, the individual search for understanding, in The Aunt's Story, is given rhythmic intensity and a sense of perpetuity by its recurrence in the sequence of questers—Theodora, Lou, Katina. And the "bones" motif, which is so
important to the artist's vision in the novel, is given greater effectiveness by the fact that there are fewer secondary motifs than in *The Living and the Dead*.

**a. THE AUNT'S STORY: TECHNIQUE**

The most noticeable technical feature of *The Aunt's Story* is its division into three very different parts. In the course of a first reading it is often difficult to see exactly how these parts inter-relate. Thelma Herring's elaboration of the *Odyssey* theme in *The Aunt's Story* provides a valuable clue; for we should observe that the novel is plotted broadly as a story of quest, with a beginning, a middle and an end. The significance of Theodora's quest will be considered later in the analysis of themes. What is important to notice at this point, is how the three parts are constructed so as to develop the separation between two different and interwoven records of experience—the objective narrative and the subjective account of consciousness, both given by the narrator. The narrator is omniscient and renders the story throughout in the third person. His point of view is dual, however. It is alternately Theodora's and that of a "normal" person; and because of the way in which the narrative shuttles back and forth from these two different standpoints, it often requires the closest attention on the part of the reader if he wishes to follow whether things are happening in "fact", or merely in Theodora's mind. (The appearance of the Holstius figure is a good example.) This element of ambiguity is undoubtedly deliberate on White's part, for
it creates in us, initially, the same kind of doubt as to the difference between reality and illusion, as Theodora experiences.

Here then is the objective story of Theodora's quest, as it can be separated from the medley, for our final appreciation of the novel:

In Part One Theodora grows up to become a lonely, middle-aged spinster. After the failure of her affair with Huntley Clarkson, she comes to a desperate realization that her life lacks something which her immediate environment cannot provide. She is ready to begin her quest, though she is not quite sure of its object:

At this point, Theodora sometimes said, I should begin to read Gibbon, or find religion, instead of speaking to myself in my own room. But words, whether written or spoken, were at most frail slat bridges over chasms, and Mrs Goodman had never encouraged religion, as she herself was God. So it will not be by these means, Theodora said, that the great monster Self will be destroyed, and that desirable state achieved, which resembles, and would imagine, nothing more than air or water. (p.134)

Then her mother dies, so that she is released from social ties and can act freely, but she does not know what to do:

If she left the prospect of freedom unexplored, it was less from a sense of remorse than from not knowing what to do. (p.10)

She rejects the temptation to "die again" for her mother (i.e. to fall into nostalgic reverie) as she had done once when her father died. (p.135) So she decides in the end, rather uncertain of her object, to travel:

"Will you really go away, Aunt Theo?" asked Lou.
"Yes," said Theodora, "I shall go away."
"Then there will a lot of other stories to tell."
"I expect not," Theodora said.
"Why?" asked Lou.
"Because there are people who do not have many stories to tell."

There were the people as empty as a filigree ball, though even these would fill at times with a sudden fire. (p.136)

In Part Two we find her at the Hôtel du Midi in the South of France, utterly disillusioned after her travels round Europe, but still waiting, and with hope not quite extinguished:

Still, there will always be people, Theodora Goodman said, and she continued to wait with something of the superior acceptance of mahogany for fresh acts. (p.141)

She has chosen this hotel because its brochure advertised a jardin exotique and she "considered its possibility" (p.142). So she goes hopefully into the jardin, and we are reminded as she does so that the rest of Europe has failed her, so that this is her last hope:

As she stepped out, she hoped that the garden would be the goal of a journey. There had been many goals, all of them deceptive. In Paris, the metal hats just failed to tinkle. The great soprano in Dresden sang up her soul for love into a wooden cup. . . . Throughout the gothic shell of Europe, in which there had never been such a buying and selling, of semi-precious aspirations, bulls' blood, and stuffed doves, the stone arches cracked, the aching wilderness, in which the ghosts of Homer and St. Paul and Tolstoy waited for the crash. (p. 145-6)

The garden turns out to be a harsh, destructive place (developed as a wasteland symbol of the world), and affords her no profit; neither does the hotel (developed as a
symbol of Europe's "gothic shell"), nor its inhabitants. The hotel burns down, killing or scattering the residents, and leaving the persistent jardin to survive behind the smoky ruins. Thus Theodora's travels have come to nothing: Europe has crumbled and the world remains a prickly cactus garden. She is now directionless again, and utters the vague suggestions of returning to Australia, which she calls "Abyssinia" since the geographical world has now become as unreal to her as the Abyssinian Meroe was when she was a child on her father's farm.

In Part Three, Theodora is returning to Australia when her quest takes a dramatic turn. She suddenly decides to rebel against the conventions of the known, social world, by disappearing into anonymity. She steps into the pre-dawn darkness from her train, leaving it to go "with all its magnificence of purpose, towards California" (p.275). Then she escapes from the truck in which Jake is taking her to a motel, and chooses for direction "the road that opened" (p.277). This leads her to the Johnsons' house where, stripped of her itinerary, her documents and her name, she stays a few hours. Finally she is driven away from the Johnsons' by the sight of a clock which reminds her of the world from which she is trying to escape, towards "humility, to anonymity, to pureness of being" (p.284). So she wanders up the hill where she finds an old, deserted, "blank house" (p.289). Here she waits for "some ultimate moment of clear vision" (p.290) which comes, in due course, in the hallucinatory figure of Holstius. With his appearance, and his conversation, her psychic balance becomes strangely altered, so that she
is able to adopt an attitude of complete composure and acceptance in the face of the paradoxes and tensions which have tortured her mind for decades. Completely at peace, having attained the object of her quest, she allows the doctor to take her off to the asylum, and the novel ends.

While this objective narrative, or plot, is worked out, Theodora's inner life—her private world of personal reality—is revealed in the novel largely through the subjective narrative, which forms a record of her consciousness. White indicates the progress of this inner life, by gradually narrowing the range of her consciousness, until she becomes almost completely solipsistic. And the extent of Theodora's deviation from objective "normality" is emphasized throughout by the fact that the narrator is constantly alternating between the two contrasting points of view. Thus her progress is measured by the constant juxtaposition of her consciousness with the "factual" account. Having seen the "facts" of the story, we can now trace out the more complex account of Theodora's consciousness.

From the beginning of her life-story Theodora is shown to have a rational, enquiring mind. She does not shrink from examining all aspects of things that she encounters, and her examination often leaves her with a sense of mystery. Thus in her mother's garden she finds:

There was a small pale grub curled in the heart of the rose. She could not look too long at the grub-thing stirring as she opened the petals to the light. (p.21)

Her sister would repudiate, would willingly deny the existence, of such distasteful things:
"Horrid, beastly grub," said Fanny, who was as pretty and as pink as roses. (p.21)

At this stage in her development, Theodora is unable to do anything more than merely accept this difference between herself and Fanny, and go on living in the routine of the family.

Theodora had not yet learned to dispute the apparently indisputable. But she could not condemn her pale and touching grub. She could not subtract it from the sum total of the garden. So, without arguing, she closed the rose. (p.21)

Her consciousness of mysteries in the nature of things grows, with each of several experiences, and she begins to be plagued by a desire to understand.

The house continued to stir with the great mystery that had taken place i.e. Pearl's pregnancy and dismissal. There was always a great deal that never got explained.

"I would like to know," said Theodora, "I would like to know everything." (p.39)

"I shall know everything," Theodora said. To wrap it up and put it in a box. This is the property of Theodora Goodman. But until this time things floated out of reach. She put out her hand they bobbed and were gone. (p.40)

Up to this point, the contrast developed is not so much one between subjective and objective narratives, as between generally different intellectual attitudes to life. On the one hand, Theodora (like her father) notices the inexplicable or mysterious things and tries to puzzle them out. On the other hand, Fanny (like her mother) manages to see only the things which will not puzzle her:
Father once said to Mother that Fanny would always ask the questions that have answers. (p.40)

But near the end of this first chapter of Theodora's story (Chapter Two), her experience with The Man Who Was Given His Dinner leads to something more than a mere intellectual attitude. It leads to a sudden inversion of vision, a kind of Joycean epiphany in which the "normal" appearance of objective reality is momentarily distorted:

"What do you do?" she asked.
"I look for gold."
"Why?"
"Because," he said, "it is as good a way of passing your life as any other."

This sounded funny. It made the walls dissolve, the stone walls of Meroe, as flat as water, so that the people sitting inside were now exposed, treading a sewing machine, baking a loaf, or adding up accounts. But the man walked on the dissolved walls, and his beard blew. (p.41)

Meanwhile, the man himself recognising her capacity for entertaining doubt about the distinction between illusion and reality:

"They say people who take to the mountains 're crazy, "he yawned. "And perhaps they're right. Though who's crazy and who isn't? Can you tell me that young Theodora Goodman? I bet you couldn't." (p.45)

The remaining four chapters of Part One repeat and expand so as to create a loose pattern, the elements established in Chapter Two. In each of these chapters, Theodora recognises more and more, the mysterious nature of existence, and is troubled by her inability to resolve the mysteries. The difference between herself and most of the people she knows,
becomes increasingly evident to her, and is clouded by overtones of fear and rejection:

[Una Russell] looked at Theodora, sensing something that she would not understand, and possibly something from which she must defend herself, or even hate. (p.49)

She hated Theodora still, she hated what was unexplained. (p.63)

[Frank Parrott] would have hated her for the incident of the hawk, hated her out of his vanity, but because there was something that he did not understand, he remained instead uneasy, almost a little bit afraid. (p.74)

She also recognises a kinship with a small number of people—her father, Violet Adams, Moraitis—and in her contact with them, she experiences a series of progressively stronger epiphanies, of the same kind as the original one she had with The Man Who Was Given His Dinner. Thus, after her father's death, her "real" environment dissolves into a grey wasteland:

She walked out through the passages, through the sleep of other people. She was thin as grey light, as if she had just died. She would not wake the others. It was still too terrible to tell, too private an experience. As if she were to go into the room and say: Mother, I am dead, I am dead, Meroë has crumbled. So she went outside where the grey light was as thin as water and Meroë had, in fact, dissolved. Cocks were crowing the legend of day, but only the legend. Meroë was grey water, grey ash. (p.88)

Shortly before the end of Part One, the tension existing between her inner vision of subjective reality
(which has burst into her consciousness at the various moments of epiphanal illumination) and her existence and social activity in the outer, "normal" world, becomes too much for her to continue to accept passively. The incident of the shooting of clay ducks at the fair is rendered as a psychological projection of her desire to break through the surface of apparent reality, to cut through the canvas world (as Lieselotte does in Part Two, p.176) and discover a world of truth:

She stood already in the canvas landscape, against which the ducks jerked, her canvas arms animated by some emotion that was scarcely hers. Because the canvas moments will come to life of their own accord. . . . The Man who was Given his Dinner, and Moraitis, for some, had already shown her this. Now she stood in the smell of flint and powdered flesh, from which the world of Huntly Clarkson had receded, and she took aim at the clay heads of the jerking ducks. She took aim, and the dead, white, discarded moment fell shattered the duck bobbed headless.

"Good for Theodora," Ralph said.

... They watched the clay ducks shatter each time Theodora fired, and it was as if each time a secret life was shattered, of which they had not been aware, and probably never would have, but they resented the possibility removed. It was something mysterious, shameful, and grotesque. (p.124)

By this symbolic act of destruction, Theodora has asserted for herself, and in the sight of others, not only the difference between herself and them, but also her right and her power to live according to her own vision of reality:

Behind them the others walked, half knowing, in their silence, ever since Theodora had shot the clay heads off the ducks, that she was separated from then for ever by something that their smooth minds would not grope towards, preferring sofas to a hard bench. (p.125)
The last sentences of Part One indicate the degree to which her inner vision has progressed away from objective normality: Even the simplest, everyday things now puzzle her, and it is in this condition that she feels the need to embark on her quest:

I shall go, said Theodora, I have already gone. The simplicity of what ultimately happens hollowed her out. She was part of a surprising world in which hands, for reasons no longer obvious, had put tables and chairs. (p.137)

In Part Two of *The Aunt's Story*, we have the middle stage of Theodora's inner development. This section of the novel is probably the most elaborate technical structure in the White canon, and it invites extensive criticism. There are such matters, for example, as the derivative links with Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, and (in the construction of the chapters) with Joyce's *Dubliners*. At this point we are concerned only with the way in which the dual structure of subjective and objective consciousness of Part Two, and its inter-relation with the other parts, reveal the progress of Theodora's experience in alienation.

