Chapter II

"The Blundering Human Beings and God": The Religious Aspect

"Religion - that is behind all my Novels . . . the relationship between blundering human beings and God. . . ."  
Patrick White

'Relationship between blundering human beings and God' is the central concern of all White's novels from Happy Valley onward. In The Solid Mandala, the question has been posed very precisely—'who and where are the Gods?' Through the protagonists of various novels, the answer to this question has been suggested in a number of ways. The wide range of reference includes the central Christian myth of Death and Resurrection of Christ (Voss, Riders in the Chariot, The Vivisector); Jewish and Oriental mysticism (Riders in the Chariot, The Solid Mandala); folklore of Pagan Gods and rituals of the aborigines (A Fringe of Leaves); and visionary and transcendental experiences (The Eye of the Storm). Patrick White is preoccupied with the deeply intimate experience of the characters as they attempt to explore their awareness of what they apprehend as divine. As the 'blundering human beings' succeed in working out their relationship to an 'unseen order', they acquire depth and meaning and progress towards achieving a harmonious resolution of their conflicts. This state of 'pure being' or 'grace' or 'identity' is the main object of quest in White's fiction.

Patrick White has written much against religion. According
to William Walsh, "'religious' may be an odd term to use for one who has written so scorchingly about religion and religious people as White, but religion stripped of sectarian sacking seems to be the only word adequate to White's intentions."³ It would be appropriate to ascertain the true nature of religion which helps White's characters to attain realisation. "My spiritual self has always shrivelled in contact with organised religion, whether externalised in that grisly museum, Westminster Abbey, the great rococo bed for the operatic courtesan in St. Peter's Rome, or the orthodox communities of Mount Athos."⁴ The phrase, 'spiritual self', clearly shows White's deep-rooted belief in religion which transcends all limitations or barriers imposed on religion by the civilised society. White describes himself as "Anglican egotist agnostic pantheist occultist existentialist would be failed Christian Australian."⁵ Even at the young age, he had doubts about the grace⁶ from organised religion. Naturally, he does not subscribe to any set of established orthodox doctrines. As he himself admits, "I belong to no Church, but I have a religious faith ... I have lifted bits from various religions in trying to come to a better understanding."⁷ Influence of William Blake is quite obvious on Patrick White.⁸ In Blake's poem, "The Everlasting Gospel", we see Jesus refusing to conform to the official religion of his day with its concentration on laws of sin and punishment. So he became:

... A chariot,
Throughout the land he took his course,
And traced diseases to their source.
This is exactly White's concept of God. No protagonist of White believes in the 'supernatural' aspect of Christian image of God. Stan Parker makes his gob of spittle—God⁹. Himmelfarb, the great intellectual, points out to the table—"This table is God."¹⁰ Laura does not believe in Christian God and Voss, while accepting the divine power, is not ready to believe in either God the Father or God—Man Christ. Patrick White's God is Universal Order, a divine entity and a perception of the infinite. Hawthorne's 'missing the sermon but listening the Church bell' aptly describes White's concept of religion and God.

Priests and church and church goers do not find favours with Patrick White. Church in The Tree of Man has been built "for people to keep their Sundays in. . . . You could not call it worship so much as an act of decent behaviour, at least for most"(p. 407). There is a marvellous description of an early service of Holy Communion in simple Australian Church: "The church smelled of cold wood, the Parson had scrubbed the face of religion . . . and wrestled with the evidence of indifference" (p. 411). In Riders to the Chariot the regular church goers are Mrs Flack and Mrs Jolley. They start their vigil of Himmelfarb's house standing in the shelter of blackberry bush and find Mrs Goldbold coming out. Unable to appreciate the true motive of the washerwoman's visit, they pass insinuating remarks—"It is wonderful," said Mrs Jolley, "To what lengths a woman will go" (p. 214). Thereafter the two women depart with:
'See you at the Church,' hissed Mrs. Jolley. 
'See you at the Church,' repeated Mrs. Flack. 
Their eyes flickered for a moment over the Christ who would rise to the surface on Sunday morning. (p. 216)

Alf Dubbo is adopted by Rev. Timothy Calderon, the rector of Numburra, and his widowed sister Mrs. Pask. They decide to carry out a 'great experiment' and to lavish upon the quarter caste aborigine, all they can of care, teaching and parental love. Mr. Calderon is a 'cultured' man of gentle blood and good education. He is at the same time a 'harmless' man of 'high ideals'. He builds up his (Alf's) character with Latin verbs and later seduces him. Mrs. Pask who teaches him painting blames him for his own seduction and compels him to run away.

Patrick White launches a scathing attack on orthodox, institutionalised and dogmatic, conventional Christian belief through the Evangelist in The Tree of Man, Palfreyman and Bonners in Voss, Rev. Timothy Calderon in Riders in the Chariot, Arthur Brown in the Solid Mandala. Monasteries visited by Hurtle Duffield in The Vivisector show how corruption breeds there. White's downright condemnation of conventional religion is based on the fact that adherence to conventions or fanaticism leads to the torture of various characters. Religious fundamentalism results in unjust isolation and persecution of Quong family in Happy Valley. But its detailed description has been given in Riders in the Chariot where Himmelfarb, along with other Jews, is subjected to untold misery and persecution. The resultant persecution may be as gross as in Nazi Germany or as rough and mocking as in Australian factory. It is patently White's intention to suggest through crucifixion
that within an ordinary suburb the same evil forces, produced
by religious fanaticism which animated Hitler's Germany, exist
at least potentially. The tension between the Whites and
the Aborigines which results in the death of Voss and the
nightmarish experiences of Mrs Ellen Roxburgh is also partly,
if not wholly, religious in nature. Ellen Roxburgh, like her
creator, feels dissatisfied with the religious practices of
the white society. Even on most sacred religious occasion all
that Ellen feels is that she is celebrating the God of the
winning side who supports and justifies, rightly or wrongly, a
system which sets the Roxburghs and the Merivales in the front
Pew and the wretched convicts in their misery, behind them,
although their (convict's) need for prayers and forgiveness is
far greater.

The communion service in the organised church does not
bring any grace or realization. In The Tree of Man, shortly
after Parker's return to Durilgai, they go to attend the
Communion Service where it is the attainment of grace through
communion wine or prayer that represents entry into the world
of the spirit and imagination. "Tentative faces were waiting
for grace to descend" (p. 411) on to the congregation, but it
does not, and everybody remains wooden. Stan, who has always
maintained a vague faith in God, remains weighed down by leaden
reality. "I cannot pray" (p. 413), he said, not trying the
hopelessness of it. Neither Stan nor Amy attains any exalted
state. Through the Service he remains empty and she confused.
And Amy's realisation that "it is finally between herself and
God" (p. 415) stands as a valid summation of the general feeling
of aloneness and non-communion among the congregation. Quite
ironically, the communion wafer in the shape of witchetty grub,
while in captivity with the blacks in the case of Voss and
Mrs Roxburgh's participation in cannibalism, a sort of
communion Service again, bring them deep realisation and
knowledge.

In fact, Amy Parker's 'it is finally between her and God'
strikes the keynote of White's concept of religion. The same
note is rung by Mary Hare when her servant Peg wants her to
read Bible, which is for everybody:

'It [Bible] is not for me.'
'But you won't try it. How have you found it?'
'I will find out what I am to find out, in my own
way and in my own time. I am different,' maintained
Mary Hare. (p. 49)

The epigraph to *The Vivisector* is significantly relevant. 13
Painting for Hurtle Duffield is also like religious experience.

He has recorded in his dunny:-

God the Vivisector
God the Artist
God. (p. 307)

When Nance asks him about modern Art, Hurtle Duffield says,
"If you could put it in words, I wouldn't want to paint"
(p. 196). God, for Patrick White, is a principle of purity,
'an ideal', a force which can bring harmony or a 'vision of
the infinite'. His God cannot be explained in words or reduced
to some palpable design or image. It is different for different
characters. Religion is the relationship between an individual
and the abstract idea of God. In novel after novel, White
makes it clear that 'man must have, as Lawrence puts it, 'a
religious connection with the idea of God and the Universe. White endeavours to open to the modern consciousness the neglected springs of life, the sources of full and kindled consciousness, in separation from which the soul is crippled and incomplete." He purpose is to demonstrate or rather render in terms of Art, the essential religious connection which man must have with life. D. H. Lawrence describes this relationship:

And I do think that man is related to the universe in some religious way, even prior to his fellowmen. . . . There is a principle in the universe towards which man turns religiously—the life of the universe itself. And hero is he who touches and transmits the life of the universe.

Thus we find that White adopts the Aristotelian idea of God as pure intellect to his own insistence that instinct is the prime activity of mind and spirit together. White's God, then, is instinctive as are his characters in the sense that they have an innate impulse to move the universe and be moved by it. Religion in his work conforms to the broad definition professed by William James as a "belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto."

Most of White's protagonists are outsiders, to use the term of Colin Wilson. They are isolated visionaries in quest of their identity or fulfilment. Right from Colonel Trevillick to Eddie Twyborn, all the characters strive to attain higher perfection. Some of them adopt religion as the mode of their quest. They perceive a high reality and try to reach it. As the ultimate reality is conceptual and indefinable,
they try to reach it through their perception. White is aware of the technological advance and material progress made in the twentieth century which question our hitherto-held religious beliefs. The religious experience does not belong to the realm of facts which can be validly known, for valid knowing, in our age, is held to be possible only where we can objectively test and verify phenomenon. Religion is, therefore, denigrated as belonging to the order of the irrational. As White claims his work "Sticks in the guts of the rigidly rational." Moreover, atheism has become a fashion in the intellectual circles today. White believes that "most people have a religious factor, but are afraid that by admitting it they will forfeit their right to be considered intellectuals." So, the frame of reference of the religious artist invokes—such as the belief in the numinous order, in God, grace and salvation—is no longer generally accepted as intellectually admissible or even intelligible. "Today we cannot even understand Nietzschean cry that God is dead, for if it were so, how would we know." Patrick White realises the difficulty "to convey the religious faith through symbols and situations which can be accepted by the people today." He subscribes to Jungian principle of commitment which urges the drowning man to dive. He told McGregor, "Now as the world grows more pagan, one has to lead people in the same direction in a different way." A religious writer can also not afford to negate the importance of the physical world. "The only means whereby spiritual and transcendental truths might be conveyed convincingly to the human mind is through analogies
Blake's mystical doctrine, "If the doors of perception are cleansed, everything would appear infinite" may not be accessible to reason, but Patrick White forges a way out of the difficulty. He knows that the true relationship between Immanent and Transcendent can be understood through perception, intuition and instinct. The epigraph to *The Solid Mandala*—"There is another world, but it is in this one"—does not mean that there is a magic world beyond the world of appearances. All possible worlds are immanent in this one because they are immanent to consciousness. Apart from the world of consciousness, there is no world. Consciousness of reality does not preclude the 'mysteries' from man's experience or deny the revelation of the hidden, the transcendent. Much of the criticism of Patrick White results from the assumption that transcendent is totally separate, totally beyond those objects which are given to us through the acts of perception. But White's world is indeed transcendent even in the most simple and direct acts of consciousness. In White's world transcendent is immanent and immanent is transcendent. "This gob of spittle is God" and 'God is in this table' prove that, for White, there is no difference between transcendent and immanence.

For the dramatisation of such a quest in so unfavourable circumstances, White makes use of non-rational, intuitive, imaginative and instinctive processes. He rejects rationality, reason and intellect as unsuitable for his purpose. Himmelfarb's "Intellekt has failed us" (p. 198) and Waldo Brown's hollow
intellectual activities clearly indicate White's attitude. His novels consistently dramatise his expressed belief: "I don't reject it [reason] but I think intuition is more important." The rationalist intellectuals in his fiction—Elyot Standish, George Goodman, George Brown, Waldo, Norbert Hare, Austin Roxburgh—are all hollow. On the contrary, Eden Standish, Theodora Goodman, Stan Parker, the quartet in Riders in the Chariot, Ellen Gluyas (not Roxburgh), Hurtle Duffield (not Courtney) work with their instincts and succeed in achieving the redeeming vision and seem to achieve their identity.

Having noted the concept of Religion and God in White's world and ascertaining that for him immancence and transcendence mean the different aspects of the same reality and that non-rational, intuitive and imaginative instincts are required to establish a meaningful relationship between the ordinary and the divine, it is only proper to find out the pattern adopted by Patrick White for the resolution of the inner religious conflicts between the characters and within the same character.

"White's central characters are visionaries." They are different from the common folk. Theordora Goodman does not want to marry, she wants to 'see the things', she can "never overcome distances." Mary Hare is described as plain by her mother. "Plain is the word, Norbert. And who knows—Mary's plainness may have been given to her for a special purpose" (p. 22). Voss is a unique German and Elizabeth Hunter is
different from others in her own way. Some of the characters
are alienated because of their religious obsessions or religious
fanaticism. Himmelfarb is the victim of double religious
persecution. The unmindful religious fanaticism in Hitler's
Germany, hounds him out of his home and he just scrapes
through death. His own obsessive adherence to Jewish religious
practices is partly responsible for his molestation and ultimate
crucifixion in Australia. Ellen Roxburgh and Alf Dubbo suffer
because of the religious disharmony in Australia's native blacks
and the foreign White rulers.

The result is that these characters, because of their
vision of a higher life or their alienation, undergo an intense
suffering and isolation. The ultimate defence against
disappointments is withdrawal into self. Love, friendship and
sex provide no satisfaction. Friendship and love prove quite
ineffective in Happy Valley. Sex is never really satisfying.
Even Hagan, the most randy of White's characters is only
"after a fashion satisfied," after sex with Vic. The
Standishes in The Living and the Dead find sex repulsive.
For Eden it is associated with aching nausea; for Elyot with
distaste, and for Catherine with a lethal act. White's main
characters usually attain their fullest identity when, like
Margaret, they withdraw from others. So, is it with Theodora
Goodman, Mary Hare, Alf Dubbo. This is the reason that they
are either single or issueless or not deeply involved with their
spouses and children. Withdrawal into self and resultant
suffering is the first prerequisite towards identity. According
to Sylvia Gzell the characters pass through three stages—
integrity, fulfilment and transcendent understanding in their process of discovering identity. They may have rare moments of happiness through Arts (Oliver Halliday—Music, Ruth Joyner—Religious Hymns, Alf Dubbo and Hurtle Duffield—Painting), Objects (shell given to Margaret by Rodney, Mandalas of Arthur, piece of glass in *The Tree of Man*), momentary recognition of affinity (Maragret and Rodney in *Happy Valley*, the Man who was given the Dinner in *The Aunt's Story*, the quartet of visionaries in *Riders in the Chariot*). The ostensibly insensitive characters of his novels realise their wishes and facile joy.

