CHAPTER - IV
PATHS TO PERCEPTION

The theme of the World War which appears in The Aunt’s Story as a fitting analogue to Theodora Goodman’s own battle for an autonomous female identity, is touched upon again, through Stan Parker’s wartime experiences in The Tree of Man, but is taken up with reinforced intensity in Riders in the Chariot. The peculiar combination of events that generated the second world war, and its highly complex and disastrous results, are constituted into a major motif in the novel, against which different values and ethics are measured.

Patrick White, in this novel pays considerable attention not only to the paralyzing impact war had on the sensibility of the western world, but also examines the nature of the so-called peace that followed the war. He seems to be implying that it is a hollow peace, since it is not charged with that rich development of the human spirit, which alone could have offered some sort of a justification for the war, as John Steinbeck puts it in Once There was a War: we should not waste our war.

Though the novel in the main, is distanced from the scene and time of the actual war (apart from the sizable section of Himmelfarb’s narrative to Miss Hare) the war is used as a constant image and threat, ominously hinting that since the old corrosive values continued to persist, the war was still on. Miss Hare the spinster Lady from Xanadu, walking back home, moves through a seemingly peaceful landscape, which has however the hidden menace of war “An early pearliness of light, a lambs-wool of morning promised the millennium, yet, the burnt-out blackberry bushes, lolling and waiting in rusty coils, suggested that the enemy might not have withdrawn” (Riders 7).
In applying the Nazi analogue to the inhabitants of the typical Australian small-town of Sarsaparilla, White's critics complain that he was overstating and exaggerating his case. To compare Australia with Nazi Germany was not only a distortion but also highly ridiculous; but as William Walsh points out:

One can appreciate the indignation which rejects the roughness of Australian factory workers as being in anyway the counterpart of Nazi evil. On the other hand, it seems to me that this is to take a sociological view of White's undertaking. He is not concerned, surely with the relative merits of two societies but with the indissoluble connection of forms of human evil. Each, whether extreme or near, comes from the corrupt will or the clouded understanding. Each in its way is a mode of non-being. (60)

Evil, Riders in the Chariot demonstrates, has several manifestations. As Margaret Atwood puts it in her novel Surfacing: "How did we get bad? For us when we were small the origin was Hitler, he was the great evil many tentacled, ancient and indestructible as the Devil. All possible horrors were measured against him. But Hitler was gone and the thing remained" (129).

But what this novel seems to be constantly asserting and decrying is that everything is exposed to a kind of nullifying simplicity – the reasons for the war, the nature of the peace. Simplification inevitably leads to falsification. This falsifying simplicity is due as White sees it, because of a mode of approach that is fundamentally flawed – the conscious rational approach, which does not take sufficient cognisance of the darker aspects of man. When a tree grows up to heaven
its roots reach down to hell. Nietzsche says ignore or deny you hell-rooted darkness like civilized man tends to do, and it will avenge itself in awful manifestations like to Nazi Syndrome.

The war seems to have profoundly shaken White (as it must have every thinking man) but White’s despair and fear fooling themselves into believing that God was in his heaven and all was right with the world. Besides, White was aware that evil was not localised only in Germany, but was implicit everywhere. Like Isaiah in the Blake epigraph to the novel, he seems to be saying that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences.

He examines the incredible blinkeredness that settled on the people after the second world war, and in this context and episode from the Polish-Jew emigrant family – the Rosenbaums (now anglicized into the Rosetrees) should be useful. Being victims of this particular war, they even more than the others would be expected to have derived a salutory lesson from their war experiences. But they are reluctant to resurrect the traumas again. So Shirl Rosetree who, “had survived the dangers of the flesh [...] did not [...] could not have endured an interrogation of the spirit” (442).

White demonstrates this through Shirl Rosetree’s pitifully inadequate response to a tragic incident. Forced to a realization of their bubble existence by the death of Himmelfarb, whom they had earlier rejected because of his continued association with that part of their history, they were desperately trying to erase from their memories. Mr. Rosetree sits dazed with shame and guilt. His wife, terrified by this lapse into areas of experience she had deliberately shut off, paradoxically suggests the same biblical Egypt which had persecuted her race: “Of course Shulamith could not
see by the light of reason and the shadowy room which was devouring Haim, although the surge of her blood could suddenly almost suggest. But she would not accept" (441).

Typically she wants to retain appearances, maintain a façade of normalcy, rather than face the discomfort of admitting to anything more than what is on the surface:

Mrs. Rosetree would have liked very much to know whether the house in Persimmon Street conveyed an impression of abnormality from outside. Needless to say, it did not. Since normality alone was recognized in Paradise East, tragedy, vice, retribution would remain incredible until the Angel of the Lord stepped down and split the homes open with his sword, or the Bomb crumbled their ant-hill texture, violating the period suites. For the present, it seemed, from the outside, reality was as square as it was built. (441)

If the Lady from Czernowitz in the concentration camp in Poland, reveals to Himmerfarb how degraded and abject the human spirit can become in the face of a brutal and inhuman death, the Rosetrees demonstrate the impoverishment and vacancy that descends on the spirit when they are pressurised to accept social and cultural values not really their own.

White’s chief target of attack is the submerging of the surge of blood and living according to the light of reason – the dead static world suggested by reality being as square as it was built. In exculpation he offers us four characters who operate mainly from modes of consciousness other than the rational. These four characters are
seemingly united by their common vision of the chariot – a symbol however that is rather distanced and vague from the main action of the novel.

They have other, stronger links however, the strongest being their ability to feel through “the surge of blood” rather than by the limiting light of reason. Together they form a kind of esoteric inner circle, the repository of strange, otherwise untapped veins of mysticism and knowledge. Their secret society operates on two levels however, and White cannot avoid certain images and phrases that are more reminiscent of war novels and mystery thrillers than apocalyptic visions.

Curiously many of their gestures and words seem to parallel a kind of underground resistance not unlike the ones the allies operated in France and Germany during the war. While this could imply the impact of the war-experience on White to the extent that he cannot help using the more daring episodes of the war as metaphors for his characters’ spiritual experience, it also serves the purpose of making them sound at times either pompous, or childish and therefore bearably human.

Miss. Hare for instance, warns Himmelfarb the Jew of impending danger and offers him her home as a hideout, in a repetition of his earlier experience in Germany, when the Stauffers had protected him from the Nazis, in their country home in Herenwaldeau. Miss Hare tells Himmelfarb: “I would hide you [...] .There are so many rooms, there would be no necessity to stay very long in one, which would add to the chances of your safety” (304).

She refers to her house-keeper Mrs. Jolley and her confidante Mrs. Falck as though they are Gestapo agents: “At least I must warn you .. when you go from here, that my former house-keeper, Mrs. Jolley suffers from certain delusions. I do not
think she is an active agent. But is under the influence of a Mrs. Flack, whom I have never met, only suspect ",(305).

Similarly, Alf Dubbo a half-aboriginal artist and one of the riders, is filled with a sense of disloyalty when he displays one of his paintings (expression of the secret power of the group) to an outsider. All this is not to undermine their relationships with one another, but to indicate how they do not escape their creator’s sardonic gaze. The very fact that they are exposed to irony makes them more acceptable. They all have to grow, from their original preconceived notion of things, to a higher level of awareness.

Neither are their relationships with one another of an unreal understanding, so prefect, and of a love so pure as to be totally untainted by sexual consideration. Momentarily at least Mary Hare is attracted to Himmelfarb, a fact she only half admits to herself; and Himmelfarb’s initial reaction to her is one of mingled repulsion and amusement, emotions not entirely in keeping with his Zaddikim image.

For instance Mary Hare while earnestly talking to Himmelfarb, takes his hands in hers and is disturbed by the pleasure that the contact arouses in her:

She took the Jew’s hand in her freckled trembling ones. What she intended to do with it was not apparent to either of them, for they were imprisoned in an attitude. She sat holding the hand as if it had been some thing of value found in the bush[ ...] Only the most exquisite sensation destroyed the detached devotion which Miss Hare would normally have experienced, on being confronted with such rare matter. (302)
Himmelfarb’s response as he recognizes her unconscious sexual overtures is not without cruelty: “[... the Jew [...] recovered with an effort from hilarious surprise, and a thought so obscene, he was humiliated for the capacity of his own mind” (302).

Mary Hare, the dwarfed, aesthetically unpleasing woman longs for a physical beauty that will make her attractive in the eyes of Himmelfarb. She fantasizes herself as beautiful and desirable: “Miss Hare had to glance at her companion to see whether he would be aware that her limbs were, in fact, so long and lovely and her conical white breasts not so cold as they had been taught to behave unless offered the excuse of music” (303).

When however he hints at the sexual cast of her feelings for him, she is defensively enraged: “Her evanescent beauty was lit with the little mirrors of fury, before it was destroyed, which it was, of course. Her condition could not have been less obvious than the sad rags of old cobwebs hanging from a cornice [...] ‘I am not interested in you! Not what you are, think, feel. I am only concerned for your safety. I am responsible for you!’” (303).

But White of course never keeps the relationships at this level. There are those moments when the riders open out to each other in complete love and understanding. For after Mary Hare’s rage is spent: “Whether she had suspected a moment before, probably for the first and only time what it was to be a woman, her passion was more serious, touching, urgent – now that she had been reduced to the status of a troubled human being [...] it was this latest metamorphosis which brought the two closest together” (303).
Himmelfarb too is made conscious of the presence of a kindred spirit: She was at her ugliest, wet and matted, but any disgust which Himmelfarb might have felt was swallowed up in the conviction, that, despite the differences of geography and race, they were, and always had been engaged on a similar mission. Approaching from opposite directions, it was the same darkness and the same marsh which threatened to engulf their movements lumbering and impeded though those movements might be, the precious parcel of secrets carried by each must only be given at the end into certain hands. (304)

(Again there is the spy thriller element with mysterious “secrets” and was phrases like “frontier” which is supposed to stand for a journey of the soul too – “although the Jew blundered on towards the frontier through the mist of experience, he emerged at one point, and found himself [...]”(297).

Paradoxically however, it is Himmelfarb the articulate intellectual of the group who shows the greatest spiritual naivete. Taking him through the ruined splendour of Xanadu her home, Miss Hare hopes the Jew will recognize the myth behind the decay: “Whether the Jew would accept the house as reality or myth [...] depended [...] on [...] a divine intuition” (298). “Out of the corner of her eye, the throbbing beauty of the hall, with its curved staircase and the fragments of bird’s nest, told her of her great courage in attempting to reveal the truth to a second person [...] after her experience with someone else” (301). But all Himmelfarb can see of it is its overwhelming “desolation”. “You too?” Miss Hare cries out “Do you only see what is in front of you?” (301)
That Himmlerlolfarb himself recognizes the inadequacy of his values is clearly indicated through his comment on entering Australia that “the intellect has failed us” (198). Here he could be referring to Germany’s vast intellectual reservoir, its poets, philosophers and musicians who could not prevent Nazism. As Stauffer puts it: “Between Bach and Hitler .. something went wrong with Germany. We must go back to Bach, side-stepping the twin bogs of Wagner and Nietzsche [...]” (162).

Himmelfarb recognizes that his flight for freedom on the night his instincts had told him that the Nazis were in the house with his wife, constituted a betrayal of her. His succumbing to a degrading fear that all his intellectualism cannot protect him from, makes him feel he is of the same like as the persecuting Nazis, who had the same intellectual resources he had.

In a complete about-turn from his earlier scholarly life, he takes a job in an obscure Australian factory which calls for a mindless, repetitive, almost reflex action—boring holes in metal sheets. But as he tells Mary Hare: “It is a discipline [...] without which my mind might take its own authority for granted. As it did, in fact, in the days when it was allowed freedom. And grew arrogant. And in that arrogance was guilty of omissions [...] It is not yet obvious [...] but will be made clear, how we are to use our knowledge, what link we provide in the chain of events” (300).

The last sentence is of particular importance. He realizes unlike Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe’s The Arrow of God (1964) that he is only an arrow in the bow of his God, and not God himself.

The other riders however, by investing him with premature Godhead (Alf Dubbo is the only one who accords him a measure of divinity when he feels he is
ready for it) are attempting a curious wish fulfillment. For instance Miss Hare almost wills him into being a God-like figure: “Whether the Jew would accept the house (Xanadu) depended not a little on whether a divine intuition, which she hoped, insisted, knew him to possess, would inform mere human vision” (298). Himmelfarb’s reaction to Xanadu as indicated earlier is disappointingly prosaic and unimaginative.