The first three chapters of Part Two (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine), present the morning, afternoon and night, respectively, of Theodora's first day at the Hôtel du Midi. In the course of this day, she encounters and converses with all the residents of the hotel. It is important to realize that almost all of these characters, though they definitely exist as separate beings (which some critics have doubted), are nevertheless closely related to Theodora by personal history. They may be regarded as *alter ego*.
figures, specimens of what she may be or of what she may become—or, in the case of Katina, what she was. They are mostly sensitive people who have been subjected to experiences of enormous frustration, disillusionment, terrible violence, or fear, and, like Theodora, they feel alienated from the world and in need of communication. (Thus they all pounce on Theodora as soon as they can, to see what comfort or sympathy she can offer them.) And in her contact with them, Theodora finds much with which she is familiar, from her own experiences of frustration and alienation:

The Demoiselles Bloch giggled, for many past crackers let off under the visitor's chair. But Theodora was less perplexed than thoughtful. In this landscape a familiar rain descended on to the palms and crossword puzzles. Somewhere in the interior, springs groaned for Sunday afternoon. (p.153)

Theodora sat. Confident her intuition would identify, she waited for Lieselotte to appear.

As she had suspected, Lieselotte was a snowdrop, quivering but green veined. Depravity had tortured the original wax . . . . (p.174)

"There is no denying that I am an artist."
"Or an old clown," said Theodora, who knew by revelation the way that Alyosha Sergei could somersault through a house, and how she was tired walking up and down, emptying his full ashtrays, and mopping up the little damp patches where his thought dripped. (p.177)

She is even able—as is hinted in the last quotation—to forget herself imaginatively into the former lives of these people, especially Mrs Rapallo, Katina and Sokolnikov.
In her first day of meeting these three she has elaborate day-dreams in which she sees and participates in their histories. There are, by my count, fourteen passages in these three chapters in which, without warning in the text or format, Theodora is suddenly living in a world projected by her imagination and experience, from the stimulus of some act or remark of one of the three.

The fact that Theodora has day-dreams, does not in itself show that she is losing her hold on "reality", until we realise what White is presenting through these fantasy projections. Briefly, they are a means of rendering Theodora's conception of the inner realities behind the outer presentation which the characters give of themselves and their histories. They are epiphanal experiences in which the meaning, for Theodora, of these people is experienced in her imaginary construction of their stories. Thus, when she first sees Katina, she perceives, even without having spoken to her, that she is a child of innocence who has not yet consciously confronted the alienating world; and she yearns to save the child from this fate. White renders all this by a day-dream, sparked off by Katina's mentioning to her governess, her memory of an earthquake. Theodora imagines herself as Katina's governess, protecting her by love from the world of tragedies, shielding her innocence:

In the sun, Katina herself was a small round white flint. That I could pick up and fling, wrapped in my love, Theodora felt, into the deathless, breathless sea. (p. 149-50)

"Come," they called. "Run. It is the will of God. The earth is going to split open and swallow
the houses of the poor."
She takes the child to the beach.
They were thrown out, all of them, out of the functionless houses on to the little strip of sand. Their bodies lay on the live earth. They could feel its heart move against their own.
Theodora held the body of the child. She felt the moment of death and life. (p.150-51)
The day-dream is interrupted by the girl conversing with her actual governess, until the words "I shall die" set Theodora off again on a brief conclusion to her fantasy. Then she returns to the phenomenal world when a cloud which she is imagining becomes Katina's handkerchief in the path. The relationship which subsequently develops between the two women actualizes the roles of innocent and protectress, established in this half-intuitive, half-prophetic fantasy. Theodora's consciousness of Katina is absolutely selective according to her perception of innocence endangered as the central reality of Katina's existence. At no time in Part Two is she aware of anything relating to Katina, except what is strictly relevant to this perception.

In similar ways, Theodora perceives the underlying reality, as she conceives it, of Mrs Rapallo and General Sokolnîkov. In each case she discovers the same desperate sadness and disillusionment with which she herself is familiar, beneath the affected exterior. But although she finds them similar to herself in this respect, she is shown to progress beyond the range of their companionship, through her penetration of their facades; in the affair of the nautilus shell, she sees the emptiness and affectation with which they finally manage to deceive themselves. "It is not surprising
at all, Alyosha Sergei," she says of the shell (p.223). He, on the other hand, finds it "fantastic" and stands, holding it in his hands, transported back to childhood (p.224). Then Mrs Rapallo arrives, desperate for her shell:

"I shall have my shell," she said, "General Sokolnikov, it is all I have got." (p.225)

When they struggle for the shell, and smash it in the passage, they depart in mortification, leaving Theodora to contemplate "the slight white rime" in the carpet. By her recognition of their childish reliance on an empty and useless symbol of beauty and perfection (pp. 163-164), she passes beyond their level of consciousness, into a deeper isolation. We are told that "Theodora herself felt considerably reduced" (p.225).

In the last two chapters of Part Two, Theodora, having lost all hope of establishing a meaningful sense of community, focusses her interest almost exclusively on Katina. Since the latter, at the beginning of Chapter Ten, is still naive and innocent, her protection represents for Theodora the last possibility for meaningful involvement in the wasteland world, but it is not an involvement which will integrate Theodora in the human community. Rather, it is an act of wish-fulfilment, like a dream, in which she reveals her desire not to have to suffer the anguish which she is suffering.

In attempting to protect Katina, Theodora is in effect dramatising her agony--her yearning that the bitter cup of life might pass. She wishes that she could have remained in the innocence of childhood, instead of becoming, through her lucid consciousness and her honesty, one of the "burnt ones."
Apart from the possibility of saving Katina, almost the only other circumstances of which Theodora is aware, at this stage, are the confessions of Sokolnikov and Mrs Rapallo. (Admittedly it is curious that something apparently motivated her to visit Mrs Rapallo in her room [p.254] and, in the absence of an explanation, this appears to be a slight weakness in character development; but it is the only one of this kind, and it is included for the sake of the plot, bringing the two women together at an important time.) For the rest, Theodora speaks only when spoken to, or when it is necessary to eat, or to escape from the fire. She is not, as I may have suggested, absolutely unaware of the trivia of her environment, but the images which now make up the little trickle of this area of consciousness are significantly narrowed down to impressions of death and decay "the bodies of dead flies" (pp. 227 and 233), words "stiff as biscuits" (p.254), "the sodden faces of old letters and the yellow smiles of photographs" (p.256).

For Katina however, Theodora has a concern, at the start of Chapter Ten, which is intense and dominating. For Katina alone, her imagination still rises out of the world of appearances to project the fantasies of truth:

Now Katina Pavlou walked without direction. Her eyes were dark. She had written, Theodora knew, in the blue cahier that she had bought from the papeterie beside the post office, she had most certainly written:

Your voice is the first velvet violin that my heart beats against in so much sadness wrapped waiting for you my love to take. (p.227)

She listens to Katina's conversations and senses the growth
of a disturbing consciousness within the girl. So she tries to communicate with her:

[Katina] turned her face against the glass, and then, unaccountably, began to cry. For Katina Pavlou had become the amazed and frightened instrument recording some climatic disturbance, still too sudden to accept or understand.

"Dearest Katina," Theodora said, "it would be easier if you would tell."

"It is nothing," cried Katina.

The windows of the little wintergarden, blurred by the action of the salt air, did not disclose. There was no guide. (p.232-233)

She feels that "the picnic will disclose" Katina's particular problem to her (p.233) and she discovers at the picnic that the girl is infatuated with Wetherby. She senses the inevitability of Wetherby's corruptive intention:

It was necessary that Katina Pavlou should discover fire. And Theodora Goodman, watching the charade move with all the hopes and hesitations of the human mechanism, knew that because she loved and pitied, the humiliation and the pain were also necessarily hers. (p.238)

At the end of Chapter Ten, Katina is filled with the transitory joy of young love, and looks out to Africa, as Theodora herself had looked out, in her youth, to the Abyssinian Meroë:

She felt Katina Pavlou, who was heavy and warm with some inner perfection of her own. But perfection, alas, is breakable, whether it is marble, or terracotta, or the more fragile groups of human statuary.

"How far is Africa, do you suppose?" Katina Pavlou asked.

"Far enough," Theodora Goodman said. (p.242)

In Chapter Eleven comes Theodora's final disillusionment, followed by the destruction of the hotel. Obsessed
with her need to protect Katina from Wetherby, she tries to
shock him into a moral awareness of his selfishness, telling
him, "You will love your obsession. You will love the faces
of mirrors. You will love your own anxiety" (p.245). But
he is not deterred, and he announces his intention of taking
Katina to the tower, much to Theodora's distress:

Theodora herself had never been as far as the tower,
but she suspected it. Especially now. She suspected
the dark smell of damp stone and possibly a dead bird.
She loathed the folded body of the dead bird, and the
maggots in its eyes.

Disgust knotted her hands. (p.246)

Sokolnikov warns her that her protection is useless, for,
as he says, "you can also create the illusion of other people,
but once created, they choose their own realities" (p.250).
But she rushes, anyway, hatless to the tower, which by now
"would have filled with mist, and the intolerable, pervasive
smell of crushed nettles" (p.251). When she finds Katina,
she realises that innocence cannot be protected from the
harshness of existence:

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

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

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

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

But no less painful in its emptiness, Theodora felt.
"Still I am glad," said Katina Pavlou, speaking
through her white face. "You know, Miss Goodman, when
one is glad for something that has happened, something
nauseating and painful, that one did not suspect.
It is better finally to know. (p.253)
In the final scene of Part Two, after the burning of the hotel, Theodora and Katina express their common state of disillusioned alienation from the world:

"I shall go away," Katina Pavlou said, touching the bones in Theodora's hand. "I shall go to my own country. Now I know. I shall go."

"And what shall you do, Miss Goodman?" Katina Pavlou shivered.
"I? I shall go now," Theodora said. "I shall go too."
She touched the smooth, cold skin of a leaf of aloe.
"Where?" Katina Pavlou asked.
"I have not thought yet."

"I may even return to Abyssinia," Theodora said. (pp. 264-265)

At the end of Part One, Theodora decided to leave her Australian environment to test the possibility of discovering elsewhere, some kind of satisfaction or peace for her anguished consciousness. In Part Two she has already searched through the home-lands of European culture, and they have failed her; in these five chapters she lives out her last hopes of finding satisfaction through relationships with people much like her in their experiences of life. We have seen how the hope which enabled her initially to involve herself through fantasy in the lives of others, has been progressively dampened, as revealed through the narrowing focus of her consciousness. With the shattering of her illusory hopes for Katina she now has nowhere to turn--at least, that is, if we take Europe and the Hôtel du Midi as representative of the whole world outside Australia, as indeed the name of the hotel and its cosmopolitan guest list suggest.
In Part Three, therefore, we find that the range of Theodora's consciousness is extremely egocentric at the start, and absolutely so by the end. On the first page, we read that "in spite of outer appearances, Theodora Goodman suggested that she had retreated into her own distance and did not intend to come out" (p.269). In spite of her fellow-traveller's anxious attempts to engage her in conversation, and her sense of conventional obligation to respond, she simply cannot bring herself to say a word to him. Indeed, the striking fact about Part Three is that Theodora says so little in it. The only conversations which she initiates or in any way sustains beyond a bare minimum, are those with Zack and Holstius—the one a boy in whom her recognition of kinship still evokes a slight response, in spite of the disillusionment over Katina, and the other a figure projected by her own imagination, and with whom her conversations are therefore solipsistic. To Mrs Johnson she hardly addresses a gratuitous word, except once to say something about Holstius, and once to enquire about Zack (pp.296, 297).

Her unwillingness to speak is a negative indication of her withdrawal into the world of private reality. White's technical skill enables him, however, to give a positive rendering of this withdrawal without compromising either the solitude or the passivity which he has built up so carefully as aspects of her final state. This positive mode is the creation of the Holstius figure. To have attempted to render Theodora's consciousness in this final section, through a direct stream-of-consciousness technique,
would not only have destroyed the effect of passivity, but would have added to an already demanding novel, a final patch of wearying, mental jungle—a stream of "madness", in the conventional term. But in developing the Holstius figure, White is able to provide Theodora with a means of expressing her state of mind directly and dramatically, yet without appearing to be motivated in some way to return from her isolation to a world of apparent communication and interaction. In her conversations with Holstius, he always takes the initiative and he alone understand her position. She accepts his companionship and understanding, and in doing so she reveals, to the reader, her final, solipsistic state. She accepts Holstius as a being at least as real as her father, and Mrs Rapallo and others (p.292); the reader knows "better" and realises that she has no communication, except with herself.

Part One of The Aunt's Story forms a complete story on its own. By expanding this story into its second and third parts, in the ways we have seen, White created a novel of depth and importance. The Theodora at the end of Part One is just the sad and lonely figure of a spinster, her father's daughter, her niece's aunt. The effect of Parts Two and Three is to give her considerable magnitude. She acquires some of the significance of an archetypal human figure. White's technique of developing the three parts is such that their inter-relation produces a lingering on of echoes of increasing significance. When we close the book, and respond in thought and memory to its over all effect, the image of Theodora—which Sidney Nolan has suggested so well in his
cover painting--fills the mind with a powerful sense of the
dignity which man can attain in the face of anguish, a sense
of great admiration for Theodora's triumph against "rivers
of fire," in fulfilment of her personal destiny, with humility.