However, the inner conflict of the isolated visionaries is resolved when they get illumination or identity. The illumination may be through the dissolution of the self and its universalisation, realisation of the transcendental reality, a fleeting vision or perfect understanding. Theodora, Voss, Laura achieve identity through stripping of the 'great monster self'. The riders in *Riders in the Chariot* and Elizabeth Hunter are bestowed with a vision which is redeeming in nature. Ellen Roxburgh understands the transcendental reality through her nightmarish experience after the shipwreck and Stan Parker does so by understanding the relationship between the transcendent and immanent.

All the novels of White are concerned with religion, but religious aspect of identity is the central theme in *Riders in the Chariot*, *The Vivisector* and *The Eye of the Storm*. It plays a secondary role in *The Tree of Man*, *Voss*, *The Solid Mandala*. 
The Aunt’s Story (1948) deals with Theodora Goodman’s quest for permanence and unity. Her quest is existential in nature and the object of quest is the reconciliation of the two worlds—matter and spirit. White’s is a dualistic world and Theodora, like other fictional characters, tries to assert the unity of all things. Theodora’s quest takes her from the apparently secure but far from innocent world of an Australian childhood to the neurotic and divided world of cruelty and passion in the pre-war Europe, and finally to a vision of truth and unity in rural America. Vague religious undertones can be noted in Theodora’s effort to reconcile the two worlds. For D. R. Burns, the things Holstius says in the last section of the novel have to do with the nature of the human spirit, of the soul. In the ‘Jardin Exotique’ section of the novel which projects various facets of Theodora’s own personality, the quester seems to bear the burden of the longing of others in a religious fashion. Burns finds The Aunt’s Story almost a religious novel. Holstius, a purely allegorical figure, admonishes Theodora:

You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow or flesh or marble, or illusion and reality or life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman, you must accept. And you have already found out that one constantly eludes the other into taking fresh shapes, so that there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion or illusion of reality. Each of your several lives is evidence of this. (p. 278)

When Theodora asks him what she is expected to accept, Holstius replies, “I expect you to accept the two irreconcilable halves”
(p. 277). Holstius's remark that true permanence is "a state of multiplication and division" (p. 284) gives the vision of unity that the universe possesses and which should be man's base for his view of reality.

The Tree of Man (1956) is the first novel in which religious theme acquires a prominent place in the quest for identity. Although the major concern of the novel is to assess the power of earth (environment), man's intrusion, the resultant disharmony and the efforts to re-establish harmony, yet the situation has been complicated by White's religious respect for the quality of 'pure being', so that the possibility of spiritual experience is latent in the novel.

It is important to realise that The Tree of Man was written after a vital development in the author's life. He had come home to Australia, and in some ways this novel is a peace offering, a gigantic effort to come to terms with a hard land and an empty people to whom 'mind is the least of possessions'. This is the reason that the grimness and disillusionment of Happy Valley and the themes of death and destruction of later novels are subdued here. Patrick White himself explains his motives in writing this novel:

It was the exaltation of the 'average' that made me panic most, and in this frame of mind, in spite of myself, began to conceive another novel. Because the void I had to fill was so immense, I wanted to try to suggest in this book every possible aspect of life, through the lives of the ordinary men and women. But at the same time I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people, and incidentally, my own life since my return.
As a result, Stan Parker, in the opening scene of the novel sets up a camp for the night at a stretch of scrubby land which he is going to clear. He decided to settle on it and resolve among those trees which, through growth and continuance within the flux of life, become an image of permanence. Interpretations of *The Tree of Man* range from the orthodox Christianity to non-orthodox paganism, but still, religious readings are possible which see the novel as celebrating the divine in man to an account of it as a secular celebration of man as a measure of all things. On one extreme is Burns who maintains, "It [The Tree of Man] is primarily and consistently concerned with the relationship of man to God, of God to man. God is God, it seems to proclaim because man is man. And equally the reverse. One lives within the being of the other." On the other extreme is the opinion expressed by Kirpal Singh that the main theme of the novel is "Nostalgia of Permanence and the fiend of motion." The problem of these different readings starts from Stan's moment of illumination before his death and his final understanding that 'One and no other figure is the answer to all sums.' The discussion whether Patrick White, at the time of reconciling such dualities as spirit and matter, being and becoming, time and eternity, the immanence and transcendence, is taking a religious stance or not tends to become endless.

At the beginning of the novel we are told that "Stan was not an interpreter of the mysteries. He was nothing much, he was a man" (p. 12). He is not a regular Church goer and nurses no dreams about salvation through communion or holy prayers.
He clears the land, builds his shack, brings his bride, has children, faces natural calamities in the shape of fire, flood and drought. Others come there and settle. In this way this pioneering hero finds fulfilment. But then comes disappointment and disillusionment. Amy becomes restless and commits adultery. The tract of virgin country they had tamed at the beginning of the book is taken over by the soulless incursions of the suburbia and their house becomes an eccentric enclave amid the texture brick of a large metropolis. Thelma has made a compromise with the society and marries her employer, a successful lawyer. Their son, Ray, ends his life by being murdered in a shabby drunken brawl. It is under these circumstances that Stan Parker gets the cerebral stroke which seems to rob him of the last vestige of stature and integrity. It is in this desperate and apparently destroyed state that Stan experiences his most magnificent vision of totality:

That afternoon the old man's chair had been put on the grass at the back—the grass . . . had formed a circle in the shrubs and trees . . . It was perfectly clear that the man was seated at the heart of it and from this heart the trees radiated. With grave movements of life and beyond them the sweep of the vegetable garden . . . presented the austere-skeletons of cabbages and wands of onion seeds. All was circumference to the centre and beyond that the worlds of other circles, whether crescent of purple villas or the bare patches of earth . . . The last circle but one was the cold and golden bowl of winter enclosing all that was visible and material, and at which the man would blink, out of his watery eyes, unequal to the effort of realising he was the centre of it.

The large triumphal scheme of which he was becoming mysteriously aware made him shift in his seat . . . (p. 474)

This passage is quite important. Stan Parker is sitting at the centre of many eccentric circles, beginning with the
garden and its radiating trees and then extending to the last circle but one, "the cold and golden bowl of winter." The last circle but one does seem to infer quite explicitly, the existence of the ultimate domain, of the pure spirit, of the transcendent God. But though this world suggests the guardianship of all enclosing deity over the man through whom his power has been made manifest, the "blinking of watery eyes" signifies Stan's effort to look beyond. His "shifting in his seat" shows his restlessness on his realisation of the vision of paramount importance. A. P. Riemer has noted the Jungian Mandalic vision in Stan's experience. For Jung, "the mandala served as a symbol to clarify the nature of the deity philosophically or to represent the same thing in a visible form for the purpose of adoration. . . . The wholeness (perfection) of the celestial circle and the squareness of the earth combining the four principles or elements or psychic qualities express completeness and union. Thus the 'mandala' has the status of a uniting symbol." Whether we may apply Jungian or some other yardstick, the meaning of this vision is purely religious. Stan Parker does get a fleeting vision of the Oneness of the duality of the world. In fact, his experience is not complete because he does not see "beyond the last circle but one" and curiously enough one colour 'blue' is absent from the vision which is supposed to represent the infinite, the I N D I G O of The Vivisector. Even then the vision asserts White's belief that transcendent and immanent are interchangable. The vision shows that "God power in this novel is immanent, lying within and behind and working out through
the efforts of the man." The greatness of the novel lies in the creation of a world where farthest reaching implications are potential within the ordinary man like Stan Parker. It does indicate the author's resolve to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary.

At this critical moment, when Stan Parker is about to resolve the conflict between the nostalgia of permanence and the fiend of motion, the organised religion, in the form of a young evangelist, intrudes to the dismay of Stan Parker as well as the reader. The young man possessing the full fervour of evangelical zeal, quoting his own example of bohemianism, offers him salvation through his faith. Stan who did not want to talk, did not respond and the young man said smilingly:

'... you do not understand.'

If you can understand, at your age, what I have been struggling with all my life, then it is a miracle, thought the old man. He spat on the ground in front of him.

.....

'You are not stubborn, friend?'

'I would not have been here if I was not stubborn' said the old man.

'Don't you believe in God, perhaps?' asked the evangelist...

Then the old man, who had been cornered long enough, saw, through perversity perhaps, but with his own eyes, He was illuminated.

He pointed with his stick at the gob of spittle.

'That is God,' he said.

As it lay glittering intensely and personally on the ground. (pp. 475-76)
It is clear from the passage that Stan has made an important realisation. Because he has gone through the sufferings and trials of life and the religious books have little or no value. Following "Nietzsche's cry: 'God is dead', Stan has tried to discover divinity in his own person. His gob of spittle is formed into a perfect mandala that completes his vision. The gob is like the Jungian Mandala which remains empty to accommodate a deity or a god or spiritual being. Since the modern age is bereft of any God, Stan takes its place to make it a whole. It was this identity which makes Stan realize the ultimate peace and through that peace he can come to deep understanding of the world. "One and no other figure is the answer to all sums" (p. 477).

Leonio Kramer feels that "this understanding is not entirely credible or intelligible." It also appears that Stan's comparison of gob of spittle is also tenuous as the authorial comment is 'through perversity perhaps'. Arthur Brown's problem of totality is partly answered by Stan Parker, "One and no other figure is the answer to all the sums" (p. 477). The vision, just before Stan's death, may be vague but it does foreshadow the later novels.

Voss makes a further progression on the theme of The Tree of Man. What Stan Parker could realize in his vision just before his death is the motive of Voss in this novel. Nietzsche's declaration that God is dead seems to have prompted German Johann Ulrich Voss to assume Godhead. Stan was an ordinary man and through his vision he found out the presence of the transcendence in immanence. The way to transcendence is what is explored in
Voss. Voss seeks it through the exaltation of his ego which is humbled and brought to nothing. It is his 'nothingness' that brings him transcendence. William Walsh believes that "Voss is John the Baptist for Patrick White as The Tree of Man is his version of Genesis and Redemption." However, this John the Baptist is not suggestive of Christ but of the Christ buried in Voss himself.

Naturally, such a complex theme cannot be expressed directly, "it is a metaphysical perception which, by definition, always falls short of any literal rendering." A. A. Philips argues that Voss is a novel that preaches hermitism. This does not sound a correct reading, for it leaves out the fundamental quest, so central to the work. The author's apparent goal can only be approached in a metaphoric fashion for the very reason that the 'real' or imaginary representation, envisaged as such, inevitably proves elusive or illusory. On the one hand, the novel examines in which way the network of natural elements mirrors a fundamental problem concerning the relationship between the individual and the forces (natural or social) threatening his identity (a problem which will be studied in another chapter); on the other hand, in its religious connotations, Voss, a Marlovian figure pits himself against God. Voss is determined to confront the worst that comes in his way of Godhead.

Patrick White makes use of the metaphor of 'quest' in the novel. The germ of the novel was presented to White by contemporary accounts of Leichhardt's expeditions across
Australian continent. "It was conceived during the London blitz and was influenced by the arch-megalomaniac of the day." The explorer is one with a thirst for 'conquest' which transcends actual thirst. This is the motive ascribed to Voss from the outset. The thrust of the thirst is clearly echoed by Mrs De Courcy, "Your thirst for conquest could have carried you over the worst of actual thirst" (p. 407). But the real motive of the novel is not to explore the 'Bush and Emptiness' of Australia. Bush is, in fact, the country of the mind. For Laura, the Bush pictures an inner world that urban man may enter also, "If he has courage and metaphysical depth to explore his selfhood and his relation to God." The conquest of the continent is the outward aspect of Voss's inward journey. The keynote of the main theme is struck very early in Voss's conversation with Le Mesurier:

'And your genius?' said the German.

'What genius?' asked Le Mesurier...

'That remains to be seen. Everyman has a genius though it is not always discoverable. Least of all when it is choked by the trivialities of daily existence. But in this disturbing country, so far as I have become acquainted with it already, it is possible more easily to discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite.' (p. 35)

It is to discover this 'genius' to 'attempt the infinite' to identify himself that Voss undertakes the journey. James McAuley refers to a remark made by Patrick White in correspondence with him, "When I was writing Voss I tried to make it look like a Blake drawing, on the mystical and a Delacroix on the worldly plane." The metaphysical theme becomes clear when Laura tells him: "I do not pray" (p. 28). Voss is startled "Ach" he
pounced, "You are not atheistisch" (p. 86). Not that Voss himself is a religious man in the ordinary sense but he believes in the idea of Divine Power. He affirms that there is a Godhead and there is, so to speak, a Universal throne requiring an occupant. But that occupant is not to be God the Father nor the Godman Christ, no, man must attain Godhead and seat himself as king upon that throne. He, Voss, will do it, and this is the real inner meaning of that expedition which in its outer aspect will be the conquest of a continent. Voss writes to Laura in a letter (which is never delivered), "... I am reserved for further struggles, to wrestle with rocks, to bleed, if necessary, to ascend. Yes I do not intend to stop short of the throne for the pleasure of grovelling on lacerated knees in company with Judd and Palfreyman" (p. 217).