It is strange but true that the protagonists have a very imperfect understanding of each others spiritual dilemmas in the beginning. In spite of all their commonality, they seem to meet at only one level - an idealistic and highly rarefied one, (their private and unpleasant responses to one another, like Himmelfarb’s to Miss Hare are quickly glossed over by the characters themselves). They are quick to recognize each other’s divinity, but far more reluctant to accept the others’ stained humanity.

So there is no real attempt on the part of the others to understand Himmelfarb’s genuine spiritual conflict. It is a conflict brought about not only by the Nazi experiences, but which has its roots even further back. As a young man he is sceptical about his Jewish faith and reluctant to accept it, and yet cannot find a spiritually substantial replacement to fill the void:

It did seem for the first time that his own brilliantly inviolable destiny was threatened, by an increased shrivelling of the spirit in himself, as well as by the actions of these whom he had considered almost as statues in a familiar park. How the statues had begun to move. Great fissures were beginning to appear, besides, in what he had assumed to be the solid mass of history .(116)
In this context there is no explanation for his volte-face and his adherence to his Jewish faith, other than the explanation that the Nazi experience had driven him to take refuge in Jewish ritual; an explanation which though emotionally valid, is not intellectually satisfying.

For there is undoubted criticism of the brand of ingrown Jewishness he practices. His coming to Australia therefore contains a subtle mockery of the continent. He wishes to make restitution for his sins of omission, by extending the figure of the Jew as a persecuted figure, literally hounded into martyrdom, to this country. In Israel such a figure would not have survived, because the other people were his own kind. He chooses Australia because as he tells his brother-in-law Ari, “it was farthest, perhaps also bitterest” (173) – in short godforsaken enough for his peculiar missionizing zeal.

He boasts to Miss Hare about his indestructibility. He tells her that he had chosen his house because of its vulnerability to attack: “I chose it purposely. Very fragile and ephemeral. I am a Jew, you see [...] Almost a boot[...] which the wind may blow down, when one has closed the door for the last time and moved to another part of the desert” (301). When Mary Hare accuses him of morbidity he answers: “It is only realistic to accept that history has proved. And we do not die of it. Even though his limbs may be lopped off from time to time, the Jew cannot die” (301).

His limiting loyalty to his faith shuts his awareness to the possibilities of other faiths. On the Seder might (a Jewish feast) urged by a desire for human companionship, he turns not to any of the other three riders, but to the apostate Rosetrees, because he wants to celebrate it with his own kind: “All around him,
behind the sticks of trees, were the boxes containing other lives, but involved in their own esoteric rites or mystical union with banality. He would not have presumed to intrude, yet, it was so very necessary to unite" (381). He takes a train to the Rosetrees' part of the town. The train journey becomes analogues to the earlier train journey from Germany to Poland which starts out as a promise of freedom to the Jewish prisoners, but ends in the treachery of the gas ovens: “Journeys implied a promise, as he had been taught, and known, but never dared accept” (382).

So the archetypal horror journey in the Nazi train, becomes a recurrent motif; it is implied that there is again betrayal awaiting Himmelfarb in his journey to Australia in search of martyrdom and expiation, just as there is betrayal waiting far him at the Rosetrees. Himmelfarb himself links the two journeys in his mind – he still retains a terror of trains: “It was the trains that still alarmed at times, because of the passengers substituted for those who had started out” (382). The betrayers in the earlier train journey were the Nazis, but now the betrayers are Jews themselves. Instead of welcoming him, the Rosetrees repulse him callously without even offering him a drink. But just as the earlier train journey to the gas ovens of Friedensdorf indirectly allowed him to gain his freedom (he escapes when the rebels in the concentration camp set fire to it) this journey too later ends in an unexpected but significant touch of grace, which Himmelfarb is chastened by.

Returning home, his treatment by the Rosetrees has so embittered him that he imbibes the country with all that is ugly and repulsive:

The train was easing through the city which knives had sliced open to serve up with all the juices running – red, and green and purple
[...] The neon syrup coloured the pools of vomit and the sailors's piss

[...] The blue-haired grannies had purpled from the roots of their hair down to the angles of their pants, not from shame, but neon

[...] The kiddies would continue to suck at their slabs of neon. (393)

Brian McFarlane commenting on this passage says: “From the grannies to the kiddies, it is all the same, allowing only for the changes due to age and sex: they are all disgusting and contemptible. What begins as a wild, if over-wrought, imagistic power degenerates into fatuity and vapidity [...] a self indulgent verbal exercise” (27). But this is not exactly White’s vision. It is Himmelfarb’s vision distorted by grief and despair. When he reaches home Mrs. Ruth Godbold the humble and kindly laundress had brought him a leg of mutton as part of the Easter goodwill. (Significantly the Jewish feast Passover and the Christian Easter fall on the same day, though Himmelfarb does not grasp the significance of this). But Mrs. Godbold’s set of loving kindness redeems the day for him: “The miracle did, in fact, occur almost at the same moment as he noticed a light approaching, swaying and jumping, as the one who held it negotiated the uneven ground [...] Himmelfarb recognized [...] Mrs. Godbold” (Riders 395).

Now his Seder table takes on a new glow and meaning: “Still untouched, the pest few hours seemed to have made a sculpture of it, not of rejoicing, but of lament. Here, rather, was the tomb of all those, including himself, who had not survived, who had not survived the return journey, and he risen from the dead, the keeper of it” (395).
The fact that White keeps a cautious eye trained on the vagaries of Himmelfarb's piety shows he is not advocating a kind of woolly transcendentalism where scattered peoples can meet in a quasi-mystical union. The importance of Leonie Kramers' article on *Riders in the Chariot* cannot be emphasized enough—particularly her statement that "far from endorsing transcendentalism White is offering a critique of it" (9).

Apart from offering a critique of pseudo-religiosity however, there is a consistent attempt to arrive at some authentic core of experience, be it transcendent, immanent or otherwise. This is made particularly clear when one examines the areas of intense experience Himmelfarb, Miss Hare and Dubbo enter before their deaths.

The war apart from being used as an apt analogy and allegory serves another structurally important purpose. The four main characters like all war victims who suffer dispossession though not actively involved in the war (except for Himmelfarb) continuously carry within them the memory of their dispossessions. Himelfarb clings tenaciously to the rituals of his Jewish religion (though admittedly the rituals appear imbued with a deeper significance for him). Alf Dubbo is both literally and symbolically the dispossessed aborigine, Mrs. Godbold has her moments of poignant nostalgia for the fen country she comes from, which she felt compelled to leave not only because of the death of a dearly loved brother, but because of her guilty love for her father and her jealousy over his second marriage. Miss Hare's life no longer has any of the aristocratic grandeur of her early youth (though she was more witness than participant in this grandeur, and for her they were not happy days).
But the war is responsible for an interesting sequence of events in Miss Hare’s life – the pittance her distant cousin Eustace Cleugh had been sending towards her maintenance, is stopped during the war, then resumed after peace is declared. The renewal of financial help draws Miss Hare’s attention to her failing health and makes her advertise for a housekeeper. This is her first deliberate attempt at contact with the outside world, which enables Mrs. Jolley (one of White’s rather two-dimentional devils) to enter into the picture.

The advent of Mrs. Jolley into Miss Hare’s delicately structured life is like Geraldine’s advent into Christabel’s in Coleridge’s poem of the same name. There is some nameless obscenity, especially felt when Mrs. Jolley executes her mock-dance where she cruelly mimics the ghostly dancing couples who once glided through the marble halls of Xanadu, deliberately blaspheming something intangible, which Mary Hare cannot quite put her finger on, but which fills her with horror nevertheless. The trouble with characters like Mrs. Jolley and her demonic friend Mrs. Flack is that their evil is never consistently convincing. What is even more unfortunate -- one grows to expect unpleasant things from them with such certainty that they become a little wearying.

Doubtless White intended some kind of a ghastly pun when he named the housekeeper Mrs. Jolley and had these two old tabbies shack up in a house called “Karma”. But they still remain unconvincing. There is not great surprise when one discovers that Mrs. Flack has an illegitimate son and that Mrs. Jolley was suspected of having murdered her husband. Rather, these two characters are successful not as portraits of abysmal evil, but as the deceptive guardians of lower middle-class morals.
and social values, for instance Mrs. Flack's constant references to her husband's solvency and respectability and Mrs. Jolley's allusions to her genteelly-married daughters. White has skillfully demonstrated the actual hatred in their relationship. The manner in which they play upon each other's nerves waiting to pounce on the other is cleverly done, though it presents a rather depressing picture.

Turning once again to the four main characters, the war has played another important role in their lives in the sense that it releases them from their hitherto isolated world, except for Mrs. Godbold who had never shut herself off in the first place. While the war put the material and spiritual destinies of entire nations into question, *Riders in the Chariot* gives it a more individualistic twist by re-examining the direction it takes in these four varied but symbolically representative characters. Their quests have a wider significance, because of its close connection with the Australian experiences.

Each rider has been isolated from his particular clan — Himmelfarb from the other Jews, Miss Hare from the wealthy socialites her parents mingled with, Alf Dubbo from his fellow aborigines, and Mrs. Godbold from her family in England. These deracines join together to form one family without however surrendering their individual beliefs. The shared vision of the chariot or the idea of a chariot is important to this extent at least, that it reveals the possibility of fusion between seemingly disparate beings.

White's indictment of the continuation of values that created the war is accompanied by suggestions of a richer alternative — the developing of the intuitive imaginations. If Miss Hare with her curious pantheistic mode of functioning stand at
the other extreme of rationalism: "She was quite mad, quite contemptible, of course, by standards of human reason, but what have those proved to be? Reason finally holds a gun at its head — and does not always miss" (Riders 37). Alf Dubbo through his paintings becomes the very apotheosis of the intuitive imagination, operating through modes of consciousness more aboriginal than western.

While Himmelfarb and Mrs. Godbold draw their basic values mainly from their Jewish and Christian frameworks, that is to say these characters draw their sustenance from religion, Miss Hare and Dubbo have no framework to draw theirs from other than the great disciplines of Nature and Art.

Many kinds of religiosity are offered to us in Riders in the Chariot, apart from Himmelfarb's Jewishness and Mrs. Godbold's brand of Christian humanism. But while these have a certain depth in their beliefs, however limiting those beliefs may, be the others work at a more superficial and social level. There is Mrs. Chalmers-Robinson's (an old employer of Mrs. Godbold's) Christian Science: "God is incorporeal [...] divine, supreme, infinite, mind, spirit, soul, principle, life, truth, love" (260) which is more affectation than belief, there is the Rev. Calderon's rapid Christianity, and the Rosetrees' adopted Catholicism, again more a disguise worn to gain acceptability than anything else.

But White obviously believes that any kind of synthesis needs to be imaginatively brought about — an act which needs both generosity and tolerance. So Passover and Easter occur on the same day, yet most of the people (even Himmelfarb) caught up in their own webs are unaware of its possible significance: "Passover and Easter would fall early that year. The heavy days were still being piled
up, and no sign of relief for those who were buried inside. Little wonder that the soul hesitated to prepare itself, whether for deliverance from its perennial Egypt, or redemption through the blood of its Saviour, when the body remained immersed in its pyramid of days" (373).

Himmelfarb, too, as mentioned earlier, needs Mrs. Godbold’s gesture of generosity to bring home to him the essence of the meaning of the feast. While Miss Hare, Mrs. Godbold and Alf Dubbo are in a sense the betrayed and forsaken – Miss Hare by her parents, Mrs. Godbold by her husband and Alf Dubbo by a series of people, Himmelfarb seems destined never to be reserved for the crux of suffering which he feels he needs to cleanse him of his sin. His wife is taken away but he escapes. The Stauffers who give him protection are apprehended but he is caught only because he voluntarily gives himself up. He is rescued from the gas ovens by being chosen as one of the scavengers who clear the bodies from the pits, but is saved from this further degradation by the bombing of the camp by the rebels. Even here, he escapes death.