No girl that was thrown down by lightning on her
twelfth birthday, and then got up again, is going
to be swallowed easy by rivers of fire. (p.45)

White has made a powerful assertion of the power of the
individual to maintain a conscious integrity in spite of the
destructive fires of the world. In this achievement, the
part-structure is the all-important technique.

Of the many secondary techniques in The Aunt's Story,
two stand out as specially effective, as in the previous
novel; the use of recurrent motifs to render certain concepts
which are basic to White's vision, and the creation of
rhythmic pattern, especially in the recurrence of embryonic
Theodora-figures.

The main point about the handling of motifs, in this
and subsequent novels, has already been stated: Certain
central motifs are used more emphatically than before, and
they therefore become a more powerful means of communication.
Part of the emphasis is achieved through a reduction in the
number of secondary motifs, and thus of the web of minor
impressions. The advantage gained probably justifies this
pruning.

The emphatic significance given to the central motifs,
and their capacity for rendering essentials of White's
vision can be observed through a brief consideration of the
motif of bones. A consciousness of bones beneath the outer
flesh is early established in the novel as a symbol for the apprehension of truth beneath the outer appearance:
Theodora is attracted to the black hills of Meroé, because

There are certain landscapes in which you can see the bones of the earth. And this was one. You could touch your own bones, which is to come a little closer to truth. (p.61)

The nature of the motif is, then, directly established in this passage, though we may already have noted it in operation earlier:

And Lou came and sat beside her. Lou did not speak, but she could feel very positively the thin bone of an arm pressed close against her waist. (p.13)

"Did Granny Goodman want to die?" asked Lou. And again Theodora could feel the thin bone of an arm pressed close against her waist. (p.17)

Certainly we should be well aware of its meaning, after the occurrence on page 61. We understand that Charlie King is being contrasted to Theodora when his hands are described as boneless:

By this time it was "The Blue Danube" that Charlie King always played. His hands rippled like a pair of kid gloves. They had no bones. Pouring the suave water that Fanny's tulle skirt caught. (p.77)

Likewise, the motif establishes a sense of community between Theodora and Moraitis:

"Bare," smiled Moraitis, for a fresh discovery. "Greece, you see, is a bare country. It is all bones." "Like Meroé," said Theodora. "Please?" said Moraitis. "I too come from a country of bones." "That is good," said Moraitis solemnly. "It is easier to see." (p.112)
"Good-bye, Miss Goodman," said Moraitis. "I shall remember we are compatriots in the country of the bones. (p.113)

In a later recurrence, the motif is used to indicate the development of consciousness in Katina. After her fall from innocence, and following the passage already quoted in which Katina asserts that "it is better finally to know" about the painful aspects of life, Theodora sees a change in her:

Under the still skin of Katina Pavlou's face the blood had not yet begun again to flow. Since yesterday, Theodora saw, the bones had some. (p.253)

Much more could be said, but the point, I think, is made. The motif recurs at many key points in the novel, not just as a predictable label, but as a means of rendering consciousness of the ambiguous nature of reality.

The recurrence of the Theodora-figures is a well handled device, functioning in two chief ways: By repetition, it adds a suggestion of universality and perpetuity to Theodora's story, and in this respect it is part of the overall, rhythmic structure; and by the variations which accompany the repetition, it reveals Theodora's own development in each part of the novel.

What I have called the Theodora-figures are the three children, among the acquaintances of her adult life, with whom she feels "the triumph of the rare alliances" (p.283). This sense of alliance has been a recurrent experience of her life. There was her father, Moraitis, the Man who was Given his Dinner, and others--but after her mother's death, and the beginning of her quest, it is an experience especially
related to the three children. In them, she sees images of herself as she was—an innocent, questioning the mysteries of life. We have seen already how, in childhood, Theodora "wanted to know everything." In Part One, Lous is similarly presented:

"I wish . . ." said Lou.
"What do you wish?"
"I wish I was you, Aunt Theo."
And now Theodora asked why.
"Because you know things," said Lou.
"Such as?"
"Oh," she said, "things."
Her eyes were fixed inwardly on what she could not express. (p.136)

And Katina, who, on their first meeting, "questioned Theodora in silence" (p.152), is clearly of the same kind. Theodora recognises Katina's kinship with Lou, and speaks to her "in the accents of an aunt" (p.184). Katina tells her of the stagnation of her home environment:

"Papa was a colonel once. Now they live in hotels. They follow the season, and Papa plays bridge." (p.186)

And Theodora sees it:

"C'est ridicule de croire," said the voice of the astringent lotion, "qu'on s'amusera a Deauville ou a Aix."
"Mais alors," said the Colonel, throwing down the card preparatory to picking it up again, "Allons a Baden Baden."

In antithesis to the concept of "s'amuser", and the implications of superficiality in Baden Baden, Katina says she "would like to marry a scientist, and sail with him up the Congo" (p.185), to penetrate the darkness of life's mysteries, instead of blinding herself to them.
Zack, though much younger than Lou or Katina, and though he appears only momentarily at the end, is also a perceptive, questioning person, with whom Theodora recognises kinship.

"And your name is what?" she asked.
"Zack," he said firmly, as if it could not have been anything else.
She could not read him, but she knew him.
"Are you visiting with us?" he asked.
Because she was blank, he added, "Are you going to be here some time?"
"No," she said.
She shook her head, but it was the finality of sadness.
"Why?" he asked.
"You will know in time," she said, "that it is not possible to stay."
He looked at her queerly . . . . (p.282)

In these three figures, then, Theodora recognises people like herself, whom she can understand to some extent, and try to protect. When she leaves Zack the kinship is rendered with pathos, in a delicate, last image:

Zack came and looked at her. Now he was very close.
"You don't want to stay with us," he said, looking at her straight.
She was close to his fringed eyes, which had approached till his forehead touched hers, and she could feel the soft questioning of the lashes of his eyes.
"Oh Zack," she said, "you must not make it difficult." (p.288)

The recurrence of the figures involves important variations, particularly in respect of Theodora's attitude towards them. At the end of Part One, she approaches her separation from Lou, with a fatalistic recognition of the fact of human isolation:
Theodora looked down through the distances that separate, even in love. If I could put out my hand, she said, but I cannot. And already the moment, the moments, the disappearing afternoon, had increased the distance that separates. There is no lifeline to other lives. (p. 137)

Fatalist though she is, in this respect, she is not totally so, for she still has her arm round the child, "a formal gesture of protection" (p. 136). Their relationship is "both close and distant" (p. 129), for though her closeness cannot create a "lifeline" to the child, it remains a closeness of identification of some kind. She sits with Lou and feels the "pressure" of her body and "her breath that was almost her own" (p. 136). In leaving her, she leaves a warning against disillusionment, by telling her that the mysteries of life do not open up to the kind of understanding that Lou desires to have (p. 137). This is her last act of protection for the girl.

In Part Two, Theodora begins her relationship with Katina at the point where her relationship with Lou, in Part One, ceased. Her first impulse is one of protection as we have seen: The protecting arm around Lou's waist becomes the arm protecting Katina from the violence of the earthquake (p. 151). But after Katina's baptism into adulthood, in the tower, Theodora's attitude to her protégée changes. She ceases to make gestures of protection or assistance. Inasmuch as Katina represents Theodora's youth, we may say that the tower episode shows Theodora that there is no retreat to innocence from the reality of her mature vision. She herself cannot return to innocence, and Katina
cannot stay there. Protection is useless. When the hotel burns we get an image of Katina which signifies her own development and also the realizations which Theodora has attained:

They were watching Katina Pavlou walk out of the burning house. She walked with her hands outstretched, protecting herself with her hands, not so much from substance, as some other fire. She could not yet accept the faces. As if these had read a reported incident, of which, she knew, the details had been inevitably falsified. But Katina Pavlou had seen the face of fire. (p.263)

So, by the end of Part Two, Theodora and Katina are equals, in that both have been burnt by the fires of the world. Or, more accurately, Katina has reached the first stage of maturity, Theodora's stage at the end of Part One. For she still hopes that a change of environment will alter essential conditions. Theodora envisages the process of Katina's departure, in search of her "own country":

Already from her corner [of the train], Katina Pavlou watched the slow smoke rise from white houses and sleepily finger the dawn. She sat upright, to arrive, to recover the lost reality of childhood. Her eyes were strained by sleeplessness.

"Yes, Katina," Theodora said.

There was no reason to suppose that this was not the sequence of events. (p.264)

Thus, through Lou and Katina, Theodora re-experiences the stages of her own development. She herself has reached a second stage of maturity. She is, at the end of Part Two, bereft of hope, and she is so weary and resigned to the inevitability of the "sequence of events," that she cannot even offer Katina the dubious comfort of physical contact.
or verbal sympathy. She had put her arm around Lou and warned her against disillusion, but with Katina she is now completely passive and falls back finally on the routine matter of getting to bed, rather than explain her reference to Abyssinia:

"You will go where?" Katina Pavlou asked.
"Come, Katina, you are almost asleep," Theodora Goodman said. "We must join the others. Listen. They are calling us." (p.265)

And then when the evolution of the isolated, world-weary figure appears to be complete, ironically, the pattern begins again with Zack. In him she encounters a stage of innocence, earlier than Lou's (which is itself earlier than Katina's). She picks him out from the other children at first sight (p.281), and when he talks with her in the washroom, she feels a "pact" is born between them (p.283). Their encounter is like her own childhood encounter with The Man who was Given his Dinner. Just as, at the end of that meeting, she knew, with a sense of inevitability, that in spite of the man's promise, he would not return (p.46), so now she looks back and sees that Zack has accepted the finality of her departure, "was taking it for granted" (p.288). Because he is still innocent and uninitiated in the world, she can still bring him some comfort through simple, physical contact, as she could with Lou at the end of Part One, and with Katina at the beginning of Part Two but not at the end. But the degree of change from Part One is now apparent in that her physical touch is ambiguous: We are not sure how far the adult is comforting, and how far she is being comforted by the memory of childhood and
innocence:

He had rubbed his cheek against her cheek. Their blood flowed together. Her desperate words, ordinarily dry, had grown quite suddenly fleshy and ripe. Their locked hands lay in solid silence.

"If I go," she asked, "will you remember me Zack?" (p.288)

Thus we see how the recurrence of the Theodora-figures functions to suggest the universality of Theodora's experience, and to mark her own stages of development. The progress in alienation of the self-conscious, lucid figure, of which Theodora is the type, could be shown schematically in five stages marked by the Theodora-figures:

STAGE I  Zack Pt. 3.
\[\underline{\text{Theodora in early childhood, early Pt. 1.}}\]

STAGE II  Lou at end Pt. 1.
\[\text{Katina at beginning Pt. 2.}\]
\[\underline{\text{Theodora at school, middle Pt. 1.}}\]

STAGE III  Katina at end Pt. 2.
\[\underline{\text{Theodora at end Pt. 1.}}\]

STAGE IV  (Mr Goodman)
\[\text{(Moraitis)}\]
\[\text{(Man who was Given his Dinner)}\]
\[\underline{\text{Theodora at end Pt. 2.}}\]

STAGE V  \[\underline{\text{Theodora in Pt. 3.}}\]

One dimension of the plot is simply the interaction of the lives of these various figures. Theodora's progress from one stage to the next is emphasized for us when she meets people who are behind her; also, as the pattern becomes familiar to the reader he applies it retrospectively, recognizing, for instance at the end of Part Two, when Theodora
is at Stage IV, that The Man who was Given his Dinner was at Stage IV, when she was at Stage I. The Aunt's Story tells us only one of the many stories of which we have caught certain moments as they crossed Theodora's story. The sense of perpetuity of the Theodora story is achieved with subtle completeness, by her meeting Zack (Stage I) when she is at the last stage.

b. THE AUNT'S STORY: THEME

It has been necessary to dwell at such inordinate length on the techniques of The Aunt's Story, before considering thematic elements per se, because of the nature of the themes. For the overall theme of the novel is implicit in the major techniques. It is the development of individual consciousness in the world of White's vision, the coming to a fuller and fuller awareness of the conditions of duality and isolation which are the primary facts of existence as White sees it. The part-structure, the use of motifs and rhythm, and other techniques, are designed to render the unfolding of this consciousness through experience; and the nature of Theodora's consciousness can only be understood through the forms of her experience which the techniques represent. The part-structure is itself a movement towards isolation and this is Theodora's consciousness. The motif-patterns and the rhythms are themselves the organic growths, which stand apart from the objective narrative, and create duality in the novel. The form of the novel is the form of Theodora's consciousness, which is the theme. We may however make an attempt to conceptualize the thematic elements of
duality and isolation by following the chain of abstractions which exist in the novel and which from time to time, give a conceptual definition of the nature of Theodora's state of consciousness, as an intellectual guide to the nature of the theme which is being evolved in the artistic technique.