Laura, with her intuition, understands the dangers to which Voss is unconsciously subjecting himself. It is quite clear that Voss wants to cross the continent under the compulsion of the force of his will. He is placed in a situation in which the conquering of the desert may seem natural to others for reasons of economics or geography or knowledge itself, and Voss is willing to make an outward accommodation to such notions. For Voss, the expedition is a personal wrestling match with the desert. To the discussion that "Deserts prefer to resist history and develop along their own lines" (p. 33), Voss's quick reaction is an unhesitating affirmation: "I will cross the continent from one end to the other. ... Why I am pursued by this necessity, it is no more possible for me to tell than it is for you, who have made my acquaintance only before yesterday" (p. 33). Again,
Laura asks if "this expedition of yours is pure will" (p. 69). Voss's reply though circumvent, means a positive 'yes'. He feels restrained by the companions and the animals, and wants to go barefoot, all alone. Laura shrinks back at the colossal will and pride of Voss, through which he wants to assume Godhead. The other character who understands Voss's real intentions is Frank Le Mesurier, whose prose-poems express the same idea which Laura expresses.

So, Laura dedicates herself to save Voss from the terrible self-destructive ambition, the ambition to transcend humanity to get Godhead for himself. She wants to save him spiritually even if physical safety is not possible. Almost by reflex action of her love, Laura re-assumes faith in God in order to be able to pray and save Voss. She knows intuitively that he who renounces love and humility cannot be deified. She takes the opposite road to that of Voss, the road of love, of sacrifice, of prayer and humility. Laura who did not pray, in the beginning, promises to pray for the German, although in his letter from Rhine Towers he asks her not to. Laura undergoes intense mental change and accepts the proposal of marriage of Voss, although she is clear about its being a spiritual marriage. At the childbirth of Rose, Laura seems to suffer the labour pains along with Rose Portion. She considers Mercy to be her spiritual child and later adopts her, after Rose Portion's death.

Through love, understanding and humility, Laura attains a vision which is of a very rare importance in Patrick White's
fiction. This vision is described by Laura in her letter to Voss. She writes about the funeral of Rose Portion:

We buried her at the Sand Hills on an indescribable day, of heat and cloud, and wind. As I stood there (I hesitate to write you all this, except that it is a truth), as I stood, the material part of myself became quite superfluous, while my understanding seemed to enter into wind, earth, the ocean beyond, even the soul of our poor dead maid. I was nowhere and everywhere at once. I was destroyed yet living more intensely than actual sunlight, so that I no longer feared the fact of death as I had found it on the pillow. If I suffered, it was to understand the devotion and suffering of Rose, to love whom had always been an effort. (p. 239)

This vision has vital importance. This is the moment of dissolution of the self, the complete destruction of 'the great monster self'. The self is dissolved into thin air and other elements of nature. It is through this dissolution that one attains greater understanding and love. "In dissolution lies the salvation" is the message of White's short story "The Twitching Colonel". This vision may seem unpalatable to some critics but it has been experienced by many people in diverse circumstances.

The Voss - Laura relationship has troubled many critics. Many of them doubt the credibility of the fact of parallel experiences of Laura in Sydney and Voss in the desert. G. A. Wilkes feels "The management of them is occasionally clumsy." The rotting of the pears in Laura's room parallel to Voss's experience of puterescence is a forced one. The flurry of telepathic episodes and the use of a sort of clairvoyance strains the dictum, 'suspension of disbelief' to its extreme limits: These objections are quite valid but then this was the only way left for Patrick White who was out to explore the
journey in the desert of the mind. Such a method is permissible in the traditions of high Romanticism and is "justified by the meta-novelistic form and spirit of the whole work." 46

As the expedition enters the farthest part of the 'bush', Voss pits his will against all odds. Voss had realized that to be God one must be self-subsistent, self-sufficient, autonomous being, dependant on no one and without any weakness. For this reason, Voss makes himself High Priest of sacrifice, the aim of which is identification with Godhead. The chosen victims of sacrifice are Voss and his companions. Voss's own poor daily self must suffer in the desert, be mortified and if necessary die. The more this mortification and self-immolation in the desert proceeds, the more nearly will he achieve, he thinks, identification with Godhead. So he is constantly racked by the compulsion to show himself immune to the weaknesses of human beings. He shows himself above religious dependence by dissociating himself from XMas celebrations at the beginning of the expedition. When he realises that Judd has detected his affection for the sheep-dog Gyp, he becomes uneasy. So during the mid-day halt Voss, after having spoken a few words to Gyp, pulls the trigger. "He was cold with sweat. He could have shot off his own jaw. Yet, he had done right; he convinced himself through his pain and would do better to subject himself to further drastic discipline" (p. 266). Voss's service to Frank Le-Mesurier has also been viewed as a campaign for Godhead. What Voss could not shake off was his inner love for Laura and it is through this 'hamartia' that salvation comes.
Le Mesurier's prose-poem, which Voss reads during his sickness, disturbs and shakes his soul. The gist of the poem is the exaltation of the idea of dissolution. What Voss tries to attain through his will and his pride, Le Mesurier's poem wants to attain through dissolution of the self, assertion and surrender seem to run together in striking contrast to Voss. "Now that I am nothing, I am the simplest of all tongues" (p. 296)

The poem makes humility his briglaw. "... As I shall grow weaker, so shall I become strong ... Then I am not God but man. I am God with a spear in his side" (p. 297). "... they choose this Kangaroo, and when they have cut the pride off and gnawed the charred bones, they honour him in ochre on a wall. Where is his spirit?" They say: "It has gone out, it has gone away, it is everywhere" (p. 297). The poem ends with a plea to God to scatter the spirit everywhere. When Voss clapped the book together his mouth said 'irrsinn' and "he was protesting very gutterally, from the back of his throat, from the deepest part of him, from the beginning of his life" (p. 297).

Now the expedition approaches the desert, moving away from both natural richness and the life of the body. The moment of the ultimate confrontation comes — man and horse against terrain, spirit against body, Whitemen against Black, Voss against Palfreyman, Voss against Judd, Voss against God. There is no avoiding the chaos by detour. The gullies have to be crossed and on the far side there is always another gully. As the party enters this real hell the struggle between Laura and Voss becomes fiercer, although Voss could imagine her with him, the two are pulling in different directions. Voss to rival and defeat God
in the final assault and Laura in her efforts to save her lover through love and humility. Now Laura develops high fever in Sydney and the ritual action of the journey has corresponding effect on her.

The blacks come closer and Voss prepares himself for the showdown. He has always identified Palfreyman with religion and even Christianity. He wants to test this force and sends Palfreyman to the blacks. In a scene of amazing beauty we can see Palfreyman accepting the commission. He decides to go to the blacks with no arms. "No, I will go. I trust to my faith" (p. 341). As he moved in his weak manner, "Both sides were watching him. The aborigines could have been trees, but the members of the expedition were so contorted by apprehension, longing, love or disgust, they had become human again. All [including Voss] remembered the face of Christ that they had seen at some point in their lives ..." (p. 342). Then the timeless moment occurs. A black threw his spear and the other stabbed with a knife. "Ah, Lord!" he said, upon his knees, "if I had been stronger" (p. 343).

The death of Palfreyman is a further jolt for Voss. He has not been able to prove Palfreyman's faith an illusion. He himself remembers the face of Christ. After the burial, the Christ figure comes to haunt him. But even now he is armed with his royal weapon of will. Now Judd who has already suffered his mortification in advance and joined the expedition partly from the wish to serve and partly in search of the fulfilment that he suspects may lie beyond the orbit of his present experience, breaks down, being forced to shoot a fallen and
screaming horse. This man-animal senses the threat of the knife, never far distant from the throat. So he realizes the negative value of the expedition. "I will not! I will not," he cries at last, shaking his emancipated body. Since his own fat paddocks, not the deserts of mysticism, nor the transfiguration of Christ, are the fate of common man, he is yearning for the big breasts of his wife, that would smell of fresh-baked bread, even after she has taken off her shift" (p. 345). So the party splits and Voss is left with Harry Robarts, Le Mesurier and Jackie, the black boy.

This is the most difficult part of the novel. Voss's mind becomes the battlefield in which his pride and will fight out a battle with the impulses of love, compassion and humility, identified with Laura. White's problem is not as much with the result of the battle as how to present it. The personal privation of the journey, the expected but undesirable desertion by Judd and others, Christ-like sacrifice of Palfreyman, the prose-poem of Le Mesurier and continued deep love of Laura who has become a part of Voss, by now, are the influences which join hands with the blacks, the elemental and uncontrollable forces, to humble Voss. Laura in her delirium tells the uncomprehending Doctor "When man is truly humbled when he has learnt that he is not God, then he is nearest to becoming so. In the end he may ascend" (p. 387).

Voss's royal instrument of his will is ultimately broken. He still wavers and Laura intends to make a sacrifice of personal nature, and ultimately offers the sacrifice in the form of her hair. When the blacks close in, Voss renounces
the Godhead, "I am no longer your Lord Harry" (p. 366). He
confesses to Le Mesurier, "I have no plans, but will trust to
God" (p. 379). He eventually calls to Christ, "Oh Jesus,
"rette mich, nur! Du Lieber!" (p. 390). In his last dream of
Laura, Voss sees them undertaking the long journey in search
of human status. It is at this time of death that Voss makes
a realization and understands and attains identity. Laura
articulates Voss's approach to humility, how important is it to
understand three stages of God into man. Man, and Man returning
into God! Voss's acceptance of the communion wafer—the
witchetty grub offered by the old aboriginal—confirms and
celebrates his transcendence.

It is in the epilogue that we can assess the real progress
made by Voss. He does achieve transcendence in another way, not
in the manner he had sought, his spirit has dispersed in the
country. "The blacks talk about him to this day. He is still
there that is the honest opinion of many of them, he is there
in the country and always will be." Laura aptly sums up, "Voss
did not die... His legend will be written down eventually
by those who have been troubled by it" (p. 448). But the price
Voss pays for his identity is very heavy and justifies Laura's
pronouncement, "Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by
torture in the country of the mind."

The twin themes of Godhead and the relevance of 'vision'
are pursued further in Riders in the Chariot (1961). This
novel is the most controversial, most directly concerned with
religion, most permeated with theological language.47 The image
of a chariot is the recurring image and the scene of crucifixion or mock lynching of the German refugee is the central event on which the lives of all the four major characters converge. All the four—Miss Hare the grotesque spinster, living in a decaying mansion, Xanandu preferring birds, plants and animals to people; Himmelfarb, an ugly Jewish refugee from the gas-chambers of Hitler, once a professor of English, now working in Brighta Lamp Factory in Sarasparilla; Mrs Godbold, the washer-woman, an emigrant from the fern country and Alf Dubbo, the half caste aboriginal with tuberculosis are alienated from the local society to which they are worthless or distasteful. The quartet is bestowed with a common vision of a chariot and the visionaries recognise in each other a capacity for transcendent experience. They are so devised as to present human wholeness in the interdependence of instinct (Mary Hare), intellect (Himmelfarb), emotion (Ruth Godbold) and creative imagination (Alf Dubbo). The four-fold structure of the novel turns our thought to four elements of nature: earth, air, fire and water. It may be that "Miss Hare stands for all that is earthly, animal like sensuous; Godbold represents the simple qualities of water, cleansing, refreshing, renewing (after all, she spends most of days at the wash tub); Himmelfarb is the man of ethereal qualities, spiritual, ecstatic; and Alf Dubbo, an abo, is consumed by a fire within, a fire which flares up in the living colour of the flame and ultimately burns him up in his physical collapse." The four are alienated because of individual reasons and are pitted against the socialites. Miss Hare is contrasted with her housekeeper, Mrs Jolley and her friend Mrs Flack—the plastic ladies of the suburbia,
vulgar in their quality and threatening in their capacity for petty malice; Himmelfarb, with Harry Rosetree, the owner of the factory in which Himmelfarb now works, formerly Haim Rosenbaum, now assimilated in Christianity and living in Paradise East; Ruth Godbold with her former Mistress Mrs Chalmers Robinson and her drunkard husband and Alf Dubbo with the prostitute Hanna whom he rooms with. The community in Riders in the Chariot reveals itself as savage and dangerous. Society, in fact, is the natural enemy of the spiritual life. The antagonism may be gross and violent as in Nazi Germany where the Jews were thought as an abstraction to be cancelled out without a quiver of personal guilt, or it may be rough and mocking as in the climax scene of the novel where Himmelfarb is hung up in the manner of 'crucifixion' by his workmates. R. F. Grissenden feels that the way in which the grey conformist forces within society perpetually seek to crucify the individual or the group who dare to be different is quite cruel. This metaphoric use of crucifixion is apt for the way in which the novel seeks to relate religious myth, historical catastrophe and mundane immediacies of contemporary Australian Society.

The four central characters are alienated. Mary Hare's isolation begins with the untouchable surfaces of her mother, the open distaste for her of the father, "By George, Eleanor the [Mary Hare] is ugly, ugly" (p. 22) and the parents' patronising evasion of the questions that trouble her. Her tentative response to Eustace Cleugh is crushed by his inability to feel any attraction towards her. Her traumatic experience when Norbert, with his demented cunning, seeks to involve her
in his suicide, to manipulate her physically so that whatever
the outcome she will be made to feel guilty, further estranges
the little girl. Her alienation becomes all the more discernible
in that she is much influenced by her father. Once fondling her,
the father asks "Who are the Riders in the Chariot, eh, Mary?
Who is going to know?" (p. 23), a question that encourages her
to expect of life some ultimate revelation which brings her
to the company of the other visionaries.

Himmelfarb's story, he tells Mary Hare, shows the growth
of the soul of a German Jewish boy who becomes a professor of
English and marries Reha. The marriage is successful but the
pair does not achieve mutual understanding. On the verge of
losing her, he realises that he knows little about her and that
he has given her incomplete love. He tries to make good this
lapse through his devotion to religion. Himmelfarb also feels
guilty for failing his people who considered him Messiah
(Mordecai). To atone his sins he inwardly burns to become a
scapegoat for his people. Himmelfarb becomes so involved in
religious rites that he takes no precautions against the
impending disaster. The fault of Himmelfarb is not that he is
a Jew, but that he is a very strict Jew. The bitter war
experience, the long persecution and his hair breadth escape
from death do not make him relax into easy ways of work hands.
When Ernie Theobalds asks Himmelfarb to have a mate, the Jew
laughs, "Anybody is my mate" (p. 307). He further explicates
the point; "I shall take Providence as my mate" (p. 308).