In Australia his crucifixion at all times is maintained at the level of burlesque, and he is brought down “too soon”. (Though the incidents generated by the crucifixion are no longer burlesque, they become semi-tragic). Martyrdom eludes him at every turn, because he is not yet ready for it. It is only during the last stages of his dying that he arrives at some fulfilling spiritual experience which seems to redeem him, where he can see all men as one man at last, an ability which, with all his intellectualism and spiritualism had lacked.
Ernie Theobald’s comment to Himmelfarb when he frees him from the abortive crucifixion is also a criticism of Himmelfarb’s too jealously guarded apartness, a hint that such deliberate and extreme isolation may not be healthy. As Himmelfarb thanks him formally, he says: “Something you will never learn Mick, is that I am Ernie to every cove present. That is you included. No man is better than another. It was still early days when Australians found that out. You may say we talk about it a lot, but you can’t expect us not to be proud of what we have invented, so to speak” (416-417).

Patrick White quite definitely does not intend this definition of Australian social and cultural values to be clubbed with the mock-mateship displayed by Blue (Mrs. Flack’s illegitimate reprobate son) and his friends. Ernie Theobald’s assessment of what constitutes a very important part of Australian social and cultural ethics, may not be a very sophisticated one. But it is healthy and down-to-earth and White probably thinks it a necessary quality in the composite world he is creating for us.

Himmelfarb has surprisingly enough an amazing resemblance to his German predecessor – Voss. His motive in choosing Australia instead of Israel for his expiation and its (Australia’s) possible redemption, is on the same scale as, Voss’s dream of being the Messiah to his chosen people – the aborigines. Both the motives are equally presumptuous and idealistic at the same time.

Just like Voss, Himmelfarb too is precipitate and hasty in offering his friendship to Dubbo, who with intuitive wisdom, repulses this move, preferring the subtleties of silence to the crudities of speech. It may be recalled that when Voss extended his hand to an aborigines in friendship the latter dropped it, because it was
“too much” for him. Both the Germans have a singular faculty for misjudging their timings. Yet Himmelfarb is not without very important elements of depth within him:

“If sometimes the foreigner found it necessary to speak, it was as though something preposterous had taken place: as though a fish had opened its mouth the other side of a glass wall, and brought forth faintly intelligible words instead of normally transparent bubbles” (208).

He is the hidden Zaddikim who is unintelligible, because he represents meaningful complexity, the same complexity which Stan Parker had resisted but finally accepted. But though he is constantly portrayed as the Saviour figure, not only in the minds of the other three main characters but amongst the rabbis of his clan as well, there are hints that Himmelfarb could be superseded in this role by another figure. Significantly in his dream his wife Reha does not offer the cinnamon apple to him (symbol of divine power of grace?) but to a mysterious third person: “Reha was offering, first the dish of most delicious cinnamon apple, then the dish of bitter herbs. Neither of which he could quite reach. Nor was her smile intended for him, in that state of veiled bliss which he remembered. Finally she turned and gave the apple to a third person, who, it was her apparent intention should have the dish” (217).

The faceless “third person” is an intriguing figure, who is this shadow creature, who is given spiritual precedence over Himmaelfarb, that Himmelfarb’s spiritual qualities are not invulnerable to ambiguity is clear right from the start. Without intending to be categorical one can perhaps venture to suggest that the real saviour-figure or better still the real “lieur” in Riders is Alf Dubbo. He is a figure who is used to highlight several layers of the complex Australian experience. In this
context the second world war becomes an important experience and metaphor in the shaping of the experience.

It serves the same kind of purpose that the Boer was does in Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Here the Australians were helping the British fight the Dutch for doing the same thing the Australians were doing in their country “keeping the black man in his place” (108). Similarly (because presumably) there is a tacit protest against Jewish genocide in the Allies’ was against the Axis powers, if one tries to give it an ideological basis, (one wouldn’t put it past history to offer that explanation) the Allies themselves were not totally exempt from the prejudices that prompted the Nazi atrocities. This explains Rosetree’s anguished cry before he commits suicide: “It is the same, it is the same” (447).

Nazism was just the extreme articulation of the darker side of man’s nature. While Nazism took the Jewish question to its most basic level – denying them the right to live by shovelling them into gas ovens: Australia (or any other colonizing country for that matter) plays a more subtle but equally destructive role in the sense that its social values are calculated to suppress those aliens who are in the minority. For absorption they have to repudiate their Jewishness totally, as demonstrated by the Rosetrees and even then absorption is grudging and uncertain.

Himmelfarb who makes no attempt to conceal his Jewishness, arouses the antagonism of his workmates in Rosetree’s factory: “To some it is always unendurable to watch the antithesis of themselves” (402). White uses one persecuted race to highlight the persecution of another. For if Himmelfarb is an antithesis, Alf Dubbo by virtue of his black skin is “anti-thesis in its extremist forms” (402).
As J.J. Healy pointed out, the second world war made the more introspective Australian aware of the silent wounds of Australian history. White wants this awareness to be heightened and made more pervasive, and what is more important he wants it to be authentic. For soon after peace had been declared there is a brief but artificial synthesis between Dubbo and his white acquaintances as they celebrate the peace: “When the white man’s war ended, several of the whites bought Dubbo drinks to celebrate the peace, and together they spewed up in the streets, out of stomach that were, for the occasion of the same colour (371).

But this is precisely the kind of false dawn that White wishes to avoid and the war is specifically referred to as the “white man’s war”: Dubbo could never identify with it. When the first learns that war had broken out he is unmoved because “Wars do not make all that difference to those who have always been at war […]” (349). This is again reminiscent of Jimmie in the The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith saying “Tell the police I said I declared war ”(86).

The historical relationship of exploitation by the white man of the native, continues even in the ease of Alf Dubbo, though here it is even more deadly, for it involves an intellectual exploitation as well. Thus his paintings are stolen by his landlady Hannah with the connivance of Humphry Mortimer and sold out. Earlier, when an adolescent, he is sexually exploited by his guardian the Rev. Calderon. In consequence Calderon’s sister Mrs. Pask accuses Dubbo of having seduced her brother and he is forced to flee. Similarly, sickened by Hannah’s treachery over the paintings he leaves her house, thoroughly disillusioned with white morality:
Dubbo did not return to the house in Abercombie Crescent. Hannah’s place was connected in his mind with some swamp he remembered without having seen, and from which the white magic of love and charity had failed to exercise the evil spirits. Certainly he had never expected much, but was sickened afresh each time his attitude was justified. “Angels were demons in disguise. Even Mrs. Pask had dropped her blue robe and grown brass nipples and a beak” (Riders 370).

J.J. Healy points out that the character of Jackie in Voss is spiralled to Dubbo in Riders in the Chariot. But while Jackie in the most complete sense of the term has had his soul touched by Voss, forming an archetype for future white-aboriginal relationships, an archetype that is constantly ignored; Alf Dubbo is the aborigine without illusions, who has pierced through the stereotypes of do-gooding and patronage on the part of the white man and recognizes the relationship for what it is, recalling how Mrs. Pask had condescended to teach him painting: “Dubbo was forced to realize that Mrs. Pask, for all her virtue, had been at heart one of the turbaned ladies of another more indolent age, leaning, figuratively […] on the shoulder of her little coloured boy” (315).

Yet Dubbo’s responses to the two sides of his personality – aboriginal and European remains ambivalent for along time. For though: “At Rosetree’s factory […] Dubbo was always the abo. Nor would he have wished it otherwise -- that way he could travel quicker, deeper, into the hunting grounds of his imagination ”(371). Yet: “He avoided his own people, whatever the degree of colour, because of certain delicacy with cutlery, acquired from the parson’s sister, together with a general niceness or squeamishness of behaviour […]”(341).
He cannot discard his western training easily: "He ate some bread, with cold sausage, which tasted of sawdust. He spat it out. But gathered it up at once from the floor. Something he had done contradicted what he had been taught" (333). Though sceptical to the point of bitterness of Christian tenets, yet when he runs away from Calderon and his sister, he uses those precepts as a sort of talisman to protect him from some impalpable evil as he camps for the night.

More subtly missed, because he would not have admitted, were those woolly precepts, of God in man, which the rector had attempted to wind round a mind that found them strange, suffocating, superfluous. Although he had adopted a few of these, in secret, for expediency's sake, and had got into the habit of protecting himself from terrors, by wrapping his thoughts in them, beside some waterhole at night. (333)

Dubbo remembers with particular clarity the voice of Himmelfarb reading from the Bible, the passage from Ezekiel: "And I looked and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud and a fire unfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof - as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire [...]" (497).

The words could be interpreted to express the first feeling of magical awe the aborigines must have experienced when the strange white man landed on their shores from their wondrous flying boats. This fatal fascination is beautifully described by Eleanor Clark in The Timeless Land, when Bennelong's father watches from the cliffs, waiting for these demi-gods to appear again. They had set his imagination on fire, and he had with poetic skill incorporated their coming in one of his cooroborees.
That these demi-gods were also agents of dispossession and extermination was another matter. The aboriginals' first fascination was a very real thing, not untouched by the transcendent; and while the white man almost continuously debased it, characters like Voss and Himmelfarb with their partial understanding notwithstanding, could rejuvenate it.

Alf Dubbo is also made to demonstrate how the aboriginal set-up has its own structural weaknesses that deny it strength when confronted by a more ruthless culture. Dubbo carries within him some of the aboriginal sense of fatality which makes him stoically endure experiences which he could have avoided if he had willed it. So even though he is repelled by Calderon's sexual advances he does not resist: "at no time in his life was Alf Dubbo able to resist what must happen. He had, at least, to let it begin, for he was hypnotized by the many mysteries which his instinct sensed" (330).

And later when Mrs. Pask accuses him of seducing her brother, he does not think of protesting but runs away: "As he wandered through paddocks and along roads, the fugitive did not reflect on the injustice of Mrs. Pask's accusation, sensing with her that all which had happened had to happen sooner or later " (332).

For Dubbo the main conflict however is not so much rejection or exploitation by white society (he does not share Jimmie Blacksmith's obsession for white acceptance) as between his aboriginal totemic imagination, from which his daily life is almost separated and his imposed western training and education. They make as is to be expected, strange bedfellows, and it is a conflict that finally kills him, but it also finds release in his final paintings described in passages of great power and beauty.
His earlier drawings seem to spring almost purely from his aboriginal heritage, and is reminiscent of bush art: “the fine spun lines of a world he felt to exist but could not et corroborate” (314).

While using metaphors that are aboriginal in their associations Dubbo also shows how brindled his heritage is. Take for instance the metaphor of the walkabout which represents a retreat, refuge and release. But for Dubbo the walkabout does not mean a return to the Bush, but a retreat into the recesses of his mind. For strangely enough he feels more at home in the city than in the bush:

Alf Dubbo now wants bush, figuratively at least, and as far as other human beings were concerned. Never communicative, he retired into the scrub of half-thoughts, amongst the cruel rocks of obsession. Later he learned to prefer the city, that most savage and impenetrable terrain, for the opportunities it gave him of confusing any one who might attempt to tract him down in his personal hinterland. (340)

Even more significantly the spirit of his grandfather, which was supposed to be his guardian spirit withdraws from him -- signifying either a complete divorce from his aboriginal imagination or a certain artistic independence which could function on its own as it did not need such props: “He remembered his mother had once told him how the spirit of his grandfather was a guardian on whom he might rely, but during one of the many phases of flight, he and his protector had, he suspected, parted company. In any case, for quite some time he had sensed himself to be alone ”(433).

The Australian brumbies that Dubbo paints is a vindication of Willie Pringle’s assertion in *Voss* that Australia in spite of its mediocrity could still transmute the
"blowflies on their bed of offal" into art. Dubbo's horses: "[...] could have been rough brumbies of a speckled grey, rather too coarse, earthbound might have been a legitimate comment, if their manes and tails had not streamed beyond possibility and the skeins of cloud shed by their flanks appeared at any point to catch on the rocks of heavenly gold" (458).

