Chapter IV

"The Great Australian Emptiness Invades the Individual's Spiritual Territory:" Environment and the Individual

Till well into my life, places, landscape meant more to me than people... It was landscape which made me long to return to Australia...

I often flung stones at human beings I felt were invading my spiritual territory. Once I sat fire to a Gunyah to show that it couldn't be shared with strangers. Years later I persuaded myself that I hadn't been acting merely as a selfish lad, but that an avatar of those from whom the land had been taken had invested one of the unwanted Whites.1

Patrick White

Patrick White's sense of himself is bound up with the sense of place as what might be seen as the savagery of nature. But it is also bound up with an awareness of the aborigines, of continuity between those feelings and the aborigines. White's fiction is shaped and influenced by environment, 'the emptiness of Australia' and he strives to find excellence in this emptiness. "Life in Australia seems for many people to be pretty deadly dull. I have tried to convey a splendour, a transcendence... above human realities."2

The term 'environment' has sometimes been misunderstood and misused which is supposed to include only natural and geographic conditions. The theory of environmental determinism states that the physical milieu of a people including natural resources, climate and geographic accessibility is the determining factor, in the formation of the culture. The environmentalist theory thereby rejects history and tradition, social and economic factors and any other aspect of culture as explanation of social development. The doctrine of environmental possibilism suggests
that the habitat acts only to create possibilities from which man may choose. In its extreme form, possibilism rejects even environmental influence on the form that choice takes. The theory fails to recognize that possibilities are distributed unequally over the world. While casual relations are no longer thought to be as clear-cut as believed by some early environmental determinists, cultural phenomena cannot often be fully understood without consideration of environmental factors. There is a welcome shift in the conception of the modern environmentalists who apply the theory in its broadest sense. Contemporary environmentalists recognize that physical surroundings are only part of a "total environment that includes social and economic factors, cultural traditions, and reciprocal influences between societies and their environment." It is not possible to determine the extent to which such environmental determinism affects the individuals or, for that reason, societies, but the effects are quite obvious.

Australia is a unique country with its typical geographical and racial problems. The continent has been inhabited on the seashore and, as such, the civilized Australia encircles the vast continent like a girdle. The mainland, the central part of it, covered with thick forests, lakes and deserts, has always exerted an irresistible charm and influence on the unconscious mind of Australian society. Australia, primarily, served as a vast prison where the convicts were marooned. Gradually, there grew up a settlement and the rulers also came to keep the flag of the British Empire fluttering. The native aboriginal tribes, with their primitive hunting weapons and pagan rituals, were
scared away by the Whites and retreated into the remotest innermost part of the continent. This triangular situation among the native abos, the marooned convicts and the White rulers not only gave a unique colour to the traditions and life of the common people but also influenced the Australian psyche.

The Australian intelligentsia did not try to rationalize the three-dimensional conflict and the literature written on the pioneering efforts glorified the inevitable victories of the White rulers. On the one hand, we notice an effort to overvalue the pioneering phase and its expressions because of their simple sense of human solidarity, the solidarity of the common folk against the obvious large-scale exploiters, whether state or the squatters, the banks or the British investors. Naturally, the need for a critical attitude to the culture of mateship arrived as a national necessity which finds expression in the works of writers like Barbara Baynton. On the other hand, we find the wholesale rejection of the pioneering phase and its expression as a mere vulgarism. While the rest of the world has continued to grow, the mass of Australians still remains hopelessly tethered to the superficial and sentimental coarseness of the past, which is now seen as philistinely false. Even in 1962, Ray Mathew described the Australian Scene: "This convention in politics, sex, and religions has not changed because Australia has not changed. Nothing has happened to force Australians to reconsider themselves and their values." This situation was understood and described by Chris Brennan, Norman Lindsay, Hugh McCrae and others in the forties. Brennan
expresses his anger at the situation.

Another day is dead and they lived it not;
Such price they pay daily, to fend the hunger dread,
That death may find them in safe bed.

"The Burden of Tyre"

The realization might have caused a slight shift in the attitude of writers like Slessor, Fitzgerald and K. S. Prichard, but the real burden of freeing Australian Literature from the jargon of pioneering fell upon Patrick White.