Alf Dubbo, the third visionary, has always been an alien
to his land, the victim of a country rector's 'Great Experiment' in assimilation. The chief effect of this experiment is to establish in Dubbo a bitter and enduring conflict between different conceptions of life, love and art. Dubbo's problem is partly racial. His difficulties nevertheless stem less from his racial alienation—of his culture only scattered sensibilities survive—than from his inability to resolve the contradictions in White society itself. The Rector preaches a Gospel of love according to John and seduces the boy. Long after he has left the rectory, Dubbo is still trying to resolve the conflict between 'woolly percepts of God in cloud and God in man' and the actualities of grog, syphilis, the betrayal of vocation and an unending line of meaningless tasks. Another reaction of sexual assault on Dubbo is that he suspects kindness in others and withdraws from any social communication of his thoughts and feelings. Alf Dubbo's story, has been described, as "little more than a record of disgust." But he consciously tries to understand the people around him. His method might have been troublesome to others, "He was happiest when he could escape and moon around the rubbish dump, where it seemed, the inhabitants of Mungindribble had shed their true selves and he was always making discoveries which corroborated certain suspicions he already had of men" (p. 336).

Ruth Godbold, the East Anglican Immigrant, is destroyed by the analogous disjunction between humanity and divinity. In her native village she experiences a thrilling moment in the grey cathedral. During hay making, her brother is beheaded by the cart wheel. Her father, a widowed cobbler, refuses to
look at her after this incident and Ruth's alienation starts. After her father's remarriage she emigrates to Australia, enters into service as a maid. The social facade noticed by her further brings into focus the disjunction between her concept of divinity where she is transported by her own singing and the society she sees as the 'living monkeys in dead furs'.

The four alienated visionaries are almost outcasts. What distinguishes them from all others is the intermittent experience of a particular vision. Each has, in certain moments of ecstasy, seen the Chariot—the symbol whose power and meaning are partially revealed as the plot unfolds. Yet each keeps the secret hidden from the world. The moments of rapture are those, in which, during some brief and casual encounter between two principal characters, each recognises that the other has seen the same vision and shared the same experience. In the subtle relationship which develops between the 'charioteers', the chariot is simply an epitome rather than a flimsy basis or an arbitrary link. Although each comes to know that the other is a 'charioteer' and although each gains from the relationship a renewed faith in his own chariot, yet what they do for each other is just because they are human beings, not as charioteers. For each of them the particular chariot supplies a link with the past, whether a personal memory or rich communal traditions. Thus, it helps to mark him off from the cultural rootlessness of Sarsparilla. This has evoked controversy. J. F. Burrows feels that "the novel's analysis of the relationship between society and its alien inhabitants is severely flawed by the failure." John Colmer in his recent study of the novel
captures succinctly the point that White uses two levels of language, "One to render mundane reality and the other to project the inner world of the visionaries." This supports the view that White arbitrarily tries to predispose the reader towards those who are not privileged as against 'the plastic ladies and the gentlemen in singlets'. It is also believed that "the characters are rigidly divided into an elect and unregenerate mass."53

In fact, while expressing the tensions between man's aspirations towards transcendence and the social world which denies this but in which he (the quester) must live, White is not so much resolving as revealing these. It is important to understand in this context that Patrick White is writing not a social history but a novel which deals with the inner realities of his characters. For that reason, his characters have nothing to do with the enrichment of social life of Australia. Theodora Goodman, Stan Parker, Voss, Elizabeth Hunter, and Ellen Roxburgh do not contribute anything to society. Then why expect it from the quartet of isolated visionaries of Riders in the Chariot?

The consciousness, of which the chariot is the symbol, resides in each of the four in form appropriate to the experience of each. But it has qualities in common. This gift of insight is secret and it is recognised only by those who themselves possess it. Suffering is a necessary condition of its development. Only suffering can reduce the person to a painfully earned state of simplicity which is the essential preparation for clarified consciousness. And again, it invariably provokes
persecution, whether it is at home by a companion, or in a factory by workmates or more monstrously in Hitler's Germany by the whole of society. Patrick White, like Lawrence, believes that direct intuitional consciousness at its height is religious.\footnote{54}

So, chariot is the symbol of the heightened consciousness of the individual characters which has been moulded by their intellectual and emotional backgrounds. The image of chariot has acquired a central place in the critical debate about the novel.\footnote{55} Leonie Kramer disputes the claim made by Patricia Morley that "each of the four whom we come to recognise as Riders in the Chariot of God has personal knowledge of the fiery chariot seen with the eyes of faith."\footnote{56} Prof. Kramer finds that the chariot has different connotations for different characters. Alf Dubbo at the age of 12, discovers the chariot in the French paintings belonging to Rev. Timothy Calderon. It is a painting of the Chariot of Appollo with four stiff figures sitting in its tiny body (p. 320). Later, Dubbo sees the painting again differently. Now he could transcribe the Frenchman's limited composition into his own terms of motion and forms partly transcendental, partly evolved from his daily experience with suffering (p. 342). Then he superimposes Ezekiel's vision on the French painting. Troubled by the duplicity of white men, Dubbo considers the chariot as nothing more than an abstraction and restates his conception of chariot after Himmelfarb's suffering as man (p. 371). Dubbo's realisation of the chariot remains tentative till the very end. Mrs. Godbold's chariot is solid and indestructive. The massive rumps of her horses waited, "wishing their tails through eternity..."
She saw the chariot image during her experience in the cathedral to begin with when she felt the golden ladder rose, extended and extended . . . (p. 236). Mrs Godbold's religious fervour seems a little sentimental as she is transported by the words of her own song. Mrs Godbold's chariot has the wings of love and charity (p. 489) and the figure of her Lord and Saviour wears Himmelfarb's face (p. 491). Himmelfarb's notion of the chariot is purely intellectual. It comes to him from the books on Jewish rather Kabbalistic and Hasdic mysticism. He tries to draw the chariot of Redemption but sees no expression on the faces of the riders. Later Himmelfarb, after the violent experiences of the war rejects intellect, "intellect has failed us" (p. 198). He tells Mary Hare that "there are hidden Zaddikim—the holy men who go secretly around the world—who are the chariot of God" (p. 155).

The idea of the chariot is first introduced to Mary Hare by her father, "Who are the riders in the Chariot, eh, Mary? Who is ever going to know?" (p. 23). Miss Hare takes to pantheism and tries to realise the truth, of the hand in every veined leaf, and would bundle with the bee into the divine mouth (p. 61). The drunken father's oblique remark encourages the daughter to expect of life some ultimate revelation. If fellowship with Himmelfarb and Mrs Godbold and her brief communion with a certain black fellow would confirm rather expound a mystery, the reason could be that, in the last light, "illumination is synonymous with blinding" (p. 24).

Echoing other critics Kramer also concludes that upon the
illuminated the chariot can confer no more than a spurious unity. Its irrelevance to their understanding of the world, each other and the society beyond them, is manifestly clear.\(^{57}\) The chariot is man-made and not divinely sent and it creates the impression that true goals must be sought not in this world but in the world beyond it.

Much of this criticism is misplaced. As already noted, chariot is the symbol of the heightened consciousness of the individual characters and it is there not because of others but in spite of others. The chariot symbolises neither their quest for eternity, nor the amelioration of their alienation, nor is it a guarantee against evil. The riders 'see' the chariot long before they are brought together by White. The image is the result of their heightened consciousness which must have been touched by the image of the chariot they came across at a young age. The chariot is a sort of a vision which brings solace to the tormented souls of the riders, that in addition to their troubled lives there is another reality, which is in the same world. "Only the chariot itself rode straight and silent, both now and on the clouds of recollection" (p. 307). White's view that there is transcendence is further supported by the vision of the chariot. The riders share the vision all right, but do not nurse any hope for redemption. Mrs Godbold finds comfort in trivial acts of charity and Himmelfarb tells Reha and Mary Hare: "I would like to persuade you that the simple acts we have learnt to perform daily are the best protection against evil" (p. 304). Alf Dubbo finds realisation when he succeeds in fusing the myth of 'God in man' and the
reality of 'man in God' through his painting. Miss Hare's Pantheism gives her true knowledge that sustains. Moreover, the vision of the chariot is one of the many visions realised by other visionaries. Leonie Kramer and others may be right in the observation that the four riders are united not by a shared vision of a mutually understood and acknowledged symbol of the transcendental but by their individual and idiosyncratic pursuit of their particular revelations. The rest of the argument that the image is superimposed and misleading is untenable. For each rider, the image has quite individual connotations not different from his/her perceptions. It simply shows their sense of the ineffable, of some ultimate meaning and the unity of life. It indicates the latent potential of realisation on the part of the visionaries. Geoffrey Dutton finds no "particular need to ask precisely what it is, although for various readers it may have associations with Ezekiel, Apollo, Plato or Blake." The vision of the chariot is bound to remain vague as language cannot convey it, as most of it is a mental perception and not an experience. Himmelfarb tells Reha "just when I think I have understood it, I discover some fresh form—so many—streaming with implications." The vision of the chariot is an advance on The Tree of Man, where Stan experiences a fleeting vision, and Voss, where transcendental experience of Laura at the grave of Rose Portion poses problems of comprehension for many readers. In this book, White has presented a vision of eternity by first showing clearly a grain of sand. The four visionaries, sustained by the assurance about their potential for fulfilment and transcendental understanding,
strive hard in their individual quest for identity.

Mary Hare has become shy of the people to the point of terror as she has been brought up without any companions. This solitariness is augmented by her feeling of guilt in which Norbert Hare implicates her at the time of his death. Her repressed sexuality is misplaced in bitterness towards all strangers. She is tormented with questions about the meaning of evil and extent of her guilt—questions which even at her sanest would have been too inarticulate to face. The physical presence of evil in the shape of Mrs Jolley and the haunting memory of her dying father almost madden her and the people start calling her 'mad woman of Xanadu.' The vision of the chariot leads her to believe that although she is different 'she will get what she is to get in her own way'. In her desire to comprehend the reality around her she turns to nature, "her hands almost always dirty and scratched, from the constant need to plunge into operations of importance: encouraging a choked plant to shoot, freeing a fledgling from its shell, breaking an afterbirth were now hung with dying ants, she observed with some distress (p. 15). Mary Hare achieves her fulfilment in her strange and complex relationship with Himmelfarb. For her, the relationship signifies a resolution of her personal guilt in his willingness to become a scapegoat. She is at last to risk death in his blazing hut in an attempt to save him from incineration. Her more general puzzlings about evil are resolved through the influence of his educated intelligence and through her recognition that her experience of
evil is insignificant as compared to his. Himmelfarb's advice that the way out of evil is not to avoid it but to submit to it and that our "daily activities are the best protection against it," strike identity for Mary Hare. Her repressed sexuality is also sublimated through her willingness to accept, without any overtly sexual response, her shy eroticism and above all in his willingness to regard her as a person rather than a spaniel. Thus the religious approach of Himmelfarb towards the very serious affairs of the world resolves the alienation of Mary Hare.

Himmelfarb's willingness to become scapegoat and his religious belief that transcendence is possible through suffering alone helps Alf Dubbo in his quest for identity. Alf Dubbo's alienation stems from a conflict between 'woolly percepts of God in the cloud and God in man' and the sordid realities of life, and his mistrust in human love and kindness. As Voss considered love as weakness and threat for his integrity, Dubbo associates love with betrayal. In his long painful career, he first glimpses true love through Ruth Godbold in the brothel of Mrs. Khalil. The growth of Alf's desire to paint shows his inner restlessness and his quest for identity. His obsession with the painting of the chariot shows how he wants to reconcile the inner conflicts by improving upon the version which he once saw as a young boy. Alf's reaction to evil is not moral but aesthetic. He is amused to see that the rector's stomach gurgles with passion and that his unclothed body reminds him of witchetty grubs. He views Hanna's beauty in terms of the colour of her skin and bedsheets. Coming to Ezekiel's chariot,
Dubbo's conception of the chariot is further intensified when he discovers that Ezekiel means much to Himmelfarb. When the 'bloody Abo' discovers through observation the love between Mary Hare, Himmelfarb and Mrs Goldbold, he realises that love is not always treacherous. He does discover that perfectly fulfilled love is accessible, and it has the redeeming power. When Himmelfarb is crucified, Dubbo cannot bring himself to act. In Himmelfarb's death (a sacrifice for the atonement of his sins), the rector's percepts come to life. Dubbo finds "self knowledge in and through the love of the brethren."

Through an awakened conscience, his understanding is enriched and the whole of his experience is fused. In a blaze of creative energy released by this understanding he paints the Deposition of Christ, thus transmuting the boyish conflicts and hypocrisies, and the chariot, fusing his later experience into one vision. Dubbo who has always drawn heavily from Bible fuses biblical myth of crucifixion and the 'actuality' and through this fusion he comes to a full understanding and his alienation is sunk in the understanding and compassion.

Alf Dubbo does not take myth as actuality and, as a result, paints the Christ (Himmelfarb) darker than convention would have approved (p. 456), the chariot horses could have been rough brumbies (p. 458), and for Himmelfarb the crown of thorns has been substituted for the crown of barbed wire.

The first Mary, Mrs Godbold, remains firm on earth with "the dust on her blunt shoes" (p. 454) and Mary Hare, the second Mary, is painted like a 'ring tailed possum' in a 'dream time womb of transparent skin' (p. 455). However, Mary Hare
is not painted in her earlier dismay or ensuing frenzy but in the serenity at the time of crucifixion. It is the result of complete understanding and fusion, and the painter and the painting become quite inseparable. However, this fulfilment cannot be followed up as material conditions intervene in the shape of Dubbo's illness and subsequent death and his paintings are lost.