In keeping with Australia the land of both actual and symbolic inversions, Dubbo realizes even more keenly the shifting nature of reality:

One curious fact emerged. From certain angles the canvas presented a reversal of the relationship between permanence and motion the old Stan Parker dilemma: "the nostalgia of permanence and the fiend of motion" as though the banks of a river were to begin to flow alongside its stationary waters ... So he encouraged an illusion which was also a truth, and from which the timid might retreat simply by changing their position. (458)

Suspicious and sceptical of Christianity because of his unhappy experiences with white man. "the duplicity of the white man prevented him considering Christ, except as an ambitious abstraction, or realistically as a man" (371). Dubbo will later synthesize his aboriginal consciousness with the essence and core of Christianity, after he, like the aborigines in Vose witnesses the great legend becoming truth, that is Himmelfarb's mock crucifixion starts the process of acceptance of a myth which till then was only an ambitious abstraction. He paints the deposition of Christ using Himmelfarb's experience as the theme. "The Christ of course, was the tattered Jew from Sarsaparilla and Rosetrees' factory. Who had, it was seen experienced other lives, together with those diseases of body and mind of which men are subject" (455-456).
The process of synthesis begins with Voss swallowing the witchetty grub as part of a communion rite and in *Riders in the Chariot* we have the reciprocal aboriginal gesture by Dubbo when he incorporates Christ through his art into his own beliefs. (The Christ he paints has a darker skin.)

Before his death, Dubbo finally opens in love to all his fellow creatures:

Because he had grown physically incapable of hating, his capacity for wonder led him to embrace objects he had refused to contemplate until now. So he would examine the face of Humphry Mortimer, for instance, with the same interest that he might have brought to bear on a flock of pastured maggots, or block of virgin land. Everything, finally was a source of wonder not to say love. (456)

He forgives all those who had exploited him and abused his humanity:

He emerged for a little to walk along the river bank, beside the Reverend Timothy Calderon. But drew away from the reactor ... So that in the end, the figures were waving at each other from a distance. They continued waving, too and back, separated, it seemed, by the great transparent sinlessness of morning. (456)

So there is this spacious gesture of aboriginal forgiveness. But a certain equivocality is unavoidable. Dubbo is a dying man, and he is dying of consumption that dreaded disease which ravages his race, so psychologically vulnerable to it. As Keneally puts it in *The Chant*: “Emu-Wrem (Jimmie’s tribal totem) was hawking up its living tissue” (31).
As important as the war analogue, though more submerged, and working as a counterpoint to it, is the concept of Xanadu – Norbert Hare’s fantastic extravaganza – his “pleasure-dome”. There is a close resemblance between Norbert Hare’s Xanadu and its literary prototype – the Xanadu built by Kubla Khan in Coleridge’s poem of the same name. The similarities occur not only in the setting and description of the two pleasure domes, but also in several of their symbolic implications.

As Wilson Knight comments in his essay on Coleridge in *The Starlit Dome*:

The pleasure-dome dominates. But its setting is carefully described and very important. There is a “sacred” river that runs into “caverns measureless to man” and a “sunless sea”. That is, the river runs into an infinity of death. The marked out area through which it flows is however, one of teeming nature: gardens, rills, “incense-bearing trees, and ancient forests. (91)

The Xanadu built by Hare is not without its strong parodic elements. Here too there is cultivated plenty in the shape of Norbert Hare’s pleasure-garden; rose-trees with miniature sun-shades to protect their complexions, deciduous trees and various other ingenuities of Nature brought to heel. And again like Kubla Khan’s pleasure-dome, all this is enfolded by “forests ancient as the hills”. But whereas in Kubla Khan’s Xanadu there is no conflict between the wild and cultivated, the indigenous and transplanted objects of nature, in Norbert Hare’s Xanadu there most certainly is a disharmony.
Hare without the wisdom and artistic vision of the warrior sage Kubla Khan, cannot reconcile the two; he would have one at the cost of the other: (Another ecological comment). " [...] the scrub, which had been pushed back immediately began to tangle with Norbert Hare’s willfully created park” (15).

But the native scrub refuses to be destroyed or forgotten: " [...] the still manageable park which he had ordered to be planted, beyond even the grey, raggedy, native scrub [...] anchorage in time and space had forced him to recognize the native cynicism of that same, grey, raggedy scrub” (15). Whereas Norbert Hare’s intention was to set up a contract structure which implied infinite superiority to things native, Xanadu fulfils in the end, far more profoundly, his quasi-profound intention that Xanadu should be his “contribution to the sum of truth” (19).

But the fact that Hare wanted his dome as far removed from practical purpose as possible, hints at a hazy, blurred artist’s vision of beauty for beauty’s sake. His hollow assumptions are fleshed out later by the dome taking on unexpectedly artistic qualities. What strikes one immediately about Kubla Khan’s dome is its splendid lavishness – the baroque magnificence of an oriental Emperor. Norbert Hare’s Xanadu with its Italian marble, chandeliers from impecunious European royal families is the last word in lavish but directionless spending. For while Kubla Khan’s Xanadu is specified by very precise measurements: “so twice five miles of fertile ground with walls and towers were girdled round” (297). Signifying the ordering controlling forces of art, Norbert Hare’s Xanadu continues indefinable and chaotic. He keeps pulling down walls and building them a new, so that the boundaries of Xanadu are never clearly defined.
The pleasure-dome in *Riders* is both a decadence and transcendence when linked to Norbert Hare and Mary Hare respectively. She would like to bring Xanadu as close to nature as possible. To Norbert Hare with his synthetic obsession with beauty, the plain deformed Mary would be a constant source of irritation. She belongs to the ranks of the despised native scrub which he so unsuccessfully tries to tame and control. The only time White admits some beauty for Mary, he uses rustic terms, she is described as a “country beauty but botched” (297).

Mary Hare however, in spite of her own unprepossessing looks has a very fair idea of what beauty is, and her appreciation is uncluttered by the false values that corrupt Norbert Hare’s aesthetics. She falls in love with Helen Antill’s beauty: (a guest at a party in Xanadu) “Just as she fell spontaneously in love with the smooth limbs of certain trees: the texture of marble, and long immaculate legs of thoroughbred horses spanking at their exercises” (Riders 29).

The disintegration of Xanadu works at two levels; on the negative side – because it was the product of a debased vision – Norbert Hare with his glimmering distorted view of the chariot; more positively it is being reclaimed by that very landscape it was artificially distanced from. Xanadu is a symbol that is outside the control of either Mary Hare or her father. It reaches out to become a part of the vegetation: “That summer the structure of Xanadu, which had already entered in a conspiracy with nature opened still farther. Creatures were admitted that had never been inside before” (289). (This recalls the church the lost child described in *The Tree of Man* where birds and fish floated in through the open doors). The admission of the animal and natural world, is the admission of the instinctual to what is basically an intellectually conceived structure.
The crumbling of Xanadu brings to one’s notice the close attention White pays to the dwellings of the four riders – Mary Hare’s Xanadu, Mrs. Godbold’s shed “temporary like,” (ironically it survives longer than the ambitious Xanadu, and continues surviving till the end of the novel). Alf Dubbo’s anonymous boarding room, and Himmelfarb’s flimsy weatherboard home, so eroded by white ants and termites that it is practically crumbling down.

While all these structures prove to some kind of violence – Xanadu crashes down and is completely razed by bulldozers, Himmelfarb’s home is burnt down and Alf Dubbo’s door is broken down by his landlady: Mrs. Godbold’s shed however, by a special set of grace remains intact within its charmed circles. Being the least isolated and the most humble of the four, she is protected. The destructiveness inherent in the other three lives, also hints at the fact that their kind of intensity can only be short-lived. Mrs. Godbold’s more practical mode of existence, allows her a longer lease of life. That Mary Hare is closely identified with the symbol of Xanadu can be recognized through the similarities between her death and the fall of Xanadu. After the death of Himmelfarb, Mary Hare seems to dissolve into the vegetation around her in a final and complete mingling:

She might have reasoned that she had fulfilled her purpose if she had not always mistrusted reason. Her instinct suggested, rather, that she was being dispersed, but that, in so experiencing, she was entering the final ecstasy [...] Never actually arriving, but that was to be expected, since she had become all-pervasive - scent, sound, the steely dew, the blue glare of white light off - rocks. She was all but identified [...] If
she did not choose the obvious direction, it was because direction had at last chosen her. (440)

Perhaps White deliberately removes the river outside the precincts of Xanadu — since the latter is more specifically linked to the Hares, and not so much to the other three protagonists. Kubla Khan’s river flows within his Xanadu, but the implications of the two rivers remain basically the same. To quote Wilson Knight again: “[... the sacred river that runs into ‘caverns measureless to man’ runs into an infinity of death [...] clearly a sacred river which runs through nature towards death will in some sense correspond to life” (91).

In Riders, the paradoxical nature of the river being next to Rosetrees’ factory implies grace that is left untapped:

The bloke Himmelfarb had gone out, and was walking alongside the green river, where nobody had ever been seen to walk. The river glistened for him. The birds flew low, swallow probably, almost on the surface of the water, and he held out his hand to them. They did not come to him, of course, but he touched the glistening areas of flight. It seemed as though the strings of flight were suspended from him fingers, and that he controlled the whirring birds. (205)

The river is ignored by the factory workers, and there are moments when even Himmelfarb forgets it, though never for long:

Under the windows the smooth green river ran, but not so that you could see it, for the windows were placed rather high, and these were days when the Jew, who had been moved in the beginning by the flow
of green water, scarcely noticed it even when he knocked off. As he walked alongside it towards the bus stop, it had become a green squiggle, or symbol of river. (307)

"symbol of a river" quite markedly points to its metaphorical significance and links it with the sacred river Alph in Kubla Khan's Xanadu. Wilson Knight says the river sinks into a lifeless ocean, before its final tumult, and that:

this tumult is aptly associated with war: the principle of those conflicting and destructive forces that drive man to his end. The 'ancestral' voices suggest that dark compulsion that binds the race to its habitual conflicts and is related by some psychologists to unconscious ancestor worship, to parental and pre-parental authority. (12)

But there is yet another facet to the river motif. Alf Dubbo (is there a deliberate pun in the resemblance between the sound of his name and the name of the sacred river "alph" in "Kubla Khan") is right from the start explicitly linked with rivers aligning him with flux and continuity. Regeneration and cleansing:

Alf Dubbo was reared in a small town on the banks of a river which never wholly dried up, and which, in wet seasons, would overflow its steep banks and flood the houses in the lower town. The river played an important part in the boy's early life, and even after he left his birthplace, his thoughts would frequently return to the dark banks of the brown river, with its curtain of shiny foliage, [...] The boy's dark river would cut right across the evening. (334)
In moments of stress, Alf instinctively turns to the river for solace. After the episode with Calderon, where he is falsely accused of seducing him he returns to his birth place Mungindribble: “Wandering along the banks of the river, which on the outskirts of most towns, is the life-stream of all outcasts, goats and aboriginals, Alf could not help feel moved as he remembered the generous waters of Numburra, and the clumps of orange blossom” (334).

Kubla Khan’s river Alph is “sacred” and runs through “caverns measureless to man” – Alf the artist plumbing the depths of primordial consciousness. As he tells Mrs. Godbold: “That is how I want it. The faces must be half turned away, but you still gotta understand what is in the part that is hidden” (Riders 283)

While the dome is necessarily a projection from the earth, the river is depicted as running covertly, secretly, flowing almost underground. Kubla Khan’s river Alph has an element of unpredictability and uncertainty; it is “meandering with a mazy motion” before it reaches infinity (“the caverns measureless to man”).

Wilson Knight suggests that water parallels instinct. “[…] suggesting original mysteries of the distant and primeval, flexes, fire and light hold a more intellectual suggestion – They are in not becoming self-conscious, leading to many agencies and high aspirations” (96-97).

Dubbo’s fascination with the unfolding fire, described by Himmelfarb also hints at his association with fire – instinct and intellect co-joining to make a powerful symbol of regeneration. Thy symbol of Xanadu and the symbol of the river when allied, begin to take on an extremely connotative significance. “The dome” Wilson Knight remarks: “[…] must be related to other statements of an ultimate intuition
where the circular or architectural supervenes on the natural: in particular to the mystic dome of Yeat’s “Byzantium” (97).

Viewed in this way, it gives one an idea of the possible shape White hopes the Australian experience should take. While Kubla Khan “decrees” that the pleasure dome be built, Norbert Hare does it as an act of defiance and is scorned at for daring to imagine such a dome, in a land where beauty was suspect. The willful destruction of Xanadu hints at failure in the attempt for a more poetic imagination. Yet Coleridge’s narrator says in “Kubla Khan” that if he heard the Abyssinian maid’s symphony and song: “I would build that dome in air” (298).