Theodora is increasingly conscious of the duality and isolation which constitutes the state of alienation to which she finally attains. The exact nature of this duality cannot be contained in a pair of opposite terms, such as life and death, fact and fancy, sense and intellect, illusion and reality, though such antitheses are helpful. Part of the nature of duality is rendered through the complex of motifs: Roses are both beautiful and grub-ridden and Theodora accepts that both aspects are part of the "sum total" (p.21). There is the apparent reality of Meroé, but there is also "another Meroè," "a dead place" (p.23). Existence is in two worlds:

She began to feel old and oracular listening to Frank Parrott's voice, as if she didn't belong. There was this on one side, and life of men keeping sheep and making money, and on the other, herself and Meroë. She was as remote as stone from the figures in the first landscape of which Frank Parrott spoke. (p.83)

It is a duality which separates those who are aware of it, from those who are not, as we see in many instances. In the duck-shooting episode at the fair, the separation is conceptually recognised by the "others" who see that "ever since Theodora had shot the clay heads off the ducks..."
she was separated from them for ever" (p.125). On the other hand, for those who have the vision of duality, there is a communion of isolation, established largely through the "bone" motif, but also conceptualized in more objective terminology though rarely:

And now Theodora began to think that perhaps the man was a little bit mad, but she loved him for his madness even, for it made her feel warm. (p.45)

She smiled the mysterious smile of someone who reads poetry and shares secrets, and Theodora smiled also, because it was true. (p.57)

This thing which had happened between Moraitis and herself she held close, like a woman holding her belly. (p.117)

Consciousness of the mysterious duality at the heart of existence produces, in Theodora, the personal anguish of uncertainty as to the world of one's "true" identity. By talking to her unrecognised self in the person of Holstius, Theodora demonstrates that, in the end, she has accepted her "true" existence in one of the two worlds; but up to this point in the novel, she is increasingly uncertain where the real part of herself is to be found. She stares at her face in mirrors, and on one occasion, "she spoke to the face that had now begun to form, its bone" (p.51). She observes in her reflection, "the dark eyes asking the unanswerable questions" (p.52). She is often struck by the strangeness of her own body:

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. (p.152)
Theodora saw how very awkward at times her own feet were in their thick black shoes. (p.55)

The theme of anguish begins in the slight uncertainty suggested in the last quotation and reaches its climax just before the end of the novel. Her consciousness of existence in two worlds produces an intolerable tension, and once again there are conceptual aids to our understanding, given in the text: "Ah, Theodora Goodman," says Holstius, "you are torn in two" (p.293). And when she asks "in agony" what she can do or say about this, he replies, "I expect you to accept the irreconcilable halves." In one sense, this is precisely what she has been doing ever since she first became aware of the duality--"she could not subtract the grub from the sum total of the garden" (p.21). But the acceptance which her mind is here urging upon her through the Holstius projection is more than mere intellectual recognition. She must recognise the duality, but she must recognise also that it is an absolute condition of existence, and she must therefore give up her quest for some underlying synthesis. Fanny, with a certain conventional accuracy, has sometimes called her mad (pp. 73, 271). And by embarking on her quest Theodora has implicitly assented to the denigration of the label, for she has sought either some new understanding, or a new environment, which will allow her to be called sane. Now, by fully accepting the absolute fact of duality, she will achieve confidence in the integrity of her position, and will be able to say to Fanny and others (in the words of the epigraph), "When your life is most real, to me you are mad." As Holstius says, in perhaps the most important conceptualization of the
theme,

You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow. . . . or flesh and marble, or illusion and reality, or life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman, you must accept. As you have already found that one constantly deludes the other into taking fresh shapes, so that there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality. (p. 293)

Theodora's acceptance of this gospel of integrity is clearly shown in the next paragraph, where her situation is like that of a candidate for religious confirmation:

Resistance had gone out of her as she lay, her head against the knees of Holstius, receiving peace, whether it was from his words, and she was not altogether sure that he spoke, or from his hands. His hands touched the bones of her head under the damp hair. They soothed the wounds. (p. 293)

The courageous integrity of her final position is prefigured earlier in the response which she has--and which separates her from others--to the Jack Frost murders:

Theodora continued to see Jack Frost's irreproachable facade, through which Frost himself had finally dared to pitch the stone. (p. 103)

But unlike Frost, who destroyed others in order to assert his vision of reality, Theodora is characterized by her humility and her desire not to bother anybody. "You will submit," says Holstius.

"It is part of the deference which one pays to those who prescribe the reasonable life. They are admirable people really, though limited.

Theodora nodded her head to each point she must remember.

"If we know better," Holstius said, "we must keep it under our hats." (p. 299)

In the humility of these last words, The Aunt's Story
offers us a more positive, human response to the anguish of the consciousness of duality than, for instance, *Moby Dick* or "The Hollow Men", in both of which the problem is treated. In Melville's novel, Ahab affects super-human pride in his passion to "strike, strike through the mask" of pasteboard which is formed by "all visible objects". His inability to accept the absolute fact of duality leads him to a megalomaniac, epic quest which is no better finally than Eden Standish's "protest of self destruction." His integrity is the integrity of pride. Theodora's humble integrity--which even Voss comes to accept in the last hour--is a nobler attitude.

And in Eliot's poem, the duality is recorded well enough:

> Between the idea  
> And the reality  
> Between the motion  
> And the act  
> Falls the Shadow.

But the final "whimper" of this poem is the unresolved anguish of man who lacks the humility, simply to accept the absolute state of man's "Between"-ness. Unless our personal judgment of Theodora is that she is ultimately a phoney, we must accept that she is a more significant human figure than the hollow men, in her response to the condition of duality.

Another aspect of alienation remains, and this is the basic isolation of the individual consciousness, whether "mad" or not. This theme is presented, as I have said of all the themes, through technical form—in this case the literal isolation of Theodora's consciousness, to a final state in which she can communicate only with herself *qua* Holstius. But we can also observe in the text, a number of conceptual statements of the theme.
We should not expect, of course, any significant communication between the two groups of individuals who are divided from one another by the factor of consciousness of duality. We do not expect much rapport between, say, Theodora and Fanny or the Parrotts, and the following incident is typical:

"Evenin' Theodora," said Mr. Parrott. "You'll know everybody. Make yourself at home."

This also made it easy for Mr. Parrott. He dismissed himself, because for the life of him he never knew what to say to Goodman's eldest girl. (pp.74-75)

But between those of Theodora's kinship (as I have called it) we might expect to find sympathy leading to communication. On the surface, this would appear to be the case, for we find Theodora establishing a friendship with Violet Adams, The Man who was Given his Dinner, Moraitis and others. Yet their communication is such that it leaves the individual still essentially isolated. The epigraph to Part One tells us this:

She thought of the narrowness of the limits within which a human soul may speak and be understood by its nearest of mental kin, of how soon it reaches that solitary land of the individual experience, in which no fellow footfall is ever heard.

George Goodman realizes in the moment of death that "the narrowness of the limits" is final:

"And we are close," he said. "It is not possible for us to come any closer."

... . . . .

"In the end," his voice said out of the pines, "I did not see it."

Then Theodora, with her face upon his knees, realized that she was touching the body of George Goodman. (p.88)
Moraitis, too, "accepted the isolation" (p.115). As indeed does Theodora herself:

There is no lifeline to other lives. (p.137)

In the end, her experience of isolation is so overwhelming that she reaches the state of pure philosophical solipsism in which she doubts the existence of anyone, even of herself and Holstius with whom she has appeared to communicate so positively:

Fact corrected expectation. Just as the mind used and disposed of the figments of Mrs Rapallo, and Katina Pavlou, and Sokolnikov. And now Holstius. She watched the rough texture of his coat for the first indications of decay.

"You suspect me," Holstius said.
She spat into the fire. She heard the strong hiss of spittle.

"I suspect myself," Theodora said, feeling with her fingers for the grain in the table. (p.292)

And Theodora's final state of acceptance, which we have considered in relation to the condition of duality, includes also the fact of isolation. The last sentence of the novel presents a final image of her wearing on her hat the rose--the symbol of her personal existence (p.299)--which "trembled and glittered, leading a life of its own."
PART 2

THE TREE OF MAN

Patrick White's next novel, *The Tree of Man*, has given rise to a great deal of critical perplexity, which is worth discussing because it underlines the basic contention of this thesis: that White's novels can only be fully understood as inter-related parts of the rendering of a consistent artistic vision. Until we have understood the lines of development within the works themselves, it seems futile, and is often quite confusing, to try to understand individual works in terms of preconceived categories or in relations to established genres within the history of the novel. We must look first at the vision which informs all the works, and not at superficial resemblances to other works, as so many critics have done in relation to *The Tree of Man*.

*The Tree of Man* and White's comments on it provide a classic illustration for Lawrence's advice about trusting the tale, not the writer. "I wanted to try to suggest in this book every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman,"¹ says White. This extraordinary statement, almost invariably quoted in criticism of the novel, is undoubtedly the main cause of the large measure of agreement, at a superficial level, which we find in that criticism. The following quotation is typical of many judgments:

It is a large, generous, complex novel which, despite certain weaknesses, does succeed in giving a remarkably comprehensive picture of the life of a man and his family. Patrick White succeeds in suggesting the
universality of the joys and sorrows of common humanity; and the novel conveys a sense of the rhythm of life, the inevitable pattern of birth, growth and decay.²

And it is through this emphasis on universality, as we find it in the reviews of the novel, that it was recommended to the American public, and thus became a best-seller under partly false pretences. Excerpts from these American eulogies are on the cover of the English edition, and they include such remarks as,

A timeless work of art from which no essential element of life has been omitted. (James Stern)

A majestic and impressive work of genuine art that digs more deeply into the universal experiences of human living than all save a few great books. (Orville Prescott)

More recently however, criticism has revealed a certain uneasiness about these epic, universal pretensions:

"I wanted to try to suggest in this book every possible aspect of life, through the lives of ordinary man and woman." The Tree of Man must be praised for the gallantry of the attempt rather than for the sureness of its achievement.³

And even Brissenden noted uneasily,

So far as The Tree of Man is concerned it may be that White has been praised more for his intentions than for what he actually succeeded in doing.⁴

This disparity between the attempt and the achievement is one of the most frequent criticisms of White. We have seen it already in relation to The Living and the Dead; and it had actually been used against The Tree of Man even before the "universal human saga" definition was applied and found to be unrealised. In 1957, A.D.Hope, in one of his denigrations
of the book, described it as an unsuccessful attempt to write within the frontier-novel tradition or genre. White, he said, had been "unable to resist the pattern that seems imposed on Australian fiction" and yet had failed to make "all the cliches of Australian fiction" relevant to his theme. Subsequent writers have denied Hope's primary assumption that the novel is a celebration of pioneering, but they in turn have failed to provide a satisfactory alternative view.

The course of perplexity is undoubtedly the characterization of Stan, and to a lesser extent Amy. Those who have tried to reconcile the strange rendering of consciousness with the unexceptional narrative framework of the novel have been unable to do so, and have therefore tended to overlook the rendering of consciousness, as the unsatisfactory part of an otherwise good book. Buckley, who considers it "White's finest work," summarily dismisses the central character "because we are given no clue to his inner life." I shall try to show that there are clues to Stan's inner life (as well as to Amy's and other characters' inner lives) and that these are a central component of the novel.

Our understanding of this point is assisted by G.A. Wilkes, who writes pertinently:

Stan Parker is the mute visionary in The Tree of Man. He represents an element in the book that critics have shied away from, even though it is a central element, and one persistent in White's work from the beginning.

In thus "shying away", critics have avoided the chief vehicles of consciousness in the novel. A valid reading must focus
attention on them, for Stan and Amy, like Oliver Halliday, like Elyot Standish, like Theodora, are born into the world of White's consistent vision—a world of alienation, of duality and isolation—and it is through their consciousness that the vision is rendered.

But whereas in the three previous novels, existence in White's world has been explored from the point of view and through the consciousness of highly self-conscious, intellectually nimble individuals, whose lucid perceptions of the paradoxes which White conceives have tormented them to distraction, now, in this fourth novel, the point of view is of a different kind. For Stan Parker and Amy, who between them form the main focus of the novel, are slow, inarticulate, uncomprehending people. Wilkes' "mute visionary" is an apt expression. But the fact that they are less able than other White figures to conceptualize the nature of their experiences of life, does not alter the facts in which those experiences inevitably originate. "I do not understand," says Amy, about her wayward son's motives, "but I know" (p. 355). To say, as White himself and others have done, that the Parkers are "ordinary" and therefore more representative of humanity than is Theodora, is only to say (and it is probably true), that there are more individual people in the world like Stan, than like Theodora. But if the Parkers are, in this statistical sense, more average than Theodora there is no reason why we should consider them more (or less) essentially human than she is. To suggest, as Wilkes does, that The Tree of Man "might almost have been written to put an end to the theme of alienation" is entirely misleading.
As less articulate people than most of White's characters, the Parkers are not aware of their experience in abstract concepts or philosophic terms. They do not say, as the Young Man does in the passage I have prefixed to this chapter (on page 59), "my dilemma in the play is how to take part in the conflict of eels, and survive at the same time." But they do experience this "dilemma". Stan, for instance, is aware of the same conflict between his participation in the world of social realities, and his survival as an individual, conscious of personal mysteries, as the Young Man describes. And although Stan does not call it a dilemma or talk of conflict and survival, his slow, instinctive mind does express his awareness of the frustrating and absurd condition of life, in its own way; and on one occasion at least, he finds the same image as the rationally, philosophic young man has used:

All these men, rocking on their heels or inclining gravely were anxious for Stan Parker to assume their size, to tell them something from his own heroic life. So they inclined, and waited. There was one thing to tell. But he could not.