Himmelfarb's feelings of guilt at the death of his wife, at his supposed cowardice and betrayal, alienate him from the mainstream of Jewish life and the Professor strives hard for atonement. He takes refuge in religion, rejects intellect and submits himself to the worst possible mortification and suffering. During this period the chariot also undergoes transformation. From the distinct Kabbalistic chariot of his earlier intellectual it chariot becomes the Chariot of Redemption, a sign more simply mystical. His first active effort to redeem his people comes during the train journey to the concentration camp at Friedensdorf. He is ready to accept new life made miraculously possible through his escape from Europe, but remains deeply conscious of his unworthiness, even guilt, and knows that a physical flight from the slaughter-house of his fellow Jews does not automatically cut him off from involvement in the solidarity of pain and suffering of his people. After further wanderings in a desert, that is now chiefly psychological, he comes to Palestine, the land of hope and desire. His near ecstasy as he touches the shore of pure land soon turns to disillusionment as he meets Ari, his own brother-in-law. Himmelfarb's discussion with Ari clearly shows the weight of guilt on his mind and his resolve.
to atone for his cowardice and betrayal and to redeem the suffering of Jewish people through self-sacrifice by becoming a scapegoat for his brethren. When Ari invites him to stay and work for his own soil, Himmelfarb notes that they are completely fulfilled. Mordecai tells them that perhaps that was not the will of God, Ari's reply is:

'. . . you, I seem to remember, Reha had decided were to play the part of Messiah.' (p. 192)

The remark falls upon Himmelfarb's psyche as an olive drop, green, hard, actual from the tree under which they are sitting. Himmelfarb asks Ari:

'What do you believe Ari?'

'I believe in the Jewish people . . .', his brother-in-law replied.

'And the soul of the Jewish people.'

'Ah, souls! he was very suspicious, jabbing the earth, 'history if you like.'

'History,' Himmelfarb said, 'is the reflection of the spirit.'

'... I would only point out that spiritual faith is also an active force, which will populate the world after each attempt by the men of action to destroy it.'

'Yes Ari,' Mordecai sighed, 'I can tell you that you are both fulfilled. But momentarily. Nothing, alas, is permanent. Not even this valley. Not even our land. This earth is in revolt. It will throw up fresh stones—tonight, tomorrow—always. And you, the chosen, will continue to need your scapegoat just as some of us do not wait to be dragged out, but continue to offer ourselves.' (pp. 192-93)

This is the key passage in the development of Himmelfarb. The
cause, the nature and intensity of his alienation and also his proposed way out is effectively caught here. So, Himmelfarb moves to fulfill his idealism in the virgin soil of Australia. White shows his concern of man for his fellowmen, and above all, the sacrificial spirit whereby an individual offers himself, humbly and willingly, for the corporate guilt of the society to which he belongs. This is an archetypal image which appears time and again in the history of an individual, country or society. This is the reason why Himmelfarb exposes himself to dangers. Probably, he observes the rituals of his religion so strictly and refuses to accept mateship to incur the wrath of others. The reaction against the odd person in society comes in the shape of Blue the mate who, along with his companions, hangs Himmelfarb on the lopped jarcanda tree to the amusement of the onlookers.

This central scene of the novel has invited attention of the hostile and friendly critics alike. If Patricia Morley, Geoffrey Dutton and others find clear transcendental elements in the scene, Leonie Kramer, discusses this scene to prove that "far from endorsing transcendentalism, White is offering a critique of it." J. F. Burrows feels that the image of crucifixion is complete in this novel. While Rosetree, cast as Judas Pilate, escapes to the safety of his office, Alf Dubbo, the aboriginal, cast in the role of Peter, looks on in impotent horror, the mob trusses Himmelfarb to a lopped jarcanda. "At least one of his hands was pierced. Through the torn shirt, it could be seen that the disgraceful ribs were gashed" (p. 412).
The mob laughs at him and a person spits at his mouth and a
girl throws an orange. The two Marys are portentously involved.
Mrs. Godbold is preparing the white sheets to lay the body of
Christ and Miss Hare in her Xanadu sees the marble shudder and
crack. The similarity between the episode and the central
myth of Christianity is reinforced by Mrs. Godbold's remark,
"Mr Himmelfarb has also died on Friday" (p.439). It is further
strengthened by the suicide of Mr. Rosetree on the prick of his
conscience. If on one hand, White has created the atmosphere
of crucifixion, on the other, he has taken pains to give it a
secular touch as well. Himmelfarb does not die on the cross
but dies, after being brought to the shack of Mrs. Godbold.
On the cross Himmelfarb prays for a sign but no sign comes and
it is not accorded to him to expiate the sins of the world.
This is probably the denial of Godhead for Himmelfarb. "But
when the Jew looked up. . . . And [he] was conscious of a
stillness and clarity of pure water, at the centre of which
his God was reflected" (p. 413). Later, in his delirium
Himmelfarb becomes the Man Kadmon, descending from the Tree of
Light 'to take the Bride'.

This is the moment of fulfilment for Himmelfarb. He may
not have succeeded in redeeming his people as 'no sign came'
when he is on the cross and the society remains as it was
before, but his quest for identity ends on a hopeful note.
"He is as content by now as he could ever have allowed himself
to be in life" (p. 432).

Mrs. Ruth Godbold is troubled by the disjunction between
humanity and divinity. She is hampered by her husband's brutality and infidelity, but more significantly by his inability to understand and partake of her kind of love. She discovers that her "... love is on two planes, one on which he might never reach" (p. 263). Her love for Tom is inevitably linked with the love for God and she is ready to sacrifice her personal desires to bear the sins of herself and her husband. Her faith in Christianity fluctuates most imperceptibly and she is generally seen as confirmed and confident in her belief. That is why her chariot is more palpable than the vision of other riders. Her moment of greatest insight occurs in childhood when she visits a cathedral and this vision stands as a goal to be cherished. "And always the golden ladder rose, extended and extended as if to reach the window of fire. But there was no fire, only bliss, surging and rising as she herself climbed upon the heavenly scaffolding and placed still other ladders to reach higher ..." (p. 236). Significantly she remembers this vision when she talks to Alf Dubbo in the brothel. It represents freedom to her which in the context of her life is the ability to rise above the elements which tie her to everyday concerns. Ruth's transcendent knowledge of freedom fulfils her need for an interpretation of life as harmonious and fruitful, not as the chaos of conventional bias and viciousness seen in the members of society. So, Ruth Godbold's quest for identity is most passive in the novel. She could understand the reality of the religious conventions. She tells Rosetree, 'Haim ben Ya'akov' that, "the coat man wears after birth does not bring any change. Man remains the same" (p. 445).
The theme of Godhead, which dominated The Tree of Man, Voss and Riders in the Chariot, engages the attention of Patrick White in The Solid Mandala (1966) as well. Whereas Himmelfarb and particularly Voss made conscious efforts to achieve it, Godhead is unconsciously attained by Arthur Brown. The Solid Mandala is primarily concerned with the life of two brothers, Arthur and Waldo, born twins and destined to live together in their childhood, youth and old age. They are almost like the two selves of the same being, two aspects of the same person, living apart and yet together, physically, mentally and spiritually. Like other protagonists of White's fiction, Arthur and Waldo are also the 'burnt ones'. They are introduced as a "couple of no hopers, with ideas about 'emselves, the Brothers Bloody Brown" (p. 18). Waldo, the pseudo-intellectual, who excels at writing English essays, becomes a librarian and supposes himself to be superior, hates people. He has prepared a list of 57 persons and things whom he hates, including the names of Mrs Poulter and Arthur. He has aspirations as a writer and pretends to have written a poem which turns out to be a copy of Tennyson's "Fatima." Arthur, known as Arthur the Dill, is a failure at school except for a surprising flair for figures. He becomes a delivery boy and accepts inferior status but loves people and is loved by them. He does establish a quasi-spiritual and quasi-sexual relationship with Dulcie and Mrs Poulter.

Patrick White describes the Brown Brothers as "my two halves. Arthur might have been the portrait of my cousin Philip Garland if Philip's childish wisdom had matured, instead
he was admitted to an asylum in his teens and remains in one to this day. Waldo is myself at my coldest and worst."61 White's subtle portrayal shows his perception of human condition in its complexity. Their thoughts and passions alternate between love and hate, adoration and detestation, attachment and isolation.

The novel is primarily concerned with depicting the nuances of this extraordinary relationship between the twins."62 It is through the double vision of the single yet divided experience of the twins that White deals with the central theme of the novel—the nature and meaning of the solid mandala. Not only the content but also the pattern of the novel is mandalic—i.e. circular. Like The Tree of Man, where Stan Parker is the centre of various co-centric circles, this novel is composed of a series of co-centric circles. The outermost one is made up of the whole suburbia of Sarasparilla including Mrs. Poulter and even Dulcie, although these two are favoured by Arthur. The outer circle encompasses the Brown family, and the inner circle encompasses the Brown family, and still the inner circle of the Brown Brothers and the innermost circle is that of Arthur Brown—the solid mandala itself.

Mandala has deep religious connotations. In oriental contemplation, the mandala is used to relate the human to the universal, "here the mandala pattern may become a 'map' of the cosmos uniting the one with the One."63 White has himself acknowledged the influence of Jung on The Solid Mandala: "The Painter Lawrence Davo had given me Jung's Psychology and Alchemy which had a great influence on me. It projected me
into my Solid Mandala." Jung can help us in interpreting the mystery of the four marbles—the central image of the novel. Arthur, the dill, carries four marbles with him. One taw is particularly his favourite and he rubs it and pierces into it. The blue marble is given to Dulcie, the cloudy golden to Mrs Poulter and Arthur offers the third mandala—the colourless one 'with a knot inside'—to Waldo. Waldo, however, does not accept this marble and it is ultimately lost. Arthur keeps one marble for himself. It is whorled one and contains two colours—green and crimson. A. P. Riemer, in his perceptive study of the subject, quotes Jung: "The symbolic number in Christian religious experience is three (denoting Trinity). Jung argues that four is much more potent and meaningful number than three in religious mysticism and he connects its importance with the age old pursuit of the perfect, primal matter, the philosopher's stone which not only possesses the quality of transmuting base matter into gold but also can reveal to its finder the secrets of divinity." The rejection and the subsequent loss of the fourth mandala, which is most probably colourless, has deep meaning. Arthur offers it to Waldo, although he knows that Waldo would not be able to untie the knot. It is a comment on Waldo's fallacy about his intellect and quite in line with Himmelfarb's 'intellect has failed us'. Later the mandala is lost. Patrick White suggests through this perfect but elusive mandala that even Arthur would not be able to get the final glimpse or revelation.
Thelma Herring believes that Arthur's quest for totality in religious aspect begins only in old age. "Brought up by parents who are conscientious unbelievers, Arthur is untroubled by religious questions until in old age he is perplexed by the 'problem of pain and the Christian emphasis on the 'blood and the nail' and begins his search." But it has to be noted that Arthur is concerned with the question of religion right from his childhood. After his visit to the performance of Gotterdammerung, he asks a question: Who and where are the God? (p. 217). The mystery of the mandalas and his quest to understand the meaning of the word 'mandala' is a part of his quest for his religious identity. In Ralph's Encyclopedia, he reads to Mrs. Musto:

The mandala is a symbol of totality. It is believed to be the 'dwelling of the God.' Its protective circle is a pattern of order super-imposed on psychic chaos. Sometimes its geometric form is seen as a vision (either waking or a dream) ... or in dance. (p. 238)

Now Arthur wants to understand the meaning of the word 'totality'. So he asks his father, quite excited and rocked by the meaning of the mandala:

'What,' he asked 'is the meaning of totality?' Dad took out the dictionary and read: 'Totality is the quality of being total.' ... 'That is to say,' said Dad, he could not clear his throat enough, 'it means,' he said, 'that which is whole,' adding: 'spelt with a 'w' naturally.' (p. 240)

Arthur thus, remains the sole quester unaided by anybody. He realises that Dad 'would never know any more than Waldo:

"It was himself who was, and would remain, the keeper of the mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light ..." (p. 240). The words 'touch' and 'light' are
quite important and meaningful, 'touch' suggesting his personal experience and 'light' the divine knowledge. He tells Waldo, "I forget what I was told. I only remember what I have learnt."

Through varied and complex symbolism drawn from various philosophies and religions like the Chinese woman under the wheel tree, Arthur's own mandalic dance, an effort to impose order over chaos has been made. Arthur dances on all the four corners and the centre like the cosmic dance of Natraj. He discovers the presence of transcendence in immanence; the presence of divine essence in human body, as enunciated in the Hindu Philosophy, "The dwelling Atman is the same as the Brahman."

This realisation is best explained in the first and second epigraphs to *The Solid Mandala*:

There is another world, but it is in this one

Paul Eluaid

It is not outside, it is inside: wholly within

Meister Echhart

When Waldo's hatred kills him (as it appears to be a case of suicide), Arthur is shocked and slams the door on the dogs and the dead body. He accuses himself of murder—may be failing in love and offers himself as getter of pain for the sin of others. It is yet another example of 'Christ stuff'.

Prof. Kantak very aptly puts it, "This inspiring idiot Arthur Brown is instantly recognised as a kind of 'Bhole Shanker' who confers blessedness unasked."

He serves as a delivery boy and carries things to others. He is the giver of the mandalas and unconsciously he gives love, strength and courage to others.
When he gives the blue mandala to Dulcie, she says, "You . . . were the one Arthur who gave me strength—well to face the truth—well about ourselves in particular my own wobbly self" (p. 256). At the end of the novel, Mrs Poulter whose God is "brought crashing down" (p. 311), tells the Sergeant, "This man would be my saint . . . if we could still believe in saints. Now a days . . . we have only men to believe in. I believe in this man" (p. 314).

In *The Vizisector* (1970), the theme of Godhead has been pushed to the background, though this does not disappear completely, and importance of vision has been given a subtler treatment. This novel projects a painter Hurtle Duffield/Courtney and through him White tends to express the spiritual problems of an artist. "In [this] novel art replaces the directly religious or mystical experience of the two previous novels, *Riders in the Chariot* and *The Solid Mandala*." It is a novel about the nature of art and the being of an artist, in this case a painter. It is also about the relationship between religious experience and art. The two epigraphs appended to the novel make White's religious concern quite clear:

As I see it, painting and religious experience are the same thing, and what we are all searching for is the understanding and realization of infinity.

Ben Nicholson

He the artist/god becomes beyond all others the great invalid, the great criminal, the great Accursed one and the Supreme Knower. For he reaches the Unknown.