This reveals that the archetypal dome itself was not immune to destruction. But in Riders instead of the Abyssinian maid’s regenerative song, there is the young workman’s dance of desecration amongst the Xanadu ruins: “The young chap [...] stood on the landing at Xanadu with a bit of an old fan he had found and there, amongst the lazy sunlight which the trees allowed to filter on to the brown wallpaper and dust-marks, improvised a dance which celebrated the history of that place” (Riders 465).

But Alf Dubbo too has built his own dome in air there is his indisputable legacy – his fiery paintings sold for a song and withdrawn from the public eye, literally going underground, (but unlike his aboriginal ancestors who left no trace of the authorship of the cave paintings, he sings his) but significantly waiting “to be discovered” (461). Each of the four characters has his or her own characteristic “dome in air”. Mary Hare though her death has become an integral part of Xanadu:
“Mrs. Godbold knew [...] that Miss Hare would not leave those parts [...] more than temporarily in spirit” (464).

Himmelfarb’s “dome in air” is his constructive ability to forgive humanity for the cruel persecution of his race (like Alf Dubbo does). What is perhaps even more important, Gentile and Jew are no longer irreconcilable entities. He can view all men as one man at last. While he is dying, almost in a trance he feels he is flowing along a river round whose banks are gathered thousands of people:

So the thousands waited for him along the banks of the interminable river. Sometimes the faces were those of Jews, sometimes they were gentile faces, but no matter [...]. By that light, even the most pitiable or monstrous incidents experienced by human understanding were justified it seemed. (438)

Mrs. Godbold too seems to have a similar insight when she tells the distraught Rosetree that Himmelfarb had been accorded Christian burial:

Men are the same before they are born. They are same at birth, perhaps you will agree. It is only the coat they are told to put on that makes them all that different [...] Only at the end, when everything is taken from them, it seems that there was never any need. There they are the poor souls, at rest, and all naked again, as they were in the beginning. (446)

Mrs. Godbold the least intellectual and the least arrogant of the four protagonists (she is a kind of ministering angel to the other three – nursing Mary Hare during her illness in Xanadu, wiping the blood off Alf’s face as he lies in a drunken
stupor on Mrs. Khalil’s floor and finally nursing Himmelfarb before his death) has also had her one memorable aesthetic-spiritual experience – listening to the organ music in the forbidden cathedral in England, an experience which she recounts to Dubbo: “In a voice so oblivious and convincing that Ruth Joyner was again sitting in the cathedral of her home town, watching the scaffolding of music as it was erected, herself taking part in the exquisitely complicated operation” (283).

The act of synthesis, the orchestration of different religions and cultures could be brought together by the same kind of vision that creates great music and poetry and paintings, that “exquisitely complicated operation”. Mrs. Godbold, in spite of her seeming placidity and kindliness however, is not without her own momentary terrors too. Returning from the hospital where the body of her estranged husband lay, she is suddenly overcome by a kind of anguish for all humanity:

[…] dismay overtook Mrs. Godbold and she began to cry. It seemed as if the group of figures huddled on the bank was ignored not so much by the traffic as by the strong undeviating flood of time […] she cried rather, for the condition of men, for all those she had loved, burningly, or at a respectful distance from her father, seated at his bench in his prison of flesh, and her own brood of puzzled little girls, for her former mistress, always clutching at the hem and finding it come away in her hand, for her fellow initiates, the mad-woman and the Jew of Sarsaparilla, even for the black fellow she had met at Khalil’s […] she cried, finally, for the people beside her in the street, whose doubts she would never dissolve in words, but understood perhaps from those she had experienced. (288)
Perhaps White intends Mrs. Godbold’s six daughters, “her six arrows” to be her “dome in air”. But this is rather clumsily and awkwardly put, and one hesitates to accept it: “She had shot her six arrows at the face of darkness, and halted it. And wherever her arrows struck, she saw other arrows breed” (489).

More convincing and more subtly expressed is: “Now she could approach her work of living, as an artist, after an interval will approach and judge his work of art” (491). And out of the ugly fibro-houses erected on the legend that was Xanadu, she can sense signs of continuing new life – a hint of promise. “Mrs. Godbold could not help admiring the houses for their signs of life: for the children coming home from school, for a row of young cauliflowers, for a convalescent woman, who had stepped outside [...] to gather a late rose”(490). So Xanadu is not destroyed after all. Out of its debris springs the promise of rejuvenating life.

One of the structural bases of White’s novels is the spiritual quest of the hero or heroine. Unlike the quest of the romance move itself, which involves external movement and marvelous adventures as well as significance, the journey of White’s protagonists is primarily inward in to the depths of their own natures, there to discover undesirable qualities repellent is depicted in terms of four archetypal stages. The Edenic stage of innocence the adult recognition of guilt, the assumption of suffering, and a fourth state that lies beyond death and outside temporal limitations.

From the epigraph of his first novel, which describes moral progress as being dependent upon the laws of suffering, White’s writing demonstrates the necessity of suffering in human life. His vision encompasses not merely the inevitability of suffering in man’s experience but the possibility that suffering may be both
exemplary and redemptive for the individual who suffers and for all those involved. From his first novel he uses the passion of Christ as the basic archetype of redemptive suffering. In the suffering and death of the third archetypal stage, death may be physical or psychic. Each of the four protagonists of Riders in the Chariot passes through a psychic death before arriving at a state of blessedness which the little dyer of purple hands describes as equanimity. The stage following upon such a death is one of a passionate love for others; it is at once personal and impartial, unlike the preferential concern and love of our normal experience. This fourth state within human life anticipates a blessed condition after life, the heaven of formal religions. White's fictional version of the heavenly state include the life of equanimity reached by the four riders. This near-heavenly state corresponds to the land of Beulah in the works of Blake and Bunyan, and the term itself is taken from Isaiah [62:4].

Hell and purgatory are also aspects of the fourth state, hell being shown by White as a demonic parody of the blessed state, as in The Boyle's station at Jildra. Purgatory is demonstrated in the luncheon scene of the crab-shell, the Bon-bon and the volcano, in the last chapter of Riders in the Chariot, where “the society ladies have floundered on the rock of love and are craving in hopes that saving grace might just become visible in the depths of the obscure purgatory in which they sat” (525).

In the same chapter, Mrs. Jolley and Mrs. Flack, are shown “in hell”, tormenting each other and themselves. “Night thoughts were cruelest and often the two women […]. Would lead each other gently back to the origins of darkness. They were desperately necessary to each other in threading the labyrinth. Without proper guidance, a soul in hell might lose itself” (516).
The quest of White's protagonists is shaped, in part, by the quest—myths found in the Bible, and in medieval romance literature with its dragon—killing theme. Romance focuses upon the conflict between the hero and his enemy, making the hero analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world; White uses the St. George myth, but his hero finds his chief enemy within himself. Moses is the archetypal leader who guides the Jewish people out of bondage under Pharaoh, to begin the long and arduous quest for the promised land. Northrop Frye describes the Bible's two concentric quest—myths, a genesis—apocalypse myth and an Exodus—millennium myth as follows:

In the former Adam is cast out of Eden, loses the river of life and the tree of life, and wanders in the labyrinth of human history until he is restored to his original state by the Messiah. In the latter Israel is cast out of his inheritance and wanders in the labyrinths of Egyptian and Babylonian captivity until he is restored to his original state in the promised land. Eden and the promised land, therefore, are typical identical, as are the tyrannies of Egypt and Babylon and the wilderness of the law. (42)

In White's modern comedies, where the idealized and supernatural forms proper to romance and myth are displaced by a narrative of verisimilitude or apparent realism, myth is used as an archetypal and anagogic metaphor. Riders in the Chariot, uses both the exodus—millennium myth and the genesis apocalypse myth; the two coverage in part six with the identification of Passover and Easter. At the end of part two, as Himmelfarb reaches Australia, a pillar of fire appears to rise up before him on
the tarmac, recalling that which preceded the Jews on their forty-year desert journey to the promised land. His choice of Australia as the farthest, perhaps also the bitterest of lands relates his suffering to the bitterness of the Egyptian bondage and the desert hardships. In their four-stage quest, White's protagonists move towards the apocalypse millennium, the new Eden and the promised land.

After the classic forms of the *Tree of Man*, and *Voss*, which established White amongst the most impressive of contemporary writers, the novels which followed in the 1960's seemed highly idiosyncratic. Instead of a mastery innovation of traditional forms and themes, readers encountered fractured structures, discordant styles and extended satiric caricature of contemporary society. *Riders in the Chariot* and *The Solid Mandala* displayed what for many came to be seen as characteristic of White: a patrician disdain for the vulgarities of modern life, and a ‘misanthropic’, restriction of interest to socially alienated characters who expressed his other-worldly, preoccupations. Yet this period, in which the strain of social satire in his work was strongest, was also one of fertile experiment, with White pursuing a wide variety of formal and stylistic approaches in different genres. In his works he related his preoccupations with imaginative and religious experience to contemporary social existence in the Sydney suburb of Sarsaparilla.

Stating this B. Kiernan in his *Novels of Patrick White* proceeds to analyze the paths to perception in *Riders in the Chariot*. *Riders in the Chariot* has proved the most controversial of the novels. The savagery of its social satire accounts for much of the controversy that surrounded its appearance. Yet, it is also the novel most directly concerned with religion, or religions in the orthodox sense, the most permeated with
theological language and some paradox has been observed here. Recent critical interest has shifted attention behind this, and evaluations of the success with which the intention discerned has been achieved. On these issues there is little agreement. While *Riders in the Chariot* reveals what has been seen as Patrick White’s most marked short comings, it is also a novel which displays the grandeur of his artistic ambition, his sheer skill at commanding a range of styles and modes. The grandeur of the conception is apparent in his attempt to explore imaginatively the nature of evil, by relating the collapse of German civilization to the barbarism of Nazi genocide to contemporary civilization in an Australian suburb. In his letter to Mr. Heubsch, Patrick White wrote,

[...] nor does the book have an exclusively Jewish theme as this letter might suggest. What I want to emphasize through my four riders – an orthodox refugee intellectual Jew, a mad Erdgeist (Earth spirit) of an Australian spinster, an evangelical laundress, and a half – caste aboriginal painter – is that all faiths whether religious, humanistic, instinctive or the creative artist’s act of praise, are in fact one. The half – caste aboriginal, who is diseased and degraded as a human being, will be perhaps the real test whether I can make his creative genius strong and convincing enough. (149)

*Riders in the Chariot* is the novel that most fully presents Sarsaparilla, the imaginary suburb in the area near where the Parkers of *The Tree of Man* first settled. The mental map the reader forms of the recent, outlying suburbs of Sarsaparilla and Barrunugli, the more affluent Paradise East, and the city proper has drawn
comparisons with Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha country. The crucifixion in this novel, the mock lynching of a German Jewish refugee is a bold and disturbing imaginative stroke reminiscent of Faulkner at his most Gothic. This is the central event on which the lives of the major characters converge. There is Miss. Hare of Xanadu, the spinster survivor of a decayed social class, who lives alone in her crumbling mansion, preferring birds, animals and plants to people. She befriends the elderly Mordecai Himmelfarb, the refugee from Germany and survivor of the concentration camps, who now works at the local Brighta Bicycle Lamp factory. Close to Xanadu is the temporary dwelling of Mrs. Godbold, who comes from rural England as a girl to go into service but who now supports her large family and shiftless husband, by taking in washing. Amongst the workers at the bicycle lamp factory is Alf Dubbo, a tubercular half-caste Aboriginal who paints secretly. These are the illuminates who, set apart from local society for individual reasons, recognize in each other a capacity for transcendent experience. Each is memorably individualized through his or her biography and at the same time, contrasted with a set of boldly theatrical caricatures: Miss. Hare with her house keeper Mrs. Jolley and her friends Mrs. Flack the plastic ladies of suburbia, vulgar in their imagined gentility threatening in their capacity for petty malice: Himmelfarb with Harry Rosetree, the owner of the factory, formerly Haim Rosenbaum, now assimilated and living with kids in Paradise East: Ruth Godbold with her former mistress Mrs. Chlmers – Robinson; and Alf Dubbo with the prostitute Hanna whom he rooms with, and her pufter friend Norm Fussel.