"Go on," he said, shaking the hands from off the sleeve of his coat. "Leave me. There's nothing to tell."

Several surprised gentlemen mumbled through respectable lips of purple grapeskins, "What's got inter yer, mate?"

"Tell what?"

"The flickin truth is not told, so nobody asked for it, or nothin. See?"

Stan Parker looked round the place, seeing that it was now pretty full, and writhing, yet he was alone with his thoughts, could look at a wall, if he chose, between the heads of eels. (p.333).

There is a second, false critical assumption which is
also worth some discussion. Again, White himself is probably the main source of error. He adds to the statement quoted earlier,

But at the same time, I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people, and incidentally my own life since my return.

"Mystery" and "poetry" are misleading terms, insofar as they suggest some kind of neo-Wordsworthian or Faulknerian uplifting of the heart. Buckley reads the book, apparently expecting to find that Stan's life will finally be made "bearable" through the attainment of some easily explicable panacea. He complains of "a certain perversity" in White's rendering of the sense of peace at the end of Stan's life. "We can have no clue," he says, "to the significance of this reconciliation with the actual, because it is put in gratuitously." Likewise, Wilkes comments that

for all its insistence on the values of the workaday world, its mystique of man immersed in nature, The Tree of Man shows that fulfilment for Stan lies not within life as normally lived, but beyond it. This is the source of an uncertainty in the book--the tension between what the novel is apparently advocating, and what it enacts."9

We may consider later just what White means by "mystery and poetry". Meanwhile, it is necessary once again to insist that White is a consistent novelist of vision, not a prophet or a teacher; that he is concerned to render life as he sees it, to "imitate" in the Aristotelian sense; he is not concerned to advocate vitalism or stoicism, or any other ethical or philosophical code--at least not in 1955. As a
sensitive human being, he has a particular understanding of the nature of existence, and this is his vision; and as an artist, he has both the vision and the technique to render the vision in communicable form. His art offers us a way of seeing life, not a road to contentment. As an artist, he also has the right to be judged in terms of the vision which he renders in his text. A close scrutiny of the text reveals that there is nothing to justify the expectations which Buckley, Wilkes and others claim are unsatisfied.

On the contrary, the one direct clue which White does, in fact, give, as a preliminary guide to the meaning of his novel, suggests something quite unlike an answer to human problems, such as the critics have looked for: The title of the book, and the poem from which it comes (part of which is included in the text and is identified for the reader on the obverse of the title page) suggests a continual state of human distress and personal limitations—of mankind ("the tree") endlessly disturbed, and of individual men ("the saplings") taking turns in a sequence of harassed and short-lived life cycles:

The tree of man was never quiet:
   Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

The gale it plies the saplings double,
   It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:
Today the Roman and his trouble
   Are ashes under Uricon.

White's novel, then, explores the condition of man who is both part of the general tree, blown by the wind but continuing to survive, and also an individual sapling, bent double by the gale and soon to disappear into ashes. In treating this theme, White extends the rendering of his
vision of life as a state of alienation, and he must be allowed the same critical open-mindedness as we are accustomed to allow to writers from George Eliot to Faulkner, whose sensibilities are generally recognised as having complex modern bases. White's work will not be pinned down under such labels as "the mystique of man immersed in nature," nor be adequately explicated by eulogies and comparisons. An examination of technical and thematic elements will show precisely how it is an embodiment of that vision of which the only safe generalization that can be made—on the basis of the previous novels—is that it is likely to focus on the problem of alienation; and the title-poem confirms this expectation.

a. THE TREE OF MAN: TECHNIQUES

Just as the part structure of The Aunt's Story was designed to render Theodora's experience of life, so The Tree of Man is structural in a series of parts corresponding to Stan and Amy's life experience. The three parts of the earlier novel revealed the narrowing focus of a primarily mental, or intellectual awareness of the chain of events within the inner world of Theodora's own mind. The four parts of The Tree of Man reveal a progression in which the objects of experience exist in the stable world of objective reality—the outer world; and the pattern of awareness is not a narrowing down, but a cycle related to the natural, seasonal cycle. The parts develop the Parkers' consciousness through youth, early maturity, middle age and old age, corresponding to spring, summer, autumn and winter.
In Part One, we see the Parkers actively blossoming in the springtime of their lives, establishing themselves on the land, planting and clearing and building. And their consciousness of objects and events selects particular aspects of the spring season:

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. (p.26)

It was a season of activity and life that might hold almost any issue, as she walked with her pail, evenings, to the waiting cow. (p.52)

In Part Two, the ground-breaking activity of youth slackens off and people begin to congregate around their village,

The women to dawdle through their shopping, the men, with less excuse, to waste time. Summer was a time of white dust and yellow grit. (p.101)

The Parkers produce children and fall into a kind of summer stupor of contentment and productivity:

The sturdy woman with her two children continued standing amongst the trees. (p.136)

New patterns of life, of paddock and yard and orchard, would be traced on the sides of the hills and the little gullies. But not yet. In time. In slow time too, of hot summer days. (p.102)

These were, on the whole, becalmed years, in spite of the visible evidence of growth. Any reference to the future was made, not with conviction, but in accordance with convention. (p.125)
This dreamy period comes to an end with the outbreak of vast, destructive forces of nature and man—"the fire that could consume, apparently, whole intentions" (p.169), and "the great joke of war" (p.194).

Part Three, the autumn of "the tree of man", is filled with a sense of failing powers, of inadequacy to tackle the personal problems of life which become more and more ponderous:

The days of autumn in which she walked were perfect in themselves. The wind dropped at that time of the year. Birds rose indolently and alighted with ease. Quinces fell and rotted after a time; she sat on a doorstep and could not pick them up . . . . Only the human being might still erupt, and assume fresh forms, or disintegrate. She watched her husband walking through the stubble. He had begun to shrivel a bit. His neck was old. What if she should find Stan fallen in the grass with his face lost in an expression she did not know? (p.234)

The children grow up and depart from home, leaving the parents empty:

There was nothing, of course, that you could explain by methods of logic; only a leaf falling at dusk will disturb the reason without reason. Stan Parker went about the place on which he had led his life, by which he was consumed really. This is my life, he would have said if he had expressed himself other than by acts of the body. But there were seasons of stubble and dead grass, when doubts did press up. (p.302)

Of course her son had gone away by this time, so Amy Parker went quickly out. Then what have I got? she asked, as the void hit her . . . . She longed for some knowledge of which others were apparently possessors. I have nothing, I know nothing, she suspected. Her breath panted to learn, as her ankles turned on stones, but there was no indication where or how to begin. (p.366)
In Part Four, the Parkers and their homestead slip further and further towards decay and death. The cycle of individual existence is coming to an end, while the wide, impersonal world continues in its endless cycles:

The garden at Parkers' had almost taken possession of the house. (p.371)

The wooden homes stood, each in its smother of trees, like oases in a desert of progress. They were in process of being forgotten, of falling down, and would eventually be swept up with the bones of those who had lingered in them. (p.408)

Stan and Amy are grandparents, and they move slowly and weakly through the winter of their lives. In the first pages of this section Stan has a physical collapse, and the unpleasantness of winter is mentioned several times. Amy comforts herself by polishing furniture "with long methodical sweeps until it lit the winter with the glow of old red wood" (p.373). Visitors come and go, and the Parkers begin to live more and more in memories, recalled in the calm of physical repose:

Amy Parker got back ponderously onto the veranda. Whole afternoons she waited for other witnesses of the past, but saw young people who had not yet lived, and strangers who were blank or kind. . . . So she got cranky at times, ugly. Or appeared herself with the past. Growing serene and even wise with these snapshots that she could produce at will from out of her sleeve. The past is a miracle of minor saints. (p.383)

The old people begin to know the depths of fear, and Stan has "a presentiment of death" (p.421):

There he sat. A grey light prevailed, by chance or intention, similar to that which is seen in bedrooms at morning. This is the light in which a man becomes aware that he will die.
The I am going to die, he said. It did not seem possible. (p.420)

Amy's climaxes of fear come with Mrs O'Dowd's death and the Ougley murder though she always manages to forestall an ultimate confrontation of the fact of death by placing her confidence in other people, particularly Stan:

She was thinking all this time of the twin knives turning in Doll Quigley and Mrs. O'Dowd. Then what tortures are in store? she asked, and was afraid, even though she was going home to her husband, a quiet man who would stand up at the last moment perhaps, and say something. Stan will know, she said.

So she was comforted. So the green sky of winter flowed by. (p.485)

Stan, on the other hand, comes to a gradual acceptance of the inescapable conditions of life and the approach of death:

Peace is desirable in itself, he said, and so in the absence of evidence that he would receive more, he accepted this with humility and gratitude. (p.432)

He sits, just before his death, on a patch of grass "which was quite dead-looking from the touch of winter" (p.493); and as he dies, we learn that "he prayed for greater clarity and it became obvious as a hand" (p.497). Amy's last thoughts in the novel reveal her consciousness of his death, in terms of the subtraction of one individual from the continuing human species:

Stan is dead. My husband. In the boundless garden. (p.497)

This contrasts nicely with her springtime confidence in the permanent unity of husband and wife:

Their lives had grown together. They would continue in that way, because it was not possible to divide their common trunk.
The brief, final chapter simply emphasizes the continuity of the life of "the tree of man" after the loss of one stem:

So that in the end there were the trees. The boy walking through them... So that, in the end, there was no end.

We see then, how the part structure establishes Stan's and Amy's consciousness in complete association with the seasonal cycle of the natural world. The association is actual rather than symbolic for Stan and Amy are integrated with the phenomenal world (just as Theodora becomes integrated with the private world of her imagination) and the pattern of their consciousness is simply part of an overall natural pattern. We see, for instance, how the plain, historical perspective of their lives falls into the same pattern (and is likewise rendered through the part structure). Their history is that of plants: In Part One, they grow and put down their roots. In Part Two, they produce fruit. In Part Three, they are stripped of their fruit. In Part Four, (in a pun which sounds silly in quotation, but not in its context, they witness the "strokes... which fell members of the family" [p.492]), and they finally wither and die.

The four-part structure thus exists both in the consciousness of the characters and in the objective narrative. Where Macbeth says "My way of life/Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf;/And that which should accompany old age,/...," he uses a nature image which happens to suit Shakespeare's purpose at that particular point in the play (just as, later, he uses the image of a bear tied to a stake, which is quite unnatural). But in The Tree of Man, nature is used much more fundamentally than as a source of occasional images. The seasonal cycle is established through the part-
structure, in such a way as to establish the nature of the Parkers' central experiences of life, and their consciousness of those experiences.

Superimposed upon this experience of the inevitable, natural cycle, is the Parkers' ironic consciousness that they do not share its permanence. They know that they are, so to speak, annuals in a perennial garden, and this consciousness is rendered, as we shall note, by the use of certain motifs and images which are objects of mystery and wonder. The structure and the consciousness of mystery thus stand in an incongruous relationship to one another and provide the technique for rendering the theme of duality.

Finally, we should notice that the shaping of the Parkers' consciousness in the form of a natural cycle establishes the basis of their epistemology as they confront the problem of duality in their lives. The natural cycle is the form of their experience, and the natural world is the primary substance of reality for them. They are predominantly "earth-bound" as Theodora is predominantly "earth-loosed" and even the mysteries of life are usually apprehended by them through such natural events as storm and lightning. In the two novels, White renders his vision of duality from complementary points of view. Stan's rootedness is nature is the obverse of Theodora's withdrawal into solipsism. Both worlds—the objective, phenomenal world of nature, and the subjective, imagined world of private apprehension—are real according to White's vision and together they constitute the paradoxical duality of existence. Theodora's consciousness moves, largely by means of the part-structure of *The Aunt's Story*, until it is fixed predominantly in the latter world, the subjective. In "earth-bound" language she goes mad.
The Parkers' consciousness is similarly established as predominantly rooted in the former world, the objective.

To put this point another way: Theodora makes a crossing from "this" world into another world, and the part-structure of her story shows this. Stan and Amy have intimations of another worlds, but they do not make the crossing; they remain fixed in the natural cycle which the part structure of their story renders. They do not "go mad", but remain in the world of nature until they are "felled".