Rimband
His recording in his Dunny, where he spends most of his time, is quite revealing:

God the Vivisector,
God the Artist.
God. (p. 309)

Duffield can more convincingly discern Platonic or transcendental forms in the regenerative world than can a number of characters in the earlier novels. Duffield expresses: "take an honest to God kitchen table, kitchen chair what could be more real, I have had immense difficulty reaching that core of reality" (p. 432).

Art also provides "a more satisfactory co-relative for 'pure being' than mandalic marbles or biblical chariots which run the risk of seeming or to depend upon Jungian or Talmudic exegesis." 70

Hurtle is another member of the large family of 'burnt ones' which populates White's world. The theme of the alienation is struck on the very first page of the book. Amongst the fowls there is a crook neck white pullet being picked at by others. Hurtle asks:

'Why're the others picking at it, Pa?'
'Because they do not like the look of it.
Because it is different.' (p. 9)

So is Duffield. "There was so much of him that did not belong to his family. He could see them watching him, wanting to ask questions. Sometimes they did, and he answered, but the answers weren't the ones they expected. They looked puzzled, even hurt" (p. 14). It is the alienation of the artist, inherent in his mental make up. This urge becomes quite clear when he sees in his mind the rough looking sheep during his visit to Mumbelong. He itches to get his fingers in their wool, for the feel of it.
Sid Cupple's story convinces Hurtle about his being different and hence isolated. 71

The monstrous transaction in which Hurtle, as a child, is sold for £ 500, against his father's desperate but unavailing opposition and with his mother's anguished but absolute support, doubles his alienation. He cannot reconcile with the idea of being a Courtney. Alfreda Courtney's jewellery and rings 'pricked and hit him.' "I don't like to be like anybody else" (p. 86), he tells Rhoda. "He would have liked to run with the mob of kids down Cox street where he belonged, if he belonged . . ." (p. 86). Hurtle takes a long time to understand that his heightened consciousness being reflected in the image of a chandelier is the cause of his difficulties. "Nobody, not his family, not Mrs Courtney, only faintly himself, knows, he has inside him his own chandelier. This is what made him, at times, jangle and want to explode into smithereens" (p. 53). Mrs Alfreda Courtney's allusion to the 'knife in his eyes'; tour of Europe during which, at St. Yver de Treger, he fleetingly sees Rhoda naked at the washstand; his adolescent love making with Boo Hollingrake, under the Monstera deliciosa and the almost abnormal significance he attaches to the colour blue, become his artistic obsessions, an effort at regaining the heightened perception of childhood and a lost state of 'pure being' he carries within himself in memory.

Through Hurtle, Patrick White depicts the fearsome isolation of the artist in general, and the Australian Artist in particular, about which White himself was deeply conscious. In the words of Delacroix, 'loneliness is the torment of my soul.' The loneliness
of God, the original Creator is passed on to the artist, together with his cruelty and the impossibility of his being consoled by anything or any living creature. This bleakly religious attitude is incompatible with classical calm or hedonistic bohemianism.  

For the expression of so complex consciousness, where personal and the universal mingle, White uses the metaphor of a painter and his psyche. He desired to become a painter himself to "give visual expression to what I have inside me, and that the physical act of painting would exhilarate me far more than grinding away at grey bronchial prose." No man "has ever achieved complete self expression," Hesse wrote. Self expression is impossible with other men; their self-expression interferes with it. The greatest heights of self expression in poetry, music, painting--are achieved by men who are supremely alone. And it is for this reason that the idea of the 'beautific vision' is possible for the artist than anyone else. The artist is to experience his moment of greatest loneliness intensified to a point where it would fill up his life and make all other relations impossible or unnecessary. It is for this reason that, after the war, Hurtle breaks with the Courtney family, even with Rhoda with whom he had an intimate, intuitive understanding. Hurtle's dilemma, as an artist, is that he must accept loneliness in order to bring out what is inside him, yet he needs people as a vivisector needs animals or God—human beings, in order to further his design. The spark, the divine creative principle that connects man to God through sex, love, art and religion, is broken everytime.
it is joined. And what if there is no God? "If God didn't exist he was his own dynamo." Yet his egotism demands the connection though he can refuse it when it is forced upon him. He breaks links with the Courtney family, after the decent Harry with the Edwardian torso was like Nietzsche's God dead. He stays back in France washing dishes and studying Art. Like romantic artistes he wants to lose himself in experience to debase himself so that he is born again through his art, associated with the disillusionment of the lost generation. John Colmer opines that "This is the novel in which White pushes to its extreme the notion that immersion in evil, some descent into hell, is a necessary precondition for achieving the clarified vision. While this theme requires that defilement and corruption should be rendered authentically, it does not necessiate the obsessive attention to the bestial and scatalogical that it receives." 74

Hurtle moves on a two-fold quest. As a person the whole quest of Duffield is for the child he had lost in himself, somewhere in childhood, when he is sold like a horse. As an artist, his effort is to perceive the Truth that is inclusive, splendid total and transcendent. Patrick White knows that "physical experience and spiritual experience are both essential and no one does no good to rise above the physical or reject the spiritual. This also helps to explain why White is so concerned to depict the grosser aspects of human physicality to emphasise that they are part of wholeness." 75 According to R. S. Baker, the "theme of The Vixenctor most exclusively stated,
is the intellectual and psychological maturation of an artist in terms of a dialectic between self and world, mind and nature, imagination and reality . . ."76 As a painter, Hurtle is a cross between the romantic and the demoniac, and the demoniac and the divine. In fact, Hurtle's journey is Art through sex and God through Art. This explains away much criticised central part of the novel which has been described as having an "atmosphere of gladiatorial eroticism."77

The central part of the novel records repeated sexual involvements of the artist. The sexual gratification becomes a fixation for him. The sense of cruelty and pathos is implicit in the act. This is made possible by the willing participation of women drawn from all sections of society—Nance the prostitute, Ben Hollingrake (Devanport) and Hero Pavlurossi, the socialities, Kathy Volkov, an artist. This is Freudian world of phantasy in which Hurtle "is not only one who has a life of phantasy. The intermediate world of phantasy is sanctioned by general human consent and every hungry soul looks to it for comfort and consolation."78

The first and the foremost, affair from the point of view of Duffield's evolution, starts with a physical collusion between Nance and Hurtle in a park. The love making between them is expressive of rank sensuality and nothing short of antics of caged monkeys. William Walsh feels, "It is to be expected that a prostitute for whom sex is impersonal and mechanically routine, if she is as full-blooded and as much in love as Nance, might naturally fume with sensuality, gobbling like a baby that which
she treats with aloof indifference as a worker." 79 Duffield reciprocates with equal overheatedness. And what he wants is not the common possessive pross to be loved by needful spasms, but "to shoot at an enormous naked canvas a whole radiant chandelier waiting in his mind and balls" (p. 207). During this period Duffield, the painter, blossoms forth and his reputation as an artist spreads after his meeting with Caldicott. Gradually, Nance becomes almost his prostitute wife. Hurtle realises that what he most required from Nance was neither the humiliating fivers, nor her 'love' necessarily but because on one level he was resuscitated by the breath he breathed... on the other pure plane they solved together equations which might have defeated his tentative mind and which probably never entered Nance's consciousness" (p. 210). So, Nance nurses other notions about this relationship and Hurtle leaves the city and moves to a shack on the rocks. The wedge between the two deepens not because of the minor success of Hurtle as a painter, but because the painter cannot love anything more than his painting, even though his painting developed through Nance. The prostitute wife becomes aware of her real situation and remarks, "... but with an artist you are never free, he's making use of yer in the name of the Holy Mother Truth. He thinkn. The Truth" (p. 247). Hurtle is shocked at these doubts as he knows that total love must be resisted—it is overwhelming like religion. Nance has already acquired an important place as she is not only Hurtle's love partner but his work, as he has only begun to create her. Hurtle, the vivisector, and his creator Patrick White realise
that Nance, a rare creature, 'a whore with a heart of gold' is, dangerous for art; so she is conveniently disposed of by the novelist. The violence of Nance's end after it is fully borne in on her that she can never be anything but secondary to Duffield's vision of Truth, and she is dashed to death on the rocks below Duffield's cabin, whether by accident or suicide or both, matches the brutality of her existence and the part-sacrificial or creative—she has played in the painter's life.

After Nance Hero Pavloussi comes in the life of Hurtle. Hurtle's partner in adolescent love making at Sunningdale, Olivia Davenport, introduces Hero, her lesbian partner, "I'm giving you, Hurtle, Hero, for Dinner" (p. 313). There was no sign that a plan had been discussed before hand by the two women. In fact, Madame Pavloussi, standing in front of him, "continue looking dazed, if not frightened, by the possibility that she was intended as a sacrifice, while there flickered briefly through his mind, an image of himself trussed on a gold plate threatened by a knife and fork in her small rather blunt hands" (p. 313). The intended affair between the two turns out to be violently vulgar & sensual. At the beginning, with Nance, it seems to him that he loves this woman whom he hardly knows as a person, at least he loves and needs her form. Whether he desires her sexually "is a matter of how far art is dependent on sexuality" (p. 189). But with Hero, Duffield feels an attraction in addition to his need of her for his painting. Their love making is bestial. She demands the ultimate in depravity. When they part, the 'appeased lust rings in her
eyes" (p. 353). The next time "he rooted her . . . you couldn't have called it anything else, on Mrs Cargill's carpet" (p. 356). The authorial remarks clearly indicate that Hero is more dangerous for art than Nance. Hero is 'civilised sex' and civilisation is not a refinement but a corruption of sensuality. Considering Hero's sensuality as a danger to the artist's isolation and hence his creativity, Patrick White destroys her, through cancer this time.

Duffield accompanies his Mistress Hero on a pilgrimage to Greece in search of spiritual revelation, redemption and grace. The pilgrimage reveals only all too human world of the convent for the fallen girls and the empty cell of the hermit. He gets the impression that the inner imaginative life is the only reality. While Hero is railed against 'the deck' on the last day in Greece, Duffield observes a little hen picking around their table: "the golden hen flashed her wings not in flight; she remained consecrated to this earth even while scurrying through illuminated dust" (p. 393). "Hurtle returns to the dust and disarray of Flint street and paints such apocalyptic moments" (p. 391).

As local lord of manor, Duffield is cultivated by the locals, Cec Cutbush, the grocer, the young Kathy Valkov and her mother, while on other level he is lionised as Artist. In his old age Hurtle is almost destroyed by Kathy whom he intends to create as his spiritual child. She is outrageously sensual, at thirteen no virgin. She absorbs him as he gasps that he wants love and not sex. After this encounter her only
regret is the delay for her lessons.

It is important to analyse these affairs. In fact, all the women are sacrifices to the flame of art through which Hurtle wants to reach the ultimate truth. His quest for the lost child and the search for truth become one. The negation of motherly love in childhood and repressed sexuality become an obsession with Hurtle. The Oedipal inclinations towards Mrs Courtney and then incestuous feelings for Rhoda are quite clear. The expression of his artistic talent is not possible without an outlet to these feelings. It is for this reason that he indulges in vulgar, sensual and depraved sexual relations with various women. Sexual partner is supposed to give motherly affection as well. So, sexual encounters liberate his repression and release the spiritual personality. For him, spirituality of that part of his nature which his lust feeds and frees is precisely proportionate to the rankness of his sensuality. In this connection William Walsh observes, "The Vivisector is organised round a psychology which assumes that the purity of Duffield's artistic purpose needs to be liberated and nourished by coarseness, toughness and sensuality embodied in Nance and others as well. The grossness of the later is inversely related to the fineness of the former." Although he has realised the futility of physical love per se, physical love as he sees it, is an exhilarating steeple chase in which almost every river ends up disqualified for some dishonesty or the other. The simple reality of the ordinary things cannot adequately stimulate the creative activity for a sensibility like Duffield's. For this reason women are essential may be
his mother or Mrs Courtney, Rhoda or Bea-Hollingrake, Nance or Aero or Kathy or Rhoda again.

Hurtle shaped by his deprivation, sold by his mother, is bound to be both in need of love and profoundly suspicious of anybody offering it. From his personal experience he feels that love is a rare commodity in this world and sex is readily available. So he wants to reach love through sex. "Sex and the possibility of its extension into love is more important in this novel than in any other book of White's." Sexual deprivation also helps him to strip himself of the 'great monster self'. He throws away his family ring and defiles his self portrait ritually as if to caste away the 'I' in him. This humility coupled with his illumination in Greece through the episode of the hen brings him nearer the attainment of his vision, his identity. In the last part of the novel, Duffield regains his childhood when he plays childish games with Rhoda in the kitchen. Rhoda tells him, 'I have learnt not to suffer.' Again, she consoles him that "he is not alone in feeling afflicted, that almost every one carries a hump not always visible and not always of the same shape" (p. 469).

Helped by the inner ripeness and his worldly experience and after being spared by the first stroke, Hurtle sets himself to the Promethean effort to reach the ultimate reality. He can comprehend but cannot communicate his vision. He is not bothered even if it be beyond his final grasp. Like Alf Dubbo, Duffield is lured by the ultimate. In Dr. Iyengar's words, Hurtle is determined to achieve "the Ultimate that will be
cheated with no money, no phoney substitutes. Beyond form and
colour and convention, beyond craft and artifice and art."\(^2\)

Believing in the epigraph to *The Solid Mandala*—"It is not
outside, it is inside; wholly within, Meister Echhart"—Hurtle
gets to paint his vision:

There was this day he sensed his psychopomp standing
beside him. At once he began scrabbling according to
direction on his rickety palate table. He was
mixing the never attainable blue.

He pursed his lips to repeat the syllables which were
being dictated: N-D-G-O . . .

. . . all his life he had been reaching towards this
vertiginous blue. . . . Now he was again acknowledging
with all his strength of his live hand the otherwise
unnamable I N D I G O.

Only reach higher. Could. And will. (pp. 616-17)

But Duffield is stroked to death before he can paint the
indigo. This word I N D I G O has been variously interpreted.