Through the story of Moredecai Himmelfarb, whose biography is the longest, a correspondent is suggested between the evil of Nazi genocide and the incipient,
banal evil that R.F. Brissenden has described as "the way in which the grey, conformist forces within society perpetually seek to crucify the individual, or the group, who dares to be different." This metaphorical use of crucifixion is apt for the way in which the novel seeks to relate religious myth, historical catastrophe and the mundane, but threatening immediacies of contemporary Australian life. A simultaneously realistic and symbolic presentation is indicated in the first few paragraphs, where we are told that the war was over, and the peace had not set aboard, that the enemy might not have withdrawn, and that the relationship between Miss. Hare and Mrs. Godbold had been fully ratified. This imagery of war and armistic — ratification is a key word to describe relationships through and appears again on the last page — suggests not only the actual war, which is now over, but also that eternal battle between forces of good and evil which is joined once more, even if satirically or farcically, in Sarasaparilla.

Despite such intimations of allegory, the four visionaries are presented with that finely selective adjustment of past and present, inner and social experience which is first found fully developed in The Aunts Story. In fact, the first of the biographies, that of Mary Hare, is reminiscent of Theodora Goodman's in its unfolding through a series of epiphenic moments that establish her personality with psychological activity but without explicit diagnosis. Like Theodora, Mary Hare as a child suffers from isolation because she is the daughter of a dilettante member of the landed 'gentry', and isolation within the family because of her sense of being ugly and resented intruder into her parent's lives. Her father, Norbert Hare was the son of a city wine merchant who had married Eleanor Urquhart Smith, a descendant of a former
governor of the state. Norbert had built the now crumbling Xanadu as his pleasure place, providing it with marble stairs, an Italian mosaic bath in a saturnalian pattern, and capping all, an amethyst glass dome which looked out, over the park he had planted, to “the ragged cynicism” (15) of the grey scrub beyond. The house mirrors his impetuosity, his extravagant self-indulgence, and his desperate seeking of distractions from the encompassing, mundane reality expressed by the cynical native gums. There is a splendidly comic Gothic scene when he runs amuck in the heat one evening, hurls the bowl from the table through the window and starts shooting at the chandelier before aiming at his own heart and missing. On this occasion the young Mary reveals to her intuitive understanding of her father’s histrionics. Another, and the most disturbing, moment is when her father, drowning in a cistern, refuses her assistance; a traumatic movement she perceives in a trance-like state. Reverberating, it suggests that Norbert, with demented cunning, is seeking to involve his daughter in his suicide, to manipulate her physically so that whatever the outcome she will be made to feel guilty. The incident captures his ambivalence towards her, his suspicion that her simplicity might be wisdom. The ambivalence has been expressed earlier by his repudiation of her for her ugliness, yet fondling her and asking “who are the Riders in the Chariot?” a question that encourages her to expect of life ‘some ultimate revelation’ and which is followed by the remark: “If fellowship with Himmelfarb and Mrs. Godbold, And perhaps her brief communication with a certain Black fellow, would confirm rather than expound a Mystery, the reason could be that, in the last light, Illumination is synonymous with blinding.” (24).
The presentation of Miss. Hare's biography in the opening is skillfully intercut with her encounters with the other visionaries and with Mrs. Jolley her housekeeper who had come from Melbourne. In contrast with the recognition scenes between the illuminates, which hover on the edge of silence because what is recognized is a shared sense of the banality of everyday existence, Mrs. Jolley and her friend Mrs. Flack are boldly satiric caricatures. They are stage stereo types of the uniquely Australian suburban matron discovered by the comedian Barry Humphries in the flush of post war affluence during the 1950's, as flatly one-dimensional as their intonation, they are dependent on their hats, their litany of household appliances, and other nonce staples of conversation, for their identity. Wearing motherhood and widowhood like robes of office, they proclaim their normality, that is, their pettiness, ignorance and prejudice, with righteous pride. With feline accuracy, Patrick White pounces, unerringly on their reveling protestations and pretensions. For the Australian reader, they are wickedly accurate caricatures, which impart the same pleasure in recognizing the typical and familiar, as Humphrie's stage's stereotypes, or White's own in his plays set in suburbia. The bold stroke of employing them in a novel though, where they are also perceived as the agents of a universal evil, has met with charges of malicious excess. They provide the most obvious example of how the mixture of modes and styles juxtaposed throughout this novel, strain critical expectations of decorum or consistency.

Thematically, Mesdames Jolley and Flack provide a parodic inversion of the seekers, and they are also ironically described in religious terms. Mrs. Flack's residence is called 'Karma'. Mrs. Jolley visits there and has her spiritual hunger
satiated by friendship and the display of such sacramentals as a pastel-blue plastic dressing table. In a parody of the communications between the illuminates, they sit after tea silently listening to their rumbling stomachs. Like Mrs. Godbold, Mrs. Jolley likes to sing hymns as she works: “She loved to sing the pinker Hymns. She would even sing those of which she did not know the words. She sang and baked. And saw pink, she loved the Jesus Christ of long pink face and languid curls, in words and windows. All was right then. All the kiddies saved. All was sanctified by cake” (59).

There are, however also presented as adepts, as ‘pythonesses’ trying to foretell and influence events, as Mrs. Flack does by inciting her illegitimate son, Blue, to Persecute Himmelfarb. This melodramatic contrivance seems to endorse Miss. Hare’s view of Mrs. Jolley as “one of the evil one’s” (156). In her discussion with Himmelfarb about sin, evil and the possibility of redemption, that interrupts the Jew’s account of his early life. Yet seeing such a caricature as the embodiment of evil, even the banality of evil, depends on also seeing, as Miss. Hare does, plastic as evil and however much sympathy might be elicited for her, Miss. Hare is mad.

Himmelfarb’s story, which he tells Miss. Hare while sitting in her garden, introduces fresh modulations mode and tone. His Bilddungsroman, recounting the growth of the soul of German Jewish boy who becomes a professor in English and then, after the war, a humble factory worker in Australia who inwardly burns to become the scapegoat for his people, is a remarkable example of White’s imaginative empathy. Geoffrey Dutton’s comment that those who were convinced after Voss that White was a Catholic mystic would find instead with Riders in the Chariot that “all long [...] he must have been an orthodox Jew” testifies to the authority he is able to
bring to bear here. The impression created is of an ample biographical account of the social and spiritual development of a personality that has known directly or indirectly the experience of his co-religionists in Europe from the 1880's to the present. Yet, despite the impression of amplitude, the procedure is essentially that of presenting the precise, authenticating images that evoke the sense of historic significance; it is as much imagistic as realistic. Thus the cultural assimilation of Himmelfarb's father into the German middle class is established obliquely by reference to his hats.

Unlike certain fanatics, he recognized his obligations to the community in which he lived, while observing the ceremony of his own. Mordecai remembered the silk hats in which his father presented himself, on civic and religious occasions alike. Ordered from an English hatter, Moshe's hats reflected that nice perfection which may be Attained less. If he was also nothing more, that was after Other, exacting, not to say reactionary standards, by which Such lustrous hats could only be judged vain, hollow, and Lamentably fragile. (Riders 98)

Whereas, the mother's retention of traditional Galician ways is evoked through architectural images.

Frau Himmelfarb had never become reconciled to the well ordered, too specious life of the North German town. As she walked with her child against the painted drop of Renaissance houses, or the formal magnificence of Biedermier mansions, her incredulous eyes would reject the evidence that man had thus confirmed the infinite. Only in
certain dark medieval street, Mordecai remembered, did his mother seem to escape from the oppression of her material surroundings. (99)

The young Mordecai's conflicts between his mother's pious orthodoxy and his father's assimilation to Gentile ways, between his youthful embarrassment at the poverty of those who are received by his mother with traditional hospitality – the rabbi from Galicia, the poor Cantor who has only his magnificent voice, and the little dyer who comes in time to haunt his conscience – and his pleasure at being accepted socially by the liberal Germans – the Stauffers, is the material of the classic novel of moral education. It is presented in a telling succession of images that evoke both the culture and Mordecai's conflicts within it, for example, his adolescent sexual turmoil which is also a flight from the involvement he feels for the little dyer:

He would roam the streets, looking into lit windows, brush against a passer by and apologize with an effusiveness which could only be interpreted as insolence. Now that he was filled with a rage to live, the scents of the streets maddened him. He would try the breasts of the whores, propped on cushions, on their window – skills. He had an insatiable appetite for white flesh, of pale complacent German girls, pressed against stucco, or writhing in the undergrowth of parks, beside stagnant water in a smell of green decay. (110)

Although Mordecai is to pursue a successful academic career, his course is away from the assimilation his father has pursued. He married the daughter of a family the disgusting dyer of his youth had introduced him to for their 'loving kindness', and "takes the path of inwardness" (134). His fascination with the Chariot
in his cabbalistic studies, his perception of "the fragmentary nature of things" (141),
and his telling his wife reassuringly that perception is not attainable by only a
privileged few but that "God is in this table" (142), emerge without any strain from
the culture context of his life. The rest of the story of his life in Europe how he is
reduced to his essential self by the loss of his position, his possession and his wife, is
sent to the gas chambers and is reprieved by suffering his first cavalry, when he is
torn by wires, and illuminated by blindness so that he discerns life in its essence, "the
blessed shape of things" (185) – is similarly convincing, with the symbolic
suggestions grounded in realistic detail.

When Himmelfarb with his messianic mission to expiate the sins of the world
reaches Australia, ends up at Rosetree’s Brighta Bicycle lamp factory. Harry Rosetree
and his wife Shrill, who has “a kind of gift for assimilation.” (208), have changed
their names, their language and their religion to become respectable middle class
Australians from the superior suburb of Paradise East. The mercilessly observant eye
, and ear, that studied the decidedly lower middle class ladies of Sarsaparilla, note the
possessions, Customline sedan and West minister Chimes, that distinguish this social
level. Class distinctions, difficult to draw in a society that proclaims egalitarianism,
are also located with gleeful malice with the ‘ladies’ and ‘gentleman’ Harry Rosetree
employs at his factory. With ironic courtesy, White bestows on the ladies of the office
the recognition of their gentility which they crave, and acknowledges the gentlemen’s
swagger of independence and refusal to be identified with their work roles. John
Colmer, in his searching discussion of the novel Riders in the Chariot, suggests there
is something Swiftian about the satiric stance.
The words of the foreman, Eric Theobald, whose mimicry of his boss's pronunciation is obviously part of his patronizing attitude towards the foreigner, can hardly console Rosetree, who has first been forced to tell Himmelfarb that he is a convert to Catholicism. Instead of a distanced disdain, as in the account of Himmelfarb's journey through the city at Passover, there is here and in similar passages an amused dramatic engagement with social manners.