The use of motifs in The Tree of Man is less obtrusive than in any of the other novels. This is largely because of the fact, that in establishing the natural world as the centre of reality for the Parkers, White's artistic idiom becomes a common idiom. In other words, the main motifs he chooses for rendering natural experiences are so common in literature and life, that they do not stand out in the way that the bones motif or the mirror motif does, in other novels. We think of "the tree of man", for instance, as a large and rather vague symbol, and we can easily fail to observe the frequent and meticulous use of trees as a motif. Yet there are over fifty recurrences of the motif, in the novel, and the following examples illustrate the range of its usage as an index of individual character and of man's relationship with nature:

Ray Parker, whose life and character are presented as unnaturally destructive, is revealed to us at certain moments through the motif:

He loved to shin up and clamber from branch to branch, until he was almost bending the crest, and now this
sensation was most imperative. To touch the thick wood. To struggle with and finally overcome it. (p.133)

He was perpetually wandering through bush, hacking or scratching, looking for birds or something to kill . . . Ah, if I could escape, he said, bending a sapling till it broke. (p.227)

His sense of oppression and persecution, which provokes gratuitous acts of savagery, is rendered through the motif, in his consciousness, when he hacks up Con's family snapshots:

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 goodnes were excluded from that place, the sky being obliterated for the moment. The boy was shivering, that took out the knife . . . . (p.240)

Again, when he ridicules Thelma's hopes for natural, domestic stability his own sense of oppression within the home is rendered through his consciousness of trees:

He sat looking out of the window at skeins of grey rain that were being flung across the paddocks, and black trees restrained so far by their roots. (p.251)

The antithesis of Ray's destructive spirit, his father's harmonious involvement in the natural world, is also developed through the motif. Stan builds his first, temporary abode out of "bags and a few saplings" (p.37). When his log house is complete, it forms part of the natural surroundings:

Seen through the trees, it was a plain but honest house. . . . (p.11)

And though he has had to cut down trees, his destruction has been for a natural, creative purpose, and we are told that "the stumps had ceased to bleed" (p.11) in due course. Subsequently, his life experiences are
rendered in terms of the motif—even down to the detail of seeing a hand which lands near him in battle as "a tendril that had been torn off some vine" (p.203). As a great storm breaks on his frail homestead and threatens to destroy it, he feels that "God blew from the clouds, and men would scatter like leaves" (p.43); and he is aware, as the wind rises, of "the passionate striving of trees" (p.43). Late in life, his sense of peace, acquired through mere acceptance of his existence in the world of nature is beautifully rendered through a variation of the motif:

He had developed a passion for carpentry in recent years, and could now see with peculiar distinctness the grain on the particular wood on which he was working, and the nick near a dovetail which had been worrying him because of the blemish it would leave. Otherwise, the simplicity and rightness of his work was greatly satisfying.

In his fever he could not have been cleaner swept. All that he had lived, all that he had seen, had the extreme simplicity of goodness. Any acts that he relived in that ample darkness of the room were performed with the genuine honesty of freshly planed wood. (p.406)

And for those readers who may relish the very faintest artistic touch, such anguish as Stan still has at the thought of death is rendered in the ultimate elaboration of the motif:

Oh God, oh God, he was saying from time to time, but very quietly and dustily, like sawdust. (p.407)

Getting back to the bolder strokes, we find at the end of Stan's life, the most direct and obvious appearance of the motif, which stands also as one of the tree symbols, independent of its recurrence as a motif, for part
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. . . . (p. 493)

From these quotations alone, we see that although the tree motif is used extensively in the novel, its force can easily be missed in a casual reading, or it may simply be read as a loosely applied symbol. In a closer reading, we discover that recurrence with variation creates a motival rhythm, revealing character and the nature of consciousness.

Of the common natural objects and phenomena which form other relatively unobstrusive motifs in the novel, the most important are those of roses, lightning, cabbages, possessive love, gazing out of a window, plants rubbing and "sawing" against houses. The way in which these motifs are used to render vision is something which White's readers perceive as they become familiar with his works, and they could each be discussed in the way that we have discussed the tree motif.

A second kind of motif, in *The Tree of Man*, and one which is more characteristic of White's work as a whole, is the motif which is unusual, either in itself, or in the way it is presented, or in the concepts to which White relates
it. The nutmeg grater, for instance, is, in itself, an uncommon object and we therefore notice its few recurrences as a motif, more than we do, say, cabbages in the novel. We recall it as we recall the nautilus shell or Mrs Goodman's paper knife. The nutmeg grater and the Parkers' separate attitudes to it, are a tiny indication of the change which takes place in their romantic idealism, between the early spring and the late winter of their lives. At the end, Amy is still a little excited by the useless object, while for Stan it is just some "irrelevant thing" which "he had forgotten" (p.496).

Another motif of this second kind is that of ants—common enough, but presented unusually, as in Mr Gage's painting (p.290), or where Amy is "staring eye to eye with the ant" (p.28). Also there are a few occasions when the bones motif of The Aunt's Story crops up, though these are, naturally, rare in The Tree of Man, since this motif is used to render a form of consciousness which is dominant in Theodora and only vestigial in the Parkers.

One of the best, though slightest, examples of the unusual motif, is detail of gristle in the neck, which forms a rhythmic indication of the consciousness of age. It occurs first where "Stan Parker knew by his mother's shoulders and the gristle in her neck, that she would die soon" (p.9). There follow, in the course of the novel, several reappearances and variations of the motif, including one which illustrates clearly how Stan's consciousness is physical, where Theodora's is mental:

Stan Parker sat there in the lovely morning, feeling his neck, which was gristly, and his sides, of which
the ribs were weak. If he could have put his hand on his own soul and judged its shape, age, toughness and durability, he would have done so. . . . He continued to smile through a haze of exhaustion, watching the young man work at a normal rate. (p. 376).

(Theodora's self awareness is revealed, not through feeling her neck, or watching the way a younger person acts, but through studying her own face in a mirror and contemplating the nature of what she sees).

Besides the part-structure and the use of motifs, a third, main technical feature of *The Tree of Man* is the unusual prose style. This aspect of the novel has been much discussed, and either condemned or condoned. Critics have consistently failed to admit the possibility that the strange effects which White achieves through this technique may be a successful realisation of a deliberate artistic intention. They concur in finding the main effect one of confused and disconnected expression; and, with one voice, they regret this lack of clarity. White, we are led to believe, has attempted some original purpose (variously specified), and has failed to achieve it perfectly, through becoming too "manneristic". The intention of this rendering has not been sought at any depth, or with a willingness to be educated to perceive new technical possibilities. Instead, its effect has been pooh-poohed as a poor derivative from Forster, Hemingway, Joyce, Lawrence and Faulkner. The kind of reading which this thesis is urging for White's work can, once again, be usefully clarified, by establishing the apparent error of the critics in this respect, and by offering
an emphatically different alternative. We shall therefore examine a representative statement by a mature and scholarly critic, whose article on *The Tree of Man* has been described as "excellent" by another White scholar, and has been anthologised in a collection which purports "to assist the common pursuit of true literary judgment."

The famous style becomes almost a separate subject for analysis, precisely because it is so often and so obviously something else than an instrument of clarity; so often it has only a factitious relation to the things he is writing about. The more complex the material, the more decorative and evasive the prose seems to become. In an earlier novel, *The Aunt's Story* (1948), for example, the whole of the second half of the novel is imprisoned in a soft cocoon of imprecision. The prose is at its best when he is evoking simpler, more direct sensations, perceptions, and imaginings. But at moments of complex crisis, it is pretentious and evasive (p.326):

The woman Amy Parker began to turn out the house during those days, to fold quantities of brown paper, to make little hanks out of lengths of string, to glance through old letters and come across yellow photographs . . . This photograph she stood upon a chest in the bedroom, propped against a vase, and would go there guiltily to look at it. Before resuming the business of her house. Arranging and furbishing.

"Here are some handkerchiefs that I put by, Stan, and that you have not used," she said once to her husband, with the clear overtones of voice used by one whose secret life is cloudier.

She brought the pile out to show that it was true, that there should be at least this between them. She was a good wife, putting a handkerchief in his pocket before he went on a journey, and brushing the fallen hair from his collar with her hand. He accepted all this, of course. And today, which was the day he had agreed to advise
a young man, a Peabody, about the purchase of some land at Hungerford, which is the other side of Bangalay.

This passage seems an uneasy mixture of exactitude and affectation. The psychological observation is correct, but the language is sometimes almost coy in its pretentiousness; the last sentence, for example, has something ludicrous about it. And the affectation is the result of his attempt to take in too many diverse influences: some passages are a sort of fruit salad of modern prose. H.J.Oliver mentions Forster; but Joyce, Faulkner, Hemingway and Lawrence are all in the bowl as well.13

The nub of Buckley's objection is that "the style has only a factitious relation to the things White is writing about;" the prose is "evasive". The psychological accuracy of observation, is seen as the true merit of the passage. We reconstruct the thinking that lies behind this conclusion, something like this: "Yes, this is real; this woman, at this autumn period of her life--her children gone, old age approaching--staves off boredom by domestic rituals, wandering about the house, sorting out old snapshots, getting her husband's handkerchiefs ready; yes, stealing nostalgic, and even guilty, glances at a picture of herself as a girl. So she hands Stan these handkerchiefs, to establish her wifely role, and (for the plot) because he's going out. Where? To help young Peabody buy land (Good! Stan is now the elder advising the youth on essential matters). Oh, there's more . . . 'at Hungerford'. So what? More still . . . 'which is the other side of Bangalay.' Oh come now, this is irrelevant and a bit pretentious, a sort of 'and-they-came-to-Jericho-which-is-on-the-further-side-of-Jerusalem' effect."
On the face of it, such a response would seem justifiable. Why, after all "at Hungerford" and why the solemn and gratuitous information "which is the other side of Bangalay"? The answer, I think, is that the place and its distance from Durilgai are uppermost in Stan's and Amy's consciousness, for specific reasons, and we have to understand that the narrator is rendering their consciousness when words are used in the manner of this last sentence. In part, the information and its serious conveyance represent simply the sense of importance which attaches to the unusual event of Stan's leaving the homestead. But, more importantly, they reveal the nature of the Parkers' consciousness, in response to Amy's adultery. Stan is not exactly sure of the nature of the disturbance which has occurred in his recent absence from home, and Amy is not quick-witted or vicious enough to recognise and jump at this new opportunity for infidelity. But now that Stan is going away again, it does register in their minds that some important fact is related to the distance of his absence, in time and space. And, being the kind of people that they are, their consciousness of this factor in the journey is rendered through fixing of their minds on definite places, rather than in abstract terms. We are not told "... at Hungerford, which would mean an absence of six and a half hours from home--hours in which the thing that had happened might happen again."

This point is, of course, only one of the details in the long quotation from Buckley; but it is a central one, for it is both the main ground of his objection, and the
culmination in the passage of White's rendering of a particular episode of consciousness. It is associated with Amy's looking at the photograph, and her care for Stan's handkerchiefs, in providing a multiple rendering of her present (cloudy) consciousness of her adultery. The setting up and looking at the photograph is part of a whole stream of nostalgic actions which have been set off in her by her lover, and which flow through the previous fifteen pages of the novel. And the ritual of handkerchiefs is an extension of her desire for atonement, first seen in her attitude to Stan after the first act of adultery:

She wanted to do something for him.
"Here's a nice piece, Stan," she said, "with the fat on that you like." (p.313)

We see then, how White's prose style is part of an integrated technical complex which repays close reading. In considering the two phrases discussed above, we see how effectively White uses the smallest stylistic units. By means of a series of slight prose distortions of this kind, he has created a substantial effect in the book as a whole, which annoyed some of those who did not appreciate the method and its rationale.

White's style is indeed "the very linchpin of what he has to say". In *The Tree of Man* it renders the nature of the Parkers' conscious experience—a slow progression of sensations, which are mainly physical in the sense that they relate chiefly to the objective realities of the natural world; the ordinary and repetitive cycles of event and attitude of an intellectually under-developed couple, whose
sensitivities to the ironies and paradoxes of life is primitive and instinctual, rather than sophisticatedly rational and abstract. Hence, for example, Amy's consciousness of the spring morning with all its promise of productivity, is presented through her selective vision of certain objects, the significance of which is sensed rather than abstractly perceived:

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, melting 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. (pp.26-27)

This is not a direct stream-of-consciousness technique, but a carefully selective rendering in which her impressions are translated through the narrator's vocabulary. (It is White, not Amy, who, for instance, describes the stench as "glandular"). But her perceptions are still simply rendered rather than described or commented on. The reader may translate the perceptions into concepts if he wishes; but Amy cannot; and if we resist this temptation, and simply accept her perceptions as images, we have a direct experience of her consciousness.