For Scheick, INDIGO coalesces the purplish blue end of the
visible spectrum with the idea of God by hinting at the
transformation of Hurtle's tired subjective individuality,
(indigo) suggests that the individual is God like into the
endless, godlike objectivity of non-being (indigo into god).\(^3\)
INDIGO can make God, and almost makes religious hieroglyph
I N R I. Finally, it makes 'I go'. The fragmentation is only
natural as it is in the mind of a man who dies before he could
share it with others. In the epigraph to *Riders in the Chariot*,
we learn: the perception of the infinite is possible through
finite. Duffield's vision of the indigo is the infinite within
the finite. Indigo, the end of the quest especially when one
considers that blue is the intermediary between white and black,
that it is darkness made visible.

The Eye of the Storm (1973) has been considered to be the best novel of Patrick White. It was regarded as one of the Crown pieces of that oeuvre in the acclamation that accompanied the judge's decision on the 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature. The Christ figure, the recurrent theme in White's novels, is missing here, but the importance and nature of the visionary (mystical/transcendental/religious) experience is the foremost concern of the novelist. The novel offers a much clearer view of White's attitude towards what Elizabeth Hunter calls 'the utmost in experience.' In other novels, the identity is struck through a last moment vision of Oneness—(The Tree of Man), a transcendental chariot, a Mandalic dance or the metaphor of the psyche of a quester or the metaphor of a painter. But in this novel, the central incident—the vision of Elizabeth Hunter—is very clear and is experienced before the action of the novel begins.

The novel has been described as bereft of religious undertones by various critics. According to Leonie Kramer, "the novel is largely free from the quasi-religious reverberations which have distinguished the novels from The Tree of Man onwards. The word transcendental in The Eye of the Storm means, in case of Elizabeth's transcending the accidents and exigencies of daily existence and finding a buried self." But such a reading may emerge from some misreading of the novel. Patrick White, as already noted, does not believe in any particular religion and his religious concept embraces
the entire gamut of rituals, traditions, transcendental and mystical experiences. The central incident of the novel—the mystical experience of Elizabeth Hunter—is purely 'spiritual'. Moreover, the religious language has been used by White time and again. On the Brumby Island Elizabeth smells and tastes a chip of wood and Patrick White describes it as a 'wafer'... she did actually taste a chip from the tree and "might have dropped this transmuted wafer as quickly as she could, but managed to put it down instead" (p. 403). On the wedding of Dorothy in a Roman Catholic Church "for one instant, out of chanting and incense, Elizabeth Hunter experiences a kind of a spiritual gooseflesh" (p. 65). De Santis experiences the dichotomy of earthbound flesh and aspiring spirit (p. 203) which she resolves through her religion of perpetual being. "Mrs Hunter only hoped, she would be allowed to experience that state of pure, living bliss, she was now and then allowed to enter. How? She was not sure. It could depend on Sister Mary de Santis. She needed Mary to hold her hand" (p. 24). Elizabeth Hunter is a demigod for Lotte Lippmann, if not God. About her devotion to Elizabeth Hunter she tells Basil Hunter, "Elizabeth Hunter understands more of truth than others... And if, I cannot worship, I have to love somebody" (p. 146). There are, in fact, numerous instances which go to prove that The Eye of the Storm is as much a novel with religious undercurrents, as others.

The novel is woven round Elizabeth Hunter, well into her eighties, bed-ridden and dying in her opulent house overlooking
Sydney's Centennial Park. She is wealthy, once beautiful, and even at 70 sexually attractive to compete with and outdo her young daughter. She has always dominated everybody whoever came into her contact as she now rules over her nurses, the housekeeper and solicitor and once her lover. Her children—the frigid and sterile Dorothy, princess by marriage, and vain and vulgar Basil Hunter, a knighted actor—come ostensibly to see their dying mother but actually to stop her from squandering their would be inheritance. William Walsh compares them with incestuous (as they become) vultures visiting to tear at the dying eagle.35 The experience of returning home and entering the realm of their mother stir the old memories and the children revisit Khudjeri, the once family property. The mother, fortified in her visionary experience at Brumby Islands, remains undeterred by the designs of the children and dies in her own stride. The psychological drama in the gradual revelation of the submerged emotional conflict between brother and sister and between them both and the mother has been aptly commented:

_The Eye of the Storm brings to the fore whole family._
_The recurrent pattern of two children who are dominated by the mother while father is a loved but distant figure, betrayed by his wife's adulteries . . . _

In the end the, ungrateful children leave for Europe without attending the funeral of their mother.

In Elizabeth, White has given us a unique creation. She has been a formidable manipulator of the lives of others. Yet, for one of her nurses, Flora Manhood, she represents 'life', the physical aspect and for Mary de Santis, she is
'human' representing the spirit. The question asked after her death, by Dorothy "could anything of a transcendental nature have illuminated a mind so sensual, mendacious, materialistic and superficial as Elizabeth Hunter's" (p. 570), along with other inarticulate questions such as "why was it given to Elizabeth Hunter to experience the eye of the storm? ... or are regenerative states of mind granted to the very old to ease the passage from their earthly, sensual natures into final peace and forgiveness" (p. 71), have been answered implicitly in the text of the novel suggesting that such an experience is very much possible for people like Elizabeth Hunter and that Dorothy's doubts are not to be taken seriously.

In fact, Dorothy's doubts have been re-echoed by various critics. It has been argued that White makes arbitrary division between his spiritually elect and the ordinary. The 'Living' and the 'Dead' are not so because of their inner qualities but because Patrick White wants them to be so. This criticism becomes all the more louder with The Eye of the Storm and it is alleged that the experience does not arise from within Elizabeth Hunter's being, but is imposed on her by the author as a big scene might be given to a leading artist.

Paradoxically enough, The Eye of the Storm should have been the novel to refute the charge of arbitrariness more than any other novel. In this novel, White shows the gradual process of development of the mind of the protagonist to the ultimate experience. David Kelley has beautifully shown how
different characters are juxtaposed together to find out exactly why illumination or grace was granted to Elizabeth Hunter or Mary de Santis up to a limited extent and denied to others including Sir Basil Hunter and Dorothy.

Before analysing the novel to find out the stages which led Elizabeth Hunter to her transcendental understanding it is important to understand the importance and nature of visions with particular reference to Patrick White's fiction. White has repeatedly made use of visions to reconcile the outsider's doubts and inner conflicts. Theodora Goodman's encounter with Holstius is nothing short of a vision, as Holstius is only the projection of Theodora's own psyche. Stan Parker's vision just before his death bestows on him the deep understanding which enables him to find transcendence in immanence and infinite in finite. Laura's vision at the grave of Rose Portion made her understand that only through dissolution we can get transcendence. Hurtle Duffield's vision of INDIGO could solve his life long quest. Elizabeth's experience could humanise and harmonise the sensual and selfish woman into a sort of a deity who understands everything and is ready to die without a twitch. It would be seen that all these characters who have been bestowed with visionary faculty, are 'different' from others. "For only we who guard the mystery shall be unhappy," the Inquisitor told Christ. For the attainment of a 'vision,' religion in the sense of an established institution or even belief in God is not essential. None of the White's visionaries is 'religious'. Similarly, without religion and even belief in God, Kirilov achieves a saint's
vision. His perfect non-attachment made him a visionary. The moment of timelessness or of a vision or of inner light is a unique experience and Nietzsche calls it a moment of 'pure will free of the perplexities of intellect.'

It is such a visionary experience or transcendental illumination that Elizabeth Hunter experiences in a typhoon on Brumby Island. The most noticeable difference between this novel and its predecessors is that Elizabeth Hunter is granted the clearest perception of 'pure being.' This experience occurred fifteen years ago when she had been left alone on a tropical Island during a cyclone, alone because she had driven Dorothy away by competing successfully with her for a lover in Prof. Edvard Pehl. After the desertion of Dorothy and Edvard Pehl she comes to Warmings lodging (Warmings being out to see their sick son) and sleeps to be awakened by the 'hands' or 'thin fingers' of the wind (p. 405). She anoints herself, moulde her hair into a crown, slips the gold and turquoise chain, over her head. Then there occurs the crucial scene in which Elizabeth Hunter 'experiences the utmost in experience' and enters the eye of the storm. Mrs Hunter undergoes a transformation when the wind slams and the lightning tatters. The bunker door somersaults and fireballs juggle. At about three, she makes an effort to get up but is put back "by a huge thrust or settling of exhausted atoms" (p. 408). "She lies and submits to some one to whom she has never been introduced" (pp. 408-09). And she finally moves out:

... she was no longer a body, least of all a woman. The myth of her womanhood had been exploded by the
storm. She was instead a being, or more likely a flaw at the centre of this jewel of light, the jewel itself, blinding and tremulous at the same time existed, flaw and all, only by grace. (p. 409)

During the storm she is, in terms of White's earlier fiction, stripped of her inessential self, reduced to her core of being and she experiences in the calm that prevails at the centre of the cyclone a State of grace, pure living bliss. The disorder created by the storm reconciles cosmic catastrophe and the violence inexplicably suffered by the individual with a co-existential joy in being. This is a sort of a rebirth of consciousness only analogous to resurrection, as though the quester re-experiences existence with the hind sight. The description of the physical battering she receives is accompanied by her retrospective glimpse of her own past life. Present and past events whirl together in a confusion of which the storm within and around her stands as a metaphor; the physical and the non-physical thus become one during the storm. She had been stripped off her inessential outer shell and reduced to her core of being. She could not recognise that life is a state of grace that is 'given' not 'sought'. "All else was dissolves by this lustrous moment made visible in the eye of the storm ..." (p. 410). There is a striking similarity between this experience and that of Laura Trevelyan and of Rama Krishnam or Swami Vivekanand. This is the moment of identity for Elizabeth Hunter. Such a vision, according to Nietzsche makes up for all apparent terrors and miseries of life. The unbeliever walks for a quadrillion miles, yet one moment of reality makes up for it. It is like Steppenwolf's idea that
he might one day look back from his ultimate goal to which the difficult path seems to have taken him or even to realise like Meursault that he had been happy and was happy still. Its importance is described by Lord Krishna: "Even if you are the most sinful of sinners, this insight will carry you like a raft above all your sins." 

Elizabeth's life after the storm is devoted to regaining the clear sense of herself as being a conscious, functioning being, sharply distinct within a universal order. For A. R. Venkat, "God was the storm and it was testing her. God had prepared her for another kind of test and having experienced one test she could not be frightened by a new one."

It is against such an important visionary experience that critics, inspired by Dorothy Hunter, have expressed their doubts. They question the possibility of such an experience by a person of sensual, selfish, vain and possessive nature like Elizabeth Hunter. They also point out the elusive nature of the experience itself. Elusiveness of the experience is only natural because the experience of numinous nature or the one intensely felt by the character's perceptions resists all attempts at communication. The language is a frail vessel and it reaches a stage where it can only gesture at meaning. The vision splendid cannot be conveyed. That is why Mrs Hunter reflects that 'you can never convey in words the utmost in experience.' She tries to grapple with the memory of her profoundest experience, "What only is given to you to live, you alone can live and relive and relive, till it is gasped
The charge of Authorial arbitrariness is perhaps unjust. There is no doubt that Elizabeth is selfish, possessive and sensual. Throughout her life she has dominated the people. Even as a little Kate Nutley, she was fond of possessions, "dolls principally at that age, then jewels such as I had never seen only a few on the wives of a few wealthier neighbours; later and last of all, I longed to possess people who would obey me and love me, of course" (p. 156). She herself does not love anyone in her life, including her husband. The husband remains a distant figure. She tells Dorothy that she loved her husband although she did not touch his penis even once. Manipulation of others is the function of the ferocity: with which she lives and a kind of purity of disinterestedness with which she serves herself, the vessel of life. "Only mother was capable of slicing in half what amounted to a psyche, and expecting the rightful owner to share" (p. 404). Her sensuality is quite evident from her various infidelities including the one with Arnold Wybird and her competing with Dorothy for Prof. Edward Pehl.

But Patrick White endows her with those qualities which make her a potential vessel for grace. We are constantly kept aware of the fact that Mrs Hunter always hankered after something deeper in life. She is shown, symbolically, as a lock opener, first of material things, then spiritual. At the time of her husband's death, she wants to experience the miraculous escape from the body. So she wants to be alone with Alfred and sends away the Doctor. The arrival of Elizabeth Hunter and
Dorothy at Brumby Island is quite revealing:

Dorothy looked in vain for the car which must surely come to meet them. While Mother had decided to make the best of the hitch in the arrangements.

'Is there much wild life on the Island?' She asked the pilot in a clear rather jolly voice.

'Lousy with it.'

'Then I shall spend my time studying the wild life of Brumby Island.'

Dorothy winced for the tone. . . . 'Mother could start a flirtation at a street crossing waiting for the lights to change.' (p. 359)

Elizabeth's zest for life is shown on another occasion,

"I shalln't feel happy till I have tasted everything there is to taste and I don't intend to refuse what is unpleasant, that is experience of another kind" (p. 351). On the morning of the storm (Dorothy had already left the Island) Mrs Hunter indulges in keen introspection:

She was a woman who had encouraged her lover's lust; indeed she had made it inevitable.

Only natural that she [Dorothy] should bear grudge, whether imaginary or justified, especially against a mother whose love of life often outstripped discretion . . .

. . . she even went so far as to admit, 'in ways I am a hypocrite.'

For the first time she was disturbed by the mystery of her strength of her elect life . . . that which stretched ahead of her . . . (pp. 400-401)

Patrick White tells us that "to confess her faults (to herself) and to accept the blame when nobody was there to insist on it, produced in Elizabeth Hunter a rare sense of freedom" (p. 401). Later, during the day she comes across two lumbermen who had felled a tree. She tastes a chip from the tree as if it were
a 'transmuted wafer'. While talking, some of the hairy creature's sweat flung off his jowl on to the back of one of her hands. Before entering the bushes she licked the back of her hand sucking her own salt along with what she liked to think the axeman's sweat and went sweltering or weeping through the glare of sand and ocean (p. 404).