The third of the visionaries, Ruth Goldbold, born Joynor, introduces another level of social satire and a different area of religious experience. Born in the English Fen country, the eldest daughter of a devout nonconformist cobbler, she has acquired an instinctive sense of duty and devotion to others. In comparison with the richness of detail in the presentation of Himmelfarb's previous life, and the haunting grotesquerie of Miss. Hare's, there is vagueness, a thinness, a sense of no more than adequacy about Ruth Joyonor's English background. The conventions of the novel of English rural life are drawn upon for the salient episodes of her entering the mysterious stone forest of the Cathedral to hear an old organist play Bach, and the haymaking when her brother is decapitated by the wheels of a cart. After this incident her refuses to look at her and after he remarries she emigrates to Australia where she enters into service as a maid. The social satire with her employers, Mrs. Chalmers- Robinson and her husband provides the specificity, the convincing excess of detail, that is lacking in the English scenes. Thus Ruth Joynor arrives in Australia in the period when "hostesses were discovering cuisine and forcing their husbands into clubs, hotels, even railway stations, in their longing for the stench of corned beef" (245).
Ruth Joynor becomes Mrs. Godbold when she marries Tom, the ice-man who delivered to the Charmers- Robinson's and moves to the temporary dwelling at Sarsaparilla to begin raising her large tribe daughters. The climax to her section of the novel comes when she goes down to Mrs. Khalil's brother to save her weak, indulgent husband from his worst instincts. Where a descent into a contemporary hell might be expected, and images of sterile lust and spiritual death, there is found instead a comic, if grotesque and broadly theatrical celebration of "all the commotion of life" (285). In a variation of Amy Parker's visiting the O'Dowds and encountering unabashed indulgence of the senses amidst the bags and iron of Australian life, Ruth Godbold encounters mere mortality in the brothel. The kitchen she is invited into is full of unwashed dishes, laundry and cats. In one bedroom the law is being entertained by Mrs. Khalil's elder daughter, Lurleen. Mrs. Khalil herself is engaging a waiting gentleman in a singlet on the subject of death. Fixer Jensen, the local Snopes looks in and drunken Alf Dubbo, the fourth visionary appears to dance and sing gnomic songs. This is the underside of Sarsaparillan life, its low vitalism and disregard for the pseudo-gentilities of suburbia clearly preferred to the niceties affected by Mesdames Jolley and Flack. However, as the ladies and their singleted clients like to preserve a basic dignity, the drunken half-caste is excluded from the tolerance of human failings shown to others. He is regarded as a colour, not as a client. Mrs. Godbold who is awaiting her husband's appearance from a bedroom has to accept Mrs. Khalil's statement that the clients come in search of live and responding to the common humanity revealed in the brothel, sympathises with Dubbo who has collapsed. She wipes the blood from his mouth, realizing, "soon it would be
her turn to bleed” (285). The extremes of low-life comedy and the recognition scene between the visionaries are juxtaposed in this well dramatized scene. It seems unfortunate that, after Mrs. Godbold leaves the brothel with her humiliated husband, a syntopic account of her past and future life in terms of all the men she weeps for is provided. Dubbo is included, but the reference to him does not add to the scene just concluded, and seems an attempt to invest it, and the rest of the details of Mrs. Godbold’s life, with a significance not apparent in their presentation elsewhere. At the end of the novel, she remembers this night as when she had “shared a mystery” (491) with Dubbo. The strength of the scene however, lies not in its mystery but its mingled comic and pathetic actuality.

White is less successful in imaginatively, empathizing with Mrs. Godbold and her overbearing material compassion, in endowing her with a life apparently independent of his thematic purposes, than he is with the other major characters. Alf Dubbo, however is a triumph. Like Himmelfarb’s, his biography has a social-historical representativeness, and his fascination with the image of the Chariot has, because of his artistic imagination, a similar appropriateness. He provides White’s first major portraits of the artist, a figure glimpsed in Mrs. Gage and the grandson in The Tree of Man, and in Willy Pringle and Le Mesurier in Voss. Alf is an illegitimate half-caste who has been adopted by the Reverend Timothy Calderon and his sister, Mrs. Pask, as their Great Experiment. Taught to paint formal watercolours by Mrs. Pask, he begs his first oils at the age of thirteen and produced a Christ, which revolts his teachers. Like Miss. Hare, his morally natural, finding beauty in the most unconventional subjects, accepting life in all its manifestation and withdrawing into
his own contemplations. His artistic consciousness is revealed not so much through descriptions of his paintings as through presentation of his habits of perception. There is a close congruity between White's own metaphoric manner and concern with colour, texture and form, and the correspondence Dubbo is constantly shown as perceiving. When the reverend Timothy initiates a sexual encounter, Alf is unconcerned, amused that the Reverend’s stomach gurgles with passion and that his unclothed body reminds him of witchetty grubs. He reveals the same moral detachment and aesthetic response to experience in his encounter with Mrs. Spice on the town dump, after he has had to leave the Calderon’s because of Mrs. Pask’s discovery of him in the Reverend’s bed room and later in Sydney when he rooms with a prostitute Hannah, who holds court for a gaggle of transvestite homosexuals. Again, what would be associated by society with sin and evil, holds for Alf and aesthetic fascination: “She had not made her bed, and the sheets were the colour of Hannah’s natural skin-gery, at least in that light, Hannah herself was the colour of oysters, except for the parting of her breasts, where water should have been dripping, like in an old bath or kitchen sink” (351).

As a boy, his imagination had been seized by the reproduction of a French painting showing four riders in a chariot illuminated by Apollo in one of the Reverend Timothy’s books. He responds to this, as he cannot imaginatively to the Gospels the Reverend instructs him in; they elude his powers of visualization, for his conception of love has been formed by memories of his mother and a quarter-caste on a metho jag. Years later, in the Sydney public library he comes across the remembered painting again.
On the whole he had little desired to learn from the achievements of other artists, just as he had no wish to profit by or collaborate in the experience of other men. As if his still in complete vision would complete itself in time, through revelation. But once he came across the painting by a Frenchman of the Apollonian chariot on its trajectory across the sky. And he sat forward, easing his brown raincoat, his yellow fingers steadying themselves on the slippery page. He realized how differently he saw this painting since his first acquaintance with it, and how he would not transcribe the Frenchman's limited composition into his own terms of motion and forms partly transcendental, partly evolved from his struggle with daily becoming and experience of suffering. (342)

The same sequence as in the past is repeated. Remembering the guardians of his youth, he reads the Gospels, only to find they are "pale, washed in love and charity, but pale" (342), and this time it is he who makes casual love, to a drunken woman. Dubbo achieves the ability to translate the 'transcendental' into paint, to express his sense of an "Absolute" (344) in terms of experience, after he perceives the deaths of Himmelfarb as a traditional Deposition, with Miss. Hare and Ruth Godbold as the two Martyrs. This clarifies his vision so that the elusive and water coloured Gospels can be apprehended in terms of "his struggle with daily becoming and experience of suffering" (342). After painting the deposition, he commences his last work, of the Riders in the Chariot, or 'the Chariot-thing, as he mentally refers to it. This shows the four visionaries symbolically in terms of the suffering they have
experienced and have been redeemed by. From this canvas, “one curious fact emerged. From certain angles the canvas presented a reversal of the relationship between permanence and motion, as though the banks of a river were to begin to flow alongside its stationary water” (458). The ultimate realization that Alf, and the novel, achieves is that permanence and motion are relative, and interdependent; that there is no absolute state or ultimate revelation, such as the visionaries have pursued, within life. This culminating realization of Alf’s life is, with his painting which achieves it, lost after his death.

Although few commentators have failed to respond to the imaginativeness with which the past lives of the four very different visionaries are created, doubts have been expressed about their relationship to each other, and to Sarsaparillian society, in the novel’s present tense. These doubts are not only over the contrivance with which the visionaries’ lives converge on the crucifixion, and subsequent deaths, of Himelfarb, but also over the author’s intentions and attitudes and his success in realizing these. A central issue in critical discussion of the novel, is the significance of the chariot by which the visionaries recognize each other. In a novel concerned with characters in search of illumination, what is being revealed here. In itself the chariot does not provide any revelation. It serves instead as a focus for the characters searching along their various paths to perception. Miss. Hare’s chariot is related to the skin, and to the principle of life, rather than more specifically to the Biblical image that Himmelfarb and Dubbo share. Miss. Hare recognizes Ruth Godbold as a fellow seer, and tells Himmelfarb that the washerwoman has also seen the Chariot, yet Mrs. Godbold’s vision as a girl, was of a golden ladder while listening to music.
The only Chariot in her experience was the cart which beheaded her brother. Himmelfarb’s chariot is that of his cabbalistic studies; Dubbo’s an amalgam of the reverend Calderon’s instructions about “God in cloud and God in man” (333). Ezekiel and a reproduction of the French painting of an Apollonian chariot. For each, the image has quiet individual connotations, yet serves as a way of communicating their sense of the ineffable- of some ultimate meaning and unity in life. In these terms, what to some critics has seemed, vagueness is establishing the significance of the novel’s central image is based on a misunderstanding, no chariot manifests itself independently of the perceptions of the individual visionaries, and Alf Dubbo, whose perception of the image is the fullest, in fact creates this in his last painting before his death. The intention would seem to be again to reveal, as in La Mesurier’s statement in Voss, that “the mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle in becoming” (271). If this is the intention however, there is still a haziness and portentousness in references to the Chariot that seem to imply some arcane significance lurking behind what is dramatically presented. Norbert Hare’s unexpected, and gratuitous, question to his daughter as to who are the riders in the chariot, already mentioned, is an early example of this.

A hazy portentousness also attends the encounters of the visionaries generally. The way in which their language skirts the edge of silence as they hint at the ineffable to each other has raised questions of the adequacy of dramatic realization and balance.

John Colmer’s recent study of the novel captures succinctly the reason for these doubts when he points out that there are two levels of language, one to render
mundane reality, the other the inner world of the visionaries; ejaculations and laconic utterances render the plight of the lovely visionaries, who have to fulfill their minimal social obligations through speech but who are only at home in the language of silent visions. An objection to these of such a rhetoric to present the visionaries, an objection that has been repeated since the novel first appeared, is that it is intended to predispose the reader towards those who are privileged by the author as against the plastic ladies, and the gentlemen in singlets, whose vernacular utterances reveal them as devoid of any percipience whatsoever- but which also have paradoxically, a convincingness and vitality not found in the exchanges between the visionaries. This objection relates to unregenerate mass, and that this radical imbalance in the author's sympathies involves an apparent contradiction. For, if illumination can be won by such outwardly unlikely characters as these, why not by Ernie Theobald, or others?

As well as these different levels of language, there is another aspect of the style that impinges here, in a more complicated way. As has been suggested, the novel engages with a range of modes and stereotypes, chiefly comic, some, as with Norbert Hare, parodic. The juxtaposing of different modes can be seen with each of the visionaries and the theatrical stereotypes that they are thrown into comparison with. This clashing of modes can also be observed at the climax of the crucifixion and Himmelfarb's death, which provides the point of convergence for the action. The only time all four visionaries come together is after this when Himmelfarb is dying. It is here that critics have focused their criticisms that the novel is continued, not only for what has been seen as the implausibility of the crucifixion by the implied correspondence between suburban xenophobia and Nazi genocide yet the crucifixion
scene is introduced by a Fellini-type sequence of a funeral and a circus becoming confusedly intermingled, an apt image for the confusion of the comic and the tragic in the novel’s apparent engagement with ultimate social moral issues.

Although the seriousness of White’s concern with the descent of civilization into the barbarism of Friedendorf is not in doubt, the effect of the disparity in modes between the presentation of this, through Himmelfarb’s earlier life in Germany, and its analogue in Sarsaparilla, is that the issue of responsibility is confused. The comic satiric level at which Australian society is presented prevents White from sustaining an analogy that might have mutually illuminated the historical reality of the Nazi holocaust and the author’s criticism of Australian society. There are many correspondence implied between the two societies and sequences of events for example, Miss. Hare’s offer to hide Himmelfarb as the Stauffers had hidden him after the correspondences between the material comforts enjoyed in Australia, by the Rosetrees amongst others, and that which proves such a fatal distraction to so many German Jews.

There were many, however in the achieving villas, in the thin dwellings of congested alleys, beside the Gummibaum intasteful beige apartments, who for a variety of reasons, could not detach themselves from the ganglion of Europe their bones protested, or they loved their furniture, or they must surely be overlooked, or they were drunk with kisses, or transfixed by presentiments of immolation, or too different to believe that they might take their destiny in hand, or of such faith they waited for divine direction. (143)
But the wider analogy between the 'evil' and those who prefer plastic to wood, inhabit brick veneer or fibro homes and go on Sunday drives, and the evil of Nazi genocide seems a confusion of moral with aesthetic values wickedly amusing at its best, the Sarsaparillan satire does not serve the implied comparison, seeming instead a purely personal and aesthetic revulsion which has replaced serious moral concern. As Harry Rosetree discovers, the penalty for apostasy and for embracing the meretricious values of Sarsaparilla is mercilessly harsh. At the personal level, Himmelfarb's experience of suffering from mysterious social forces in Hitler's Germany is powerfully presented, but these forces remain both rationally uncomprehended by him and dissociated from the caricature of society that Sarsaparilla is, and which is presumably intended to illuminate them, or be illuminated by them. The two societies and the modes of writing about them do not interrelate and only personal and inner, experience seen as meaningful.