Another interesting and noticeable feature of the prose,
is the repeated use of simple, generic terms—the man, the woman, the husband, the mother, the son—in place of actual names (or often, as a prefix, as in "the woman, Amy Parker"). Admittedly this does tend to create a sort of "Adam-and-Eve-in-Australia" effect. Yet this effect is subsumed in the larger purpose—the rendering of the nature of the Parkers' consciousness. In order to understand this point, we have first to realise that when the narrator uses an expression like "the man, Stan Parker", the phraseology conveys not so much an objective awareness of his presence, as Stan's subjective self-awareness (or Amy's awareness of him). This is the way Stan and Amy think and we do not find the device occurring in relation to, say, Thelma or Ray, except when they come into Stan's or Amy's consciousness. Thus it is only when Thelma and Dudley arrive at Durilgai that the latter is referred to as "the husband" rather than "her husband" or plain "Dudley". Amy asks Stan: "Do you like this man, the solicitor?" and he replies, "He seems a good sort of man." To be constantly aware of oneself and others by personal name, is the property of a more lucid, analytic mind than the Parkers possess. For to be aware of a person primarily by name, is to be aware of his personal identity, rather than his generic existence. Since the Parkers' central experience of reality is rooted in the physical properties and rhythmic cycles of the natural world, so they are aware of themselves and one another primarily as fellow-participants in the affairs of that world—literally, as animals, and sharing some of the anonymity with which we regard animals. They differ
from one another in the broad, sexual division and in other generic ways. Their personal attributes are limited, more or less, to circumstantial accidents, as when Amy becomes "the forsaken woman" (p.28), when she is left alone in the house. Normally she is "the woman" or "the wife", and Stan is "the man". In Part One, she is "the thin girl" (p.22), "the young woman" (p.3), and he is "the man", "the young man, her husband" (p.31). Mrs. O'Dowd is consistently "the neighbour woman" (p.56) and "the fubsy woman" (p.57). They never get to know the name of the child picked up in the flood. He is simply "the child" and, later, "the lost boy," because this is how the Parkers are aware of him. By the fourth part, Stan is "the grandfather" (p.407) and "the old man" (p.495), as well as simply "the man." Thus the simple denominators are part of the overall techniques of rendering the nature of their consciousness and the pattern of its growth.

b. THE TREE OF MAN: THEME

The theme of The Tree of Man might be described in the same general terms as those used about The Aunt's Story, which I repeat from p.93 above: The overall theme of the novel is implicit in the major techniques. It is the development of individual consciousness in the world of White's vision, the coming to a fuller and fuller awareness of the conditions of duality and isolation which are the primary facts of existence as White sees it. But the nature of the Parkers' awareness of these facts is different from Theodora's, as they are different kinds of people. In discussing
Happy Valley, we saw how White's characters are spread out in a scale of self-awareness (see pp. 27-31 above), on which Oliver represents the extreme high, and the Belpers and Furlows the extreme low. The latter were described as "dimly aware of their plight as human beings, but . . . unable to see ways and means of winning through to fulfilment" (p. 29 above). In Theodora, White extends his treatment of the "Oliver end" of the scale; in the Parkers, he gives his first full consideration to the "Furlow end."

The principal difference between the Parkers and Theodora is that in their response to consciousness of duality in life, the former remain on the "normal" side of the dividing line. Thus the part-structure of The Tree of Man does not (as that of The Aunt's Story did) act as a striking means of rendering the theme of duality. We must recall that in each novel the part-structure "is designed to render the unfolding of consciousness" (p. 93 above). Whereas Theodora's increasing "abnormality" corresponds to the movement towards isolation in the structure of her story, the overall "normality" of Stan and Amy is matched by the normal, cyclical life processes which the part structure of their novel renders. The part-structure thus reveals their integration in the unified, natural world.

However, against the background "normality" of the part-structure, White presents the Parkers' occasional intimations of mysteries behind the appearance of things, and this way the experience of duality occurs. To call it the theme of duality is perhaps misleading, for Stan and Amy do not conceptualize two possibilities, like Theodora's two Meroes
or Oliver's "world" and "not world". Like the Furlows, their awareness is dim, and it would therefore be more accurate to say that they experience vague ontological doubts. Nevertheless, their experience is basically similar to that of White's more conscious characters, whose articulate concepts of duality do not help them to greater ontological certainty. In continuing to use the term "duality" we reflect that White's vision does not change between The Aunt's Story (or even Happy Valley) and The Tree of Man, despite the different degrees of cerebral capacity of his characters.

The clearest indication of the Parkers' consciousness of duality comes through the impact on their sensibilities of certain objects and events of wonder. For Stan, there are boyhood memories of Shakespeare and the Old Testament, and for Amy, the silver nutmeg grater. Both of them respond with awe to the mysterious violence inherent in nature, for those who can see it, in its expression through lightning, storms, fires and the flood. Then too, the dramatic destruction of Glastonbury creates for each of them strange experiences of unreality which recur in their thoughts and dreams over long periods of time.

All these things break in upon the monotony of the Parkers' lives, casting doubt on the reality of their immediate, experiential shere. They respond with fear and puzzlement, and sometimes with romantic dreams of superhuman joy. Both kinds of response are evident, for instance, in Chapter Five, in the storm and its aftermath.
The storm occurs immediately after the first discordant moment in the Parkers' marriage. ("It was the first time in their relationship that there were any loose ends"
p.42.) As the wind and rain begin to exhibit their power, to "rouse the terror" and "bash the small wooden box" which is their shack, Stan remembers the Old Testament and wonders whose side God is on—his or the storm's:

Surrounded by the resentful inanimacy of rock and passionate striving of the trees, he was not sure. In this state, he was possessed by an unhappiness, rather physical, that was not yet fear, but he would have liked to look up and see some expression of sympathy on the sky's face. (p.43)

As trees snap and splinter, "man and woman were flung against each other with the ease and simplicity of tossed wood" (p.44) and they survive. After the storm, Stan remembered again the figures that had plodded through the pages of his boyhood in the face of drought and famine and war, and the great deserts of human and divine injustice, as he lay on the horsehair sofa. And here he was, still fumbling through the more personal events. He could not interpret the lightning that had written on their lives. (p.45)

Immediately after this evocation of the consciousness of mystery, we are given an indication of the romantic hopes (which Stan and Amy both share):

He had not learned to think far, and in what progress he had made had reached the conclusion he was a prisoner in his human mind, as in the mystery of the natural world. Only sometimes the touch of hands, the lifting of a silence, the sudden shape of a tree or presence of a first star, hinted at eventual release. (p.46)

Later in the novel, several romantic incidents occur but,
though they are exciting at first, they do not provide "eventual release." Madelaine, who represents a separate romantic dream for each of the pair, becomes at last, for Stan, just the memory of a hair-singed woman vomiting wretchedly on the lawn at Glastonbury. For Amy, she develops into the dowdy Mrs Fisher "with the butter on her mouth after scones" (p.451). And the romance is dissolved:

Altogether she could not dissolve too completely the lovely effigy of Madelaine that had been hers. So poetry that has been used up must go out of the system. It must be got rid of as bile if necessary. (p.448)

The word "poetry" in this last quotation reminds us of White's statement that he intended, in this novel, "to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people." In the light of such "mystery and poetry" as we find in this novel, we have to interpret White's statement not as a promise of the discovery of some rapturous or sublime state, but as something akin to Katina Pavlou's realization that "it is better finally to know" about the distressing facts of life, rather than to remain in ignorant joy. White offers the idea that Stan's and Amy's lives are 'more bearable than, say, Mrs Gage's, simply because they are aware of the condition of duality, while she remains in restless ignorance, running about in her "enchanted car." "Mrs. Gage's own life had filled the foreground. She could not have believed in much else" (p.383).

The Parkers' consciousness of duality forms one part of their experience of alienation. The other part is their
sense of isolation. This is expressed chiefly through Stan's and Amy's repeated discoveries that they are unable to communicate fully with one another, as well as through a more general inability to express themselves. Both factors are extensively treated in the novel and they form perhaps the most striking feature of the Parkers' experience.

She was ashamed of not being able to say those things she should. All day long she had listened to the bell on the cow, the laughing of a bird, the presence of her silent house. Her thoughts had chattered loudly enough but took refuge now. (p.31)

He watched her hand, and the old sock that she held on the wooden acorn. And she drew the wool together, sitting at the centre of the night. He watched, and they were indeed the centre, but precariously, and he wanted to be certain. This made him chew the little stub of pencil, and would have undoubtedly resulted in something final, if it was to have been given to him to express himself in his life. But it was not. Except sometimes he had formed the lines of prayers. (p.111)

In part, the general lack of self-expression is a product of the conservative tradition of the farming community. This is comically epitomized in the ritualistic scene where Ossie Peabody comes to buy a calf:

He saw Stan walking across his land. Both men looked away. They had known each other for so long, each took it for granted that he was recognised. Eventually they would meet and talk together, or shape words, between grunts, and silences, and glances, and memories of all that had happened to each other over the years. (p.154)

The same kind of basic, conversational economy exists between Stan and Amy:
His wife came to him and said, "You are going over to Joe Peabody's."

It was a statement, not a question, as she stood with her hands in the pockets of her cardigan, watching her husband scrape the tools. And Stan Parker made no answer, it was a noise, rather, of confirmation, which she had learned by this time to interpret. (p.372)

But Stan particularly feels his inarticulateness as something much more personal and important than a mere feature of rural conservatism. His tormenting sense of inability to say the right things to Amy, to make her understand what he feels, becomes at last a pathetic, fatalist realization that "he would never reach her" (p.460). After his death, even his daughter who is so much more articulate than her parents, "remembered his silences, which she had failed to penetrate . . . but which she suspected at times contained something of worth" (p. 491).

The Parkers then, like Theodora, are conscious of their alienation in conditions of duality and isolation. Also like Theodora, but in different ways, they each come to (or, in Amy's case, approach) a final state of resolution, in which they are able simply to accept the nature of their lives, and cease to fret. Although these final states are inscrutable in that we are not able to feel their effect for the Parkers, they are nevertheless states which are clearly defined in the text.

Briefly, Stan comes to a growing realization in Part Four that "peace in itself is desirable" and he is content simply to accept the nature of life and die in peace. Amy lives on beyond the end of the novel in the knowledge that
she has finally achieved an un-possessive attitude towards someone she loves (her grandson) and that through this relationship, and less intimate social involvement, she will be able to endure the conditions of life. Stan's realization begins when he trips and nearly shoots himself. He decides to go to a Communion Service and we are told,

Then he hoped for God.

It was very peaceful kneeling there on the carpet, once you had got down to it, leaning on the varnished rail, which heat had cracked in its seasons. Pease is desirable in itself, he said, and so in the absence of evidence that he would receive more, he accepted this with humility and gratitude. (p.432)

Later, when the young evangelist leaves him sitting in the garden, with tracts blowing away into the undergrowth, his reconciliation with the natural world (which is strongly rendered through an appearance of the tree motif considered above) leads him to see even a gob of spittle as God, and "a jewel." As he continues to stare at this humblest manifestation of human existence, his simple acceptance of life is complete:

A great tenderness of understanding rose in his chest. Even the most obscure, the most sickening incidents of his life were clear. In that light. How long will they leave me like this, he wondered, in peace and understanding? (p.496)

We may not know why Stan reaches his "peace and understanding" but we do know how. He simply ceases to worry about trying to combat the mysteries and the anguish of life. He accepts that life "is not intended to be easy" (p.465), that "the objects of earth" are "incredible" and that the "blaze of sunlight" is "intangible" (p.497). So
he dies with a complete sense of resolution of care, rendered in what we might call a "psychological image": "that One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums" (p.497).

Amy's resolution is not so complete as Stan's, though it too is clearly defined. Throughout the novel, Amy's maternal instincts have motivated her to love and mother first, the boy from the flood, and later, Thelma and Ray. But she realises through several stages that she has failed to achieve a valuable relationship with these children, mainly because her love has been too possessive. Ray charges that she "would kill a person dead to see what was inside" (p.362). And later, "she no longer experienced any desire to possess" Thelma, "because she had failed to do so" (p.384). Her relationship with Ray's child now promises to satisfy her:

Amy Parker had not attempted to possess this remote child, with the consequence that he had come closer than her own. She was placid with him. She was an old woman of course. It was easier. Even in her moments of irony, or foreboding that this little boy would eventually do or say some cruel thing, or invest himself with some mystery that would not be for her to solve, her well-being was not disturbed. (p.398)

Her attitude, given her different interests and personality, is one of acceptance like Stan's. At the end, little Ray is "the grandson, Elsie's boy, in whose eyes her own obscure, mysterious life would grow transparent at last."