Elizabeth Hunter's visionary experience, read with this background, appears to be quite convincing, and there is no reason to feel that Patrick White himself chooses his spiritually elect. In fact, he gives opportunities to all the characters for spiritual development, but only a few accept the challenge. A similar incident happens when Dorothy is flying home. Her plane is caught up in the storm. Dorothy's co-passenger narrates another incident when their frigate passed through the eye of the storm. Dorothy narrates it to Elizabeth Hunter on her death bed. She asks "Is that all?" and Dorothy's answer is "Oh, yes . . . " Sir Basil and Dorothy make an effort to re-enter their childhood. But their effort is conscious one and lacks innocence, and the result is their incestuous love making in the bed of their parents.

Elizabeth Hunter has actually 'earned' the grace before it was 'given' to her. Out of her retainers, only Mary de Santis reaches near grace which she earns through her selfless service. That is why she has the last say in the novel. She has made 'her work her religion' and is ready to take up her job with another unpleasant invalid. So "she ducked, to escape from the prism of dew and light, this tumult of wings and her own
unmanageable joy . . ." (p. 589).

The identity attained by Mrs. Elizabeth Hunter gives her the calm and wisdom to face death with perfect equanimity. She achieves 'salvation' "the completeness of existence, not by denying but by affirming everything in her life, her failures as well as her successes, down to the last humiliation of her old age." White makes the spiritual experience of an immoral and selfish woman totally convincing. The spiritual experience is for her as Art was for Hurtle Duffield, the neurosis for Theodora Goodman or the desert for Voss, the entrance to a supreme reality.

*A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), though constructed on the lines of 'Historical Novel,' is concerned more with the inner meaning of the events than the outer ones. It is evidently involved in the "unprofessed . . . religious factor" in the modern man.

In fact, Ellen Roxburgh's alienation and final reconciliation in religious terms is the result of the racial problem between the native abos and the White rulers. The religious tensions between the two communities have been heightened further by the economic and other hardships which the native blacks have been pushed into. Brought up as a pagan, her mother a follower of religion of 'genteeel sort' and her father a young singer of the dissenting hymns, Ellen as a child, makes a pilgrimage to a pagan well that cures, and is cured, more or less of her disorder (may be sensuality). Impressed by the folklore about the pagan Gods, Ellen develops an irresistible attraction
towards Tintagel, a pagan God, who according to the legend, eloped with Iscult, the daughter of King Mark. As a young girl in Cornwall, she immerses in St. Hya's well and exercises her presentiment of evil, not that she is aware of any sin, but because she has an inner feeling. This part of her nature is later glimpsed by Miss Scrimshaw: "Ah, who am I to say? I only had the impression that Mrs Roxburgh could feel life had cheated her out of some ultimate in experience. For which she would be prepared to suffer, if need be."

Miss Scrimshaw's '... cheated her out of some ultimate in experience' sums up the qualities of Mrs Roxburgh's character. Ellen Gluyas, who had dreamt of a pagan God, gets invalidish Mr Austin Roxburgh as a husband, not only of her father's age but also belonging to a polished civilised Christian family, much opposed to the qualities of Ellen's nature. So, possessing a free pagan nature, daughter of an almost incestuous father, wife of an invalid husband, Ellen feels alienated through her emotional injuries, repressed sexuality and imposed Christianity. This alienation is further deepened by her seductive adultery with Garnet Roxburgh whose lust has already doomed many ladies.

The novel is concerned with the inner experience of the central character, an experience ripened and enriched through a cornish farm, an english Manor, a ship, a boat, an island, the conventions of the aboriginal tribe. "The composition is organised round the idea of a 'voyage' not a voyage out, but a Return voyage."
Haunted by the guilt of her sexual encounter with Garnet Roxburgh, Ellen and her husband board a ship quite unsuited for the passengers. They are ship-wrecked and in a moment of 'pure being' Austin Roxburgh is killed and Mrs Roxburgh is enslaved by an aboriginal tribe. It is during this period of slavery, where she is subjected to shameful physical torture and made to crawl on all fours like animals and to climb trees like squirrels, that the original nature of the pagan Ellen Gluyas gets liberated. She realises that Abos are as much religious in their own way as the Christians. The difference between the two being the difference not of basic things but of those rituals which varied because the blacks are harrassed and vanquished, 'bloody abos', and the Whites are the victorious rulers. "What she longed to sense in the behaviour of these human beings [Aboriginals in the camp] was evidence of a spiritual design, but that she could not, any more than she could believe in a merciful power shaping her own destiny" (p. 247). The Ellen story functions as a ritual of initiation involving first of all a separation from the family, friends and all that is familiar, then a time of testing in the wilderness which leads to a crucial revelation and is then followed by a ritual re-entry, ceremonies of clothing, eating and finally of reconciliation promised in her meeting with Mr Jevons and return to Sydney. This eminently justific Miss Scrimshaw's anticipation about Ellen's readiness to suffer for some ultimate in experience and expressed by young Gluyas when she immerses herself in the dark waters of St. Hya's well crying for some predicament which probably no one can explain — "no specific
sin, only presentiment of an evil she would have to face sooner or later" (p. 110).

Ellen Roxburgh's participation in the cannibalism of the aboriginals is a sort of a communion meal when, driven by hunger, she picks up a thigh bone of the dead girl which has fallen from one of their overflowing dillies. This human flesh nourished not only her animal body but also some darker need of the hungry spirit (p. 274).

In this way, Ellen Roxburgh experiences religion. Back home, she has attained a realisation: "No one is to blame and everybody for whatever happens" (p. 363). Back to civilisation, the peace of mind settles on her with the realisation, like that which came to Virgil's Mleboeus (that the beneficent Caesar and the destructive Caesar are the same person) that the Roxburgh's 'Lord God of Hosts' and Pilcher's 'God is Love' are the same thing.

Arthur Brown's question in The Solid Mandala, "Who and where are the Gods" (p. 217) is the central question in all White's fiction. It finds expression in variegated ways and is further strengthened in the imagery and the language used by White. There is reference to the central Christian myth of crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, Jewish and Oriental mysticism, Jungian Mandalic symbolism, the muffled conflict between the paganism and modern christianity, the nihilism in Nietzsche's cry that 'God is dead', the Hindu philosophy of Advaitvod-non-dualism and the concept of immanence in transcendence and vice-versa. In fact, religion is deeply
implanted in his man's yearning for the infinite and his capacity for visionary experience. Since White's protagonists are questers, the quest takes religious hue in one or the other way. Deeply religious in his own way, White deals with the theme in its all possible ramifications, which explains his assertion that 'religion is behind all my novels.'

Religion, for White, is not something narrow or dogmatic. It is not a set of doctrines, rituals or ceremonies. "I belong to no Church," says White, "but I have religious faith." It is something broad-based, a sort of moral order and many of his protagonists make efforts to adjust themselves to this order. Religion, in this sense, can neither be defined nor expressed. Mrs Chalmers Robinson tells Ruth: "God is incorporeal . . . divine, supreme, infinite, mind, spirit, soul, principle, life, truth, love" (Riders, p. 260). When she asks Ruth about her belief, the girl echoes the author's assertion, "... a person cannot tell what she believes" (p. 260). The institutionalized religion obviously, has been mocked at. The communion service in The Tree of Man brings no grace either for Stan or for Amy. Hurtle Duffield discovers the hermit missing from his cottage and monastery is nothing but the breeding place of corruption.

Rev. Timothy and Mrs Fisk are the custodians of the purity of their flock which in turn is represented by Mrs Jolly and Mrs Flack. Even Himmelfarb, a very rigid Jew, is subjected to unrelieved persecution. Jewish and Kabbalistic rituals and ceremonies offer him no salvation and, paradoxically enough, he is crucified and gets a Christian burial. Laura succeeds in saving Vors from damnation through religion but her God is not
the institutionalized deity. Whatever possible salvation comes for Voss comes through the witchetty grub which he accepts from an old abo. The experience of Elizabeth Hunter, entering the eye of the storm and getting the pure bliss, is the result of her sincere penitence and her partaking of the communion wafer in the shape of a chip of wood and the sweat of some wood cutter. Ellen Gluyas seeks purgation in her immersion in the black waters of St. Hya's well and her dark spirit gets nourishment from cannibalism.

In fact, there is a subtle and suggestive mocking tone throughout his fiction, that disapproves of the dogmatic religiosity. This explains the apparent disjunction between the deliberate archetypal pattern and the structural design in his fiction, where the imagery is indubitably religious, the progression of the theme pulls in another direction. No light comes to Himmelfarb even when he is on the 'cross'. On the eve of the Christmas celebrations Voss's expedition suffers the first jolt at the hands of the blacks. On the other hand, Arthur Brown, during the performance of his mystic 'dance of the Mandala', becomes Christ image. "... the blood running out of the backs of his hands water out of the hole in his ribs. His mouth was a silent hole ..." (p. 266).

Paradoxical as it may sound, White is still deeply involved in the religious odyssey of his characters. Because of their heightened consciousness, his fictional protagonists get a glimpse of higher life. They want to attempt the infinite and thereby appear to be striving for Godhead, which becomes a
symbol of their quest for identity. White makes it amply clear that while quest for identity can be fulfilled, the effort for Godhead is bound to be frustrated. Himmelfarb, who decided to play the Messiah, could do nothing for the common Jews. Vors, who wanted to occupy the throne, prays for grace. However, this does not deny them the state of self-realization, fulfilment or self-enlightenment. It comes through suffering, purity and simplicity, not through dogmatic, purblind adherence to any particular religion. Even Mrs Godbold gets solace, in the acts of love and charity, not in the chanting of religious hymns. The protagonists come to a sort of realization through their intense personal efforts, inner impulses and suffering. Man is Christ with a spear in his side. Through the deaths of Palfreyman and Austin Roxburgh (both die with a spear in their sides) White makes it clear that crucifixion is a necessary prelude to the realization but it is not the inevitable result of crucifixion.
Notes and References


5 Ibid., p. 102.

6 Ibid., p. 73. "At the appropriate age I was confirmed, my chief reasons being that it was something the others were submitting too, and because it promised a break in the monotony. . . . We ascended in couples for the laying of the hands. Nervousness forced me to kneel on a step lower than the one my companion chose, which made it difficult for the elderly Bishop. He had to reach forward one arm long, the other short; it gave him a deformed look. Perhaps for that reason I remained unaware of the grace my skull was expecting from his finger tips."

7 McGregor, op. cit., p. 38.

8 White has appended epigrams to his Novels—The *Vivisector*, *Riders in the Chariot*, from William Blake.


11 Arthur Brown expresses his disbelief in Christianity in his explanation of the meaning of the Grand Inquisitor scene in *The Brothers Kramazov* and Mrs Poulter's secular acts of charity rather than the singing of hymns bring sainthood for her.

13 "As I see it, painting and religious experience are the same thing, and what we are all searching for is the understanding and realization of infinity." Ben Nicholson

Epigraph to The Vivisector

14 William Walsh, op. cit., p. 124.


21 Wilkes and Herring, op. cit., p. 218.

22 McGreggor, op. cit., p. 218.


25 Wilkes and Herring, op. cit., p. 139.


31 D. R. Burns, op. cit., p. 175.


36 A. P. Riemer, op. cit., p. 119.


41 Prodigal Son, op. cit., p. 39.


43 Ibid., p. 37.
When RamiKrishan was only seven, he had an important experience which I give in his own words: "One day in June or July, I was walking along a narrow path separating paddy fields, eating some puffed rice looking up at sky, I saw a beautiful sombre thunder cloud. As it spread rapidly over the whole sky a flight of the snow white cranes flew over head in front of it. It presented such a beautiful contrast that my mind wandered to far off regions. Lost to outward senses, I fell down and the puffed rice was scattered in all directions. Some people found me and carried me home ... ."


James MacAuley, op. cit., p. 41.

Brain Kiernan, op. cit., p. 65.


R. F. Brisenden, op. cit., p. 41.


Brian Kiernan, op. cit., p. 49.


Leonie Kramer, op. cit., p. 11.

At Humidong Sid cupple narrates the story about the possums. '... homestead reo [Sidd Cupple's] house had been full of possums, 'pissing' through the ceiling on to yer plate. Till we tied a bell round the neck of this - er animal, see? Soon as 'e run after 'is mates, the mob of possums began ter disappear. It was the bleeged bell-see... 'Sid laughed and laughed at his memory of the belled possum; but Hurtle was struck cold: by a vision of himself, the last possum on earth. Patrick White, The Vivisector, p. 111.


77 Ibid., p. 216.


80 Ibid., p. 104.

81 Geoffrey Dutton, op. cit., p. 41.


84 Leonie Kramer, "Patrick White: The Unplayed 'I'" Quadrant (Jan - Feb., 1974), pp. 65-68.

85 William Walsh, op. cit., p. 112.


I was suffering from excruciating pain because I had not been blessed with a vision of the mother. I could not bear the separation any longer. Life did not seem worth living. Then my eyes fell on the sword, that was kept in the mother's temple. Determined to put an end to my life, I jumped up and seized the sword, when suddenly the blessed mother revealed herself to me. The buildings vanished, leaving no trace, instead there was a limitless, infinite, shining ocean of consciousness or spirit. As far as the eye could see, its billows were rushing towards me from all sides to swallow me up. I was panting for breath.

(Cf.) Life of Rama Krishana, op. cit., p. 71.

In the devil chapter, there is a story of the free thinker, who believed there was no life after death. When he died he was indignant to find he was wrong. As a punishment for his unbelief he was sentenced to walk a quadrillion miles. He lay down and refused to move and a thousand years went by before he grew tired of lying down and set out to walk the quadrillion miles. When he had finished, he was admitted into heaven at last. He cried immediately that two seconds in heaven were worth walking for a million times as long. (Cf. Dostoevsky's Brother's Kramazovs).


The Bhagwad Gita, Chapter IV. 36 Shaloka (Translation in English), op. cit., p. 43.


A. R. Venkat, "A Study of The Eye of the Storm," The Literary Endeavour, op. cit., p. 120.


Peter Beatson, op. cit., p. 167.

Patrick White, A Fringe of Leaves (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 17. Subsequent references are to this edition and have been noted parenthetically in the text.
100 William Walsh, op. cit., p. 118.


102 This realization is comparable to that of Virgil's Maecenas that the beneficial Caesar and the destructive caesar are the same person.