From the beginning Himmelfarb had known that he possessed the strength, but did pray for some sign. Through all the cursing, and trampling and laughter, and hoisting, and achieving and distortion, he had continued to expect, until now, possibly, it would be given. So, he raised his head. And was conscious of a stillness and clarity, which was the stillness and clarity of pure water, at the center of which god was reflected. (413)

One might well enquire if a sign is given to Himmelfarb. This might be a gesture towards the ineffable which although it cannot be communicated can be alluded to and recognized by sympathetic readers. Or it might be vagueness the
result of a deliberate ambiguity that insinuates an irony at Himmelfarb’s expense. If his vision is as looking in clear water, then what he would see would be himself, and what, literally, he would see reflected in the sky is the sun. In context, the irony would be that he failed messianically to expiate the sins of the world, and his realization is anticlimactic rather than the epiphanic revelation that the reader might expect from a writer he considers conventionally religious. The use of the indirect third person—the intermittent filtering, in this case of Himmelfarb’s consciousness through the narrative, voice—has obviously confused interpretations with some attributing such a passage to the character and assuming the author’s endorsement and other attributing it to the author and detecting his ironic distance from the perception of the character which he is rendering.

A clear instance of such ironic reservations is found when Miss. Hare bursts into Himmelfarb’s burning house. So she stood in the everlasting moment. A revelation should have been made to one possessed to her especial powers, and indeed, a more rational curtain of flame was almost twitched back for her to see. She did almost, from under her key now transparent eyelids. The sparks were halted. She almost saw the body of her friend, a rather frail old man, or at most, inflammable prophet, his ribs burning like the joists of a house.

(423)

The insistent note of qualification here, and her, and her discovery after this that Himmelfarb is not, in fact, in the house, detach author and reader from the revelation. Miss. Hare expects and attempts to summon up. Miss. Hare’s epileptic
fits, like the belated revelation of Mesdames Jolley and Flack's psychological motivations, seem efforts at allowing interpretation at the rational and realistic level while at the same time sustaining the level of symbolic and spiritual significance. Throughout the novel a deliberate ambiguity is produced by maintaining simultaneously two levels of perception, the visionary and the ironically realistic. This can be seen in the final paragraphs describing Mrs. Godbold, the surviving visionary. "from behind", her great beam, under the sticky cardigan, might have appeared something of a joke, except for the few who happened to perceive that she also more a 'crown'. But an ambiguity that suggests irony, at the expense of Himmelfarb's messianic hopes, or Miss. Hare's expectations of revelation, or Mrs. Godbold's simple piety will seem to produce confusion- unless it is considered that the fullest vision is not that of any of the illuminates but of the novelist himself.

In terms of the novel's mixed modes and unbalanced sympathies, it presents finally a deeply divided vision. Through his seers, the author explores different, yet only partial, paths to perception. Of those who have sought a vision of a Chariot- and Mrs. Godbold who remains securely earthbound is not amongst them it is significantly, the artist, Alf Dubbo, who most fully achieves this by creating it in paint. "The vision of that other artist behind Dubbo is of the inherent irony of the Absolute manifesting itself in even the most sordid aspects of life and instead of the individual being able to attain some permanent state of exaltation, of the need for all to be relived, resanctified " (127). In expressing these tensions between man's aspirations towards transcendence and the social world which denies these but in which he must still live, White is not so much resolving them as realizing them with
great imaginative power and passion. A passion which at the same time prevents his achieving a sure control over his dramatic presentation of the conflict.

Even by Patrick White’s standards, Riders in the Chariot is a novel remarkable for its richness of content and it adds to this a more conscious rigour of pattern. If the form disclosed by Voss is that of a route or path, the design of Riders in the Chariot suggests a knot. The lives of four people, utterly different in character and provenance, are tied together in the mean suburb of Sarsaparilla. Their differences are marvelously realized. The lives of the crazy Miss. Hare, Himmelfarb the survivor of the Nazi camps, Mrs. Godbold the East anglian immigrant, and Dubbo the tubercular painter, are unfolded with the utmost assurance and the most inward conviction. The group is united by their possession of a secret gift, the immediate apprehension of reality and values by modes of understanding neglected or despised by the common run of men. This taking of a place among the realities, this knowledge of what life consist in, and this never failing that knowledge, make up the faculty or organ of consciousness which, while independent of experience, makes itself felt gradually through the articulation of the character’s lives. The chariot, biblical, is the symbol of this consciousness. The concept of the chariot comes to Himmelfarb during his studies of ancient Rabbinical mystical works and is cloudily gathered by Miss. Hare by means of an almost non-human instinct for the otherness of the natural world of plants and animals. It appears to each, to Himmelfarb, to Miss. Hare, and to Dubbo and Mrs. Godbold, in an idiom appropriate to his or her nature. At one point Himmelfarb relates it to Jewish spirituality:
“That, I am not sure”, he replied. “it is difficult to distinguish. Just when I think I have understood, I discover some fresh form- so many-streaming with implications. There is obvious enough the Throne of God, for instance. That is obvious enough- all gold, and Chrysoprase and jasper. Then there is the Chariot of Redemption, much more shadowy, poignant, personal. And the faces of the riders, I can’t begin to see the expression of the faces”. (151)

Forms streaming with implication.; the phrase carries with it an intimation of the nature of this special non-discursive apprehension which the world of sense of pure being, of the radiance of existence. It is a gift of which suffering is the necessary condition and the recognition of which in others depends upon one’s possession of it. It invariably provokes persecution. It is because the gift has to do with the clarity of existence that it provokes evil in those who are committed to negation. “The evil may be bland as in Mrs. Jolley, the persecutor of Miss. Hare, or chummy as in the workmates who ravage Himmelfarb in a mock crucifixion, or monstrously abstract as in the Germany of the ovens, where the guards might laugh at some indignity glimpsed, but on the whole, at the assembly point, they seemed to prefer a darkness in which to hate in the abstract the whole mass of Jews” (192). Evil does always contain this note of vacancy, of shadowy non-being. The conflict between the enlightened and the rest is not simply, therefore one of human antagonists but is something raised to a metaphysical and religious plane.

Throughout this novel the nuclear life of objects has an extraordinary importance and is conveyed with a poet’s power. Objects help to make palpable the
most fleeting of metaphysical experiences, and they give weight and solidity to a narrative concerned with what is mysterious and difficult. White in much of his work attempts to convey the inward life of objects and sometimes, particularly in the case of scenery, this tricks him into an exaggerated use of the pathetic fallacy. But in Riders in the Chariot the intrinsic vitality of objects has as part of its being its meaning for the handler and observer. The center of Miss. Hare’s character depends upon her effort empathically to become, not merely to grasp, the nature and existence of what she encounters in the non-human world. This is true in her moods of despair: “Later, when she got up from the ground, she did not attempt to inquire into what might have bludgeoned her numb mind and aching body, for might had come, cold and black, she bruised knuckle on knuckle, to try to stop her shivering, and began to feel her way through the house, by stages of brocade, and vicious gilt, by slippery tortoise shell and coldest, unresponsive marble” (41).

Or in her mood of rapture:

Although no other human being was actually present, she did resent what must eventually recur. She stroked leaves sulkily. She broke a shaggy stick. Other people would drive along a bush road looking out of the windows of a car, but their minds embraced almost nothing of what their flickering eyes saw. Whole towers of green remained unclimbed, rocks unopened, or else the intruders might stop their card, and go in search of water. She had seen them, letting themselves down into the cold, black secret rock pools, while remaining enclosed in their own resentful gooseflesh. Whereas she Miss Hare, whose
eyes were always probing, fingers trying, would achieve the ecstasy of complete, annihilating liberation without any such immersion. (12)

Objects are also used in the more external and traditionally professional way to evoke a personality and define its bias. Mordecai Himmelfarb's father, Moshe, for example, is a worldly Jew of liberal tastes who believes that the age of enlightenment and universal brotherhood had dawned in Western Europe and who loved to give expensive presents and cultivate the Gentiles:

The four main lives through which the author's vision is transmitted (and vision is an appropriate term because White is engaged here with a force which, to quote some words from Voss, causes the world of substance to quake) are shown with that creative authenticity derived from the marriage of absolute fidelity of observation to imaginative power. The tubercular half-caste is someone in whom one sees an essential flavour of Australia, and Dubbo's grasp of reality through the concreteness of painting in something White feels a peculiar personal sympathy for and an astonishing power to communicate. Miss. Hare once more embodies that extraordinary, Lawrentian feeling for other than human forms of life which, as we see in Lawrence, can educate into the highest wisdom, and her tainted genealogy is something that White again shows an intimacy of understanding for Mrs. Godbold represents, as does Stan Parker, simplicity, normality, the central traditional morality raised by gentleness and candour to the point of genius. And this, too, is a nature highly attractive to White which he had dealt with on more than one occasion. Himmelfarb, the central figure of the book, is a wholly new creation, European, Jewish, learned, saintly. Not only he but the cultivated middle-class German – Jewish
tradition to which he belongs, its context, and character, its strength and weakness, are conveyed with extraordinary inwardness and force and without a single false touch or distortion. How splendidly and accurately we feel the ritual and discipline of Hebrew practice and its combination of a strong tribal and family quality with the rule, remote spirit of Jewish religion, or of religion itself.

Himmelfarb's enlightenment, as we see with Voss, is not something which he has earned by effort, nor is it the simple progressive and maturing of his inheritance. It is a gift, a grace. It has survived his doubt, sensuality, infidelity, boredom, treachery and the persecution of others, but its residue in Himmelfarb is a total clarity of understanding which enables him, to take his place in the realities and to know what life consists in and never to fail in that knowledge.

Just as the grades of evil are connected, so there is a unity supporting, the rungs of faith, or the ladder of goodness. Just as the party of evil can stretch from the Nazis to the factory workers, so that good includes in its membership the sanctity of Himmelfarb, the crazed integrity of Miss. Hare, the aloof disinterestedness of Dubbo and the folk goodness of Mrs. Godbold. Indeed, these four, drawn from the ends of the earth and brought together in this remote and unlikely place, correspond to or indeed are the hidden Zaddikim.

In each generation, (says Himmelfarb to Miss. Hare “We say, there are thirty six hidden zaddikim holy men who go secretly about the world, healing, interpreting, doing their good deeds [...] ”. “It is even told [...] how the creative light of God poured into the Zaddikim. That they are the Chariot of God ”( 173).
In fact, we see here how the technique of the novel, the skilful sewing by which these utterly desperate lives are brought together, is exquisitely in symmetry with the central theme of the novel – the existence of a party of goodness and being, and the singular and profound and secret unity which binds its members together. This, in fact, is the highest kind of techniques, the best answer to Leavis's question: "is there any great novelist whose preoccupation with form is not a matter of his responsibility towards a rich human interest, or complexity of interests, profoundly realized? – a responsibility involving, of its nature, imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination and judgement of relative human value?" (29)

Patrick white belongs to a line of novelists whose art embodies a concentrated and dazzling vision of man. Such writers are not manipulators of plot, or cultivators of sensibility, or critics, of manners, or chronicles of a period. Their art is initiated by their vision and its form is determined more by a force from within than by an extrinsic scaffolding. These writers are not lacking in the capacity for the most inclusive and most significant kind of design. Voss and Riders in the Chariot certainly answer this account.

In the third section of Voss there occur some lines already quoted- which are an apt epigraph for Riders in the chariot. "It was his niece, Laura Travelyan, who had caused Mr. Bonner's world of substance to quake" (Voss 373). Causing the world of substance is the great shaping activity working through Riders in the Chariot. The world of substance exposed in the novel includes not only the hard, thick, resistant one of common life and convention but other and odder worlds too; the world of a crazy specimen of the decayed Australian gentry, the world of an unpretentious
working woman, the world of a persecuted German Jew, the world of an uprooted Aborigine. In addition, each of the characters, in which these worlds are defined and examined gives access to one species of a fourfold variety of experience of the natural world, of plants and animals through Miss. Hare nearly non-human instinct for otherness, of family ritual and neighbourliness in Mrs. Godbold, of sanctity in Himmelfarb, and of art in the painting of Dubbo. The four lives, the separate worlds, different orders of experience, connect in a skillfully managed and natural way, in Sarsaparilla. But perhaps, one feels, on reflection, after all, as John Updike wrote, “what we want from our great imaginers is not fuel but fire, not pattern but an action, not fragmented and interlaced accounts but a story" (Riders 30).

The story of manifold voice is powerful, cogent, human.