The central theme of The Tree of Man is then, the
nature of life in the world of alienation, as it is expressed through the consciousness of two simple, inarticulate people. The Parkers stand at the other extreme of intellectual lucidity from Theodora Goodman and remain mystified and locked in the world of cyclical nature. Their story complements Theodora's story to make up a comprehensive rendering of man's consciousness of life, as White's vision enables him to see it. The rendering is achieved through the integrated use of mature novelistic techniques. Nothing in these novels is factitious; everything is subordinated to the thematic purpose, the artistic embodiment of vision.

_The Aunt's Story_ and _The Tree of Man_ are White's major naturalistic novels. Beginning with _Voss_, in which he was "above all . . . determined to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism," White's vision is expressed in the large symbolic forms of the later period. Even in _The Solid Mandala_ a fundamental symbolic conception underlies the apparently naturalistic surface; the characters embody Jungian concepts of personality and become complementary symbols of universal man.

Another difference between the earlier novels and the three later ones is that the latter show an increasingly bitter attitude to society. In _The Solid Mandala_ the harsh presentation of man's frailty, the concentration on aspects of hatred and destructiveness, and the horror scene at the end where one dog is swallowing lumps of Waldo's body and the other is chewing at his genitals, all bespeak a mind
which has lost some of the balance which controls the vision of the two novels of the middle period. Elements of misanthropy infect the art.

The direct line of continuation from the theme of The Tree of Man is not, therefore, in the subsequent novels; but we find it in several of the short stories collected in The Burnt Ones. In particular, the stories "Dead Roses," "Clay" and "The Letters" are essentially images of "the burnt ones," those who because they are conscious of alienation, live in an anguished search for peace.
CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF SYMBOLISM IN THE LATER NOVELS

Of the seven published novels, a major division can be made between the first four and the last three. This division is evident in a number of factors which are all related to a basic thematic development. White's artistic vision remains more or less constant throughout the works (though it does acquire certain aspects of maturity after The Living and the Dead, as we have seen). But the later novels do more than simply render the vision. Beginning with Voss, White turns to metaphysics in what appears to be an attempt to discover some form of faith with which to resist the anguish of the consciousness of alienation. He turns away from the naturalistic basis of the first four novels in order to explore the possibility of transcending the mind and the body through a spiritual communion between those who are aware of the desire for such transcendence. The suggestive rendering (it is never a didactic presentation) of this communion or fellowship of illuminati appears to be the main purpose for which White uses the symbolic mode in Voss and Riders. The fellowship is based on a general similarity of vision such as existed between Theodora and Moraitis—"compatriots in the country of the bones." It is represented in Voss, chiefly by the symbolic, imaginary relationships between Voss and Laura, and in Riders, chiefly by the symbol of the chariot.

Voss and Riders are ambitious novels of superb technical performance and intricate theme. For many readers, the achieved form alone is enough to make these novels extremely valuable:
Flawed and imperfect though it is, _Riders in the Chariot_ nonetheless remains, in Manfred Mackenzie's phrase, "a wonderful thing", wonderful both for the authenticity with which the individual segments in its fantastic structure are rendered, and for the splendour and originality of its basic design.²

And it is true that whatever may be our response to and interpretation of the central themes, there are sufficient individual elements of impressionistic brilliance as well as satiric force, to call forth high praise. Nevertheless, the essential meaning of these novels, their overall thematic conception as "meta-novels"³ cannot be ignored. Even if we choose to limit our critical responses to extensions of elements from the earlier novels (such as the rendering of Laura as a Theodora-figure, or of Mrs Godbold as a "mute visionary"; like Stan Parker), we are still not coming to terms with the central effects of these works. It is after all _relationships_ which the symbolic frameworks present, and the meaning of these relationships is problematical. Various interpretations have been tentatively suggested, but they are mostly concerned with the artistic conventions—the symbolism—through which the relationships are presented, and not with their meaning. At any rate no-one has yet explained this meaning at all satisfactorily, and most critics are patently bewildered and even a little annoyed:

There is something tainted about a creative habit which insists on an allegorical reading and then blurs the meaning it points to . . . . There are dangers in presenting a heroic theme in a _symboliste_ mode; and in _Voss_ there is a mandarin quality which is refreshingly missing from _The Tree of Man_.⁴
The problem is whether an equivocal assessment of the events, encouraged by the author, does not tend to disintegrate what he has created: and whether the kind of interrogation of the author's intention which the book invites is adequately received when the reader accepts the invitation and presses the inquiry.5

In *The Solid Mandala* White returns from his metaphysical journey, not quite to naturalism, but to a symbolic rendering based on psychological realism, according to Jungian concepts. In this latest novel, the two principal characters embody the Jungian concepts of "logos" and "eros"⁶ as complementary aspects of human personality, and this basic dichotomy is reflected also in the minor characters. White shows, through the outcome of the plot, that communication is impossible between people in whom different aspects prevail. (Thus Arthur, eros-dominated, and Waldo, logos-dominated, are in permanent antipathy which ends in murder.) Furthermore, though communication is possible between two "erotic" or two "logistic" people, because their interests and mentalities are similar, it is only in a purely "erotic" relationship that any happiness results from the relationship. In so far as the two brothers represent two aspects of one individual, *The Solid Mandala* is a symbolic novel revealing the tragic incongruity in the make-up of human personality: one is either stupid and happy (with one's own psychological kin), or intelligent and miserable, depending on whether one is predominantly erotic or predominantly logistic. In conjunction, within the individual and the race, the two aspects war against one another and produce destructive hatred.
In view of the extent to which White's earlier novels are successful in integrating themes and techniques to create coherent and valuable renderings of his vision, there is something suspect about criticism which writes off the later novels as thematically corrupt. For this reason, and because we are admonished by the fact that previous White criticism has so often been wide of the mark, it is perhaps wiser to suspend judgment on the later period until some critic has analysed its principal features in the way I have tried to do for the earlier. However, it may be worth suggesting for future critics, that *Voss* and *Riders* need interpretation in the light of the symbolic function achieved in *The Solid Mandala*. We should not underestimate White's capacity for originality, and there is certainly a case to be made for viewing his later work in terms of modern psychological thought. We have already seen how the interplay of the Holstius figure and Theodora, at the end of *The Aunt's Story*, enabled White to create a symbolic personification of Theodora's conscious state. And the chief characters in *The Solid Mandala* are consistently realised as complementary aspects of a single, archetypal personality. And we recall the symbolic effect of the relationship between the Young Man and his anima in *The Ham Funeral*. Similarly, it might be possible to accept the principal characters of *Voss* and *Riders* as pure symbols of different aspects of personality, of different motivational forces (Cp. the four Tempters of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*), within the entities of individual (archetypal) personalities, represented by each novel as a whole. Such a reading might enable us to interpret these novels as further integrated renderings, in a
plane more boldly symbolic than has been recognised, of White's vision, rather than attempts to suggest the possibility of a metaphysical solution to the problem of isolation which is inherent in the state of alienation. Thus we should see all the main characters as aspects of ourselves, rather than "a tiny elite, whose members recognise one another through some sixth sense". Indeed, it may be that White's use of a large symbolic mode in these later novels in an unrecognised attempt to render more concretely, that final state of acceptance which, in Theodora and Stan, is presented as inscrutable. Such at least, is the interesting suggestion which we may derive from Cassirer's comments on symbolism and freedom:

The "freedom" which man is able to wrest for himself does not imply that he has removed himself from nature, from her being and operations. He cannot overturn or break through the organic limits which are fixed for him just as for any other living being. But within those limits, indeed by means of them, he fashions a breadth and self-sufficiency of movement which is accessible and attainable only by him. Uexkull once remarked that the formal structure (Bauplan) of each living thing, and hence the determinate relationship between its stimulus world and its functional world, encloses this being as firmly as the walls of a prison. Nor does the human being escape this prison by destroying its walls; he escapes only by becoming conscious of them. Here the Hegelian statement holds good—that he who knows about a limitation is already free of it. This becoming aware is the beginning and end, the alpha and omega, of human freedom. Knowing and taking account of necessity is the genuine process of liberation which "spirit", in contradistinction to "nature", has brought to perfection.

The various symbolic forms--myth, language, art, and science--constitute the indispensible precondition for this process. They are the true media--which man himself has created--by virtue of which he has been able to separate himself from the world, and in this very separation, to bind himself all the closer to it.
Although Cassirer is using the word "symbol" here more basically than is implied when we call Voss and Riders symbolic, the relevance of this statement is clear. It could be argued that in his later novels, White achieves "the genuine process of liberation which 'spirit', in contradistinction to 'nature', has brought to perfection", and that this process is rendered through a radically symbolic form, in keeping with the ambitious venture into freedom, which is consciousness of limitation. But this is only speculation, and for the present the symbolic function of the later novels remains to be understood and appreciated, if indeed it is not the major flaw that it appears to be.
FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER I)


2. Editorial note, Meanjin, XV (1956), 223.


5. See e.g. Colin Roderick, "Riders in the Chariot: An Exposition," Southerly, XXII (1962), 62-77, where the novel is treated as "a fictional essay in Jewish mysticism" and is regarded as a possible testimony of conversion, on White's part.


8. On the other hand, the developing strain of social criticism in the novels, especially the later ones, does display a more or less straightforward argument. But it is only a minor purpose of the works as a whole, and as such, is given only scant treatment in this study.

9. In using the term "naturalism" (particularly in the first and last chapters of this thesis), I do not wish to link White with the deterministic philosophy of such people as Dreiser and Norris. I use "naturalism"--and unfortunately there seems to be no more suitable term--to denote a technique of mimetic art which limits its subject-matter to experience within the natural
world, and does not attempt to find symbolic equivalents for supernatural experience. This is the philosophical meaning of the term according to the O.E.D.: "A view of the world and of man's relation to it, in which only the operation of natural (as opposed to supernatural or spiritual) laws and forces is admitted or assumed." White's earlier novels display such a view. However, the technique of naturalism does not exclude the use of symbols as a means of interpreting or linking experiences.


11 (London, 1927), and (Toronto, 1963), respectively. Tindall (see footnote 12 below) refers frequently to Brown and Forster, and their terms "rhythm" and "pattern".


13 Tindall, p.228.

14 It is worth noting that A.E. Housman (whose influence on White is most evident in The Tree of Man) uses the symbol of bones in a manner closely related to White's usage. See "The Immortal Part," in A Shropshire Lad (London, 1896.) I am grateful to Dr. Elliott B. Gose Jr. for pointing this out to me.


16 Loc. cit.


18 Loc. cit.


FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER II Part 1)


2 For the use of this term and the terms "moral imagination" see Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (New York, 1960), pp. 84-88, 215. Briefly, moral realism is a form of sympathetic appreciation of the multiplicity of human situations and affairs. Trilling illustrates with a striking image: the recognition which comes to a loving father, who has observed the behaviour of his many children, of the endless variety of possible human activity and motivation. The moral imagination is the faculty man exercises in seeking values through moral realism. Trilling sees the novel of the past two centuries as "the most effective agent of the moral imagination." Through use of the moral imagination, in reading a novel, we do more than merely see or admit another person's point of view. We become aware of states of mind and feeling, of which we had previously been ignorant, in part or wholly. Our consciousness, our experience of life may thus be significantly extended.

3 Page refs. throughout refer to edns. listed in the Bibliography.


5 See Happy Valley pp. 20, 153, Riders p. 265

6 Happy Valley p. 127, The Aunt's Story p.27

7 Happy Valley p. 139, Voss p.417.


9 Rasselas Chapter 2.
Compare Ruth's experience in Riders p. 265.

The Aunt's Story epigraph.

We notice, in passing how the Schumann which first enables them to communicate has now yielded place to Chopin in whom they presumably find a more personal idiom as the means of mutual understanding.

Vol. XXXV, 602-609.


See fn. 2 above.


3. *The Literature of Australia*, p.415

4. E.g. He heard her voice darkly down the funnel of the telephone. He went over each little detail of phrase, in what had become a mist, his mind was a mist in which things jostled unexpectedly. She had left him with the receiver in his hands. He looked at these. They were blunt, reddish. They returned a receiver carefully because unaccustomed to the act, the shape. But he could see her thin mouth working, shaping on words in the funnel of a telephone. Talking on the telephone was like having your mouth up against another person's mouth. It made him gulp down words like water running down the sink. (p.191)

5. See especially Chapter 8 of *Aspects of the Novel*.


8. White uses the device differently from Moore. White's plot is a flashback returning to the identical moment, whereas Moore's is a movement forward in time, returning to the identical place.

9. We notice how in *The Ham Funeral*, White's next work, The Young Man opens the play with the words "I have just woken, it seems" (see p.59 below), which leads us to suspect that White may be deliberately drawing attention to the developmental inter-relation of his works. See Loder's article on *The Ham Funeral* and its place in White's development (listed in the Bibliography).
FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER III Part 1)


2 See the Bibliography.

3 C. F. Forster on *War and Peace*, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 170.

4 Chapter XXXVI.
FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER III Part 2)


1. See the various expositions of *Voss* and *Riders* listed in the Bibliography.


5. McAuley, 44.


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IV GENERAL