Patrick White shifts his focus from outside to the inner mind and as such projects the tensions of the Australian situation through the Psychic display of his characters. He assesses the situation in the right perspective and tries to resolve the conflict between man and nature and society. If *Happy Valley*, *The Tree of Man* and *The Eye of the Storm* deal with one aspect of the problem, the relationship between man and nature; *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot* and *A Fringe of Leaves* take up the triangular situation: the relationship among the White masters, condemned criminals and the 'bloody abos'.

Patrick White intuitively perceives that man cannot strike identity without adopting himself to the natural rhythm of nature. The characters in *Happy Valley* remain estranged and unhappy as they consider the valley as a source of gold or conscious happiness as exploiters. They fail to establish any meaningful relationship between man and nature. Through Stan Parker, Mary Hare, Elizabeth Hunter, Ellen Gluyas, White expresses his conviction that man "should have a religious connection with the universe."
the modern consciousness 'the neglected springs of life, the sources of a full and kindled consciousness in separation from which the soul is crippled and incomplete.'

Throughout his literary career, White has created characters, scenes and situations "to communicate a sense of harmony reconciling the divisions between man and nature." The Australian outback provided White with a rich variety of possible situations. Although George Steiner complains of "the play of European densities against the gross vacancy of the Australian setting," yet the fact remains that the Australian wilderness along with its aboriginals plays a most potent role in White's fiction. "Just as God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and placed the pillar of fire before the children of Israel in the wilderness so in Australia in the Twentieth century he may choose to speak to the individual out of nature." It is for this reason that 'great Australian emptiness' has played so significant a role and various characters have struck identity through objects of nature. "In Ellen's youth rocks had been her altars and spring water her sacrament." Elizabeth Hunter gets a deep insight after passing through the eye of the storm. A special empathy exists between these characters and the world of animals. Thoodora Goodman and Arthur Brown find satisfaction from their dogs which is denied to them by the people. Mary Hare rears a nestling in her blouse and feeds a snake in the garden. Himmelfarb sees God in a table and for Stan a gob of spittle functions as a mandala (alive with spiritual illumination as glass marble is for Arthur Brown). It has been noted
that in White's World "... trees and flowers emerge as mandalic symbols - the sun figures as an image of the deity, fires function as purgatorial flames, water dramatises processes of spiritual regeneration, storms are events where the divine might is tangibly manifested ...".

The problem of the Aborigines receives White's attention. He explores the possibilities of racial relationships in Voss, Riders in the Chariot, A Fringe of Leaves. In Voss, the aborigines function as the emissaries of the land itself, celebrants of sacrifice Voss must pay to its mysterious powers. The Abor join their might with the desert which resists the assault of the explorers. In Riders in the Chariot, Alf Dubbo is one of the four visionaries and through him Patrick White shows that there is virtually no difference between the people, including aborigines. Dubbo's element is fire, the element of triumphant creativity and his life is an indictment of the 'great Australian Emptiness' which surrounds him. A Fringe of Leaves is there to show what aborigines actually mean to Patrick White. The novel shows, "on the one hand, the importance of white culture, and on the other, the liberating effect of contact with the savage domain they represent and inhabit." White's novels support the thesis that Australian culture will be incomplete until it comes to terms with the full range of human possibilities, above all, with the claims of nature honoured by the Aboriginal culture and intensified by the rejection of the white society.

Happy Valley is concerned with man's separation from his
environment, including his fellowmen, because of his ego which gives him importance out of all proportions. The novel projects the main theme of all his future novels—man's endless search of happiness and feeling of peace which, in the later novels, comes to him through self-knowledge and extinction of the ego. Man's erection of barriers prevent communication between even the members of the same family and cause his alienation from nature and environment. In fact, the novel shows the results of what happens when an individual is isolated from those around him, society as well as other objects of nature. In the geographic alienation of the town itself, from the main stream of Australian life, and Oliver Halliday's alienation, from his family, White focuses the failure of man's meaningful relationship with his environment.

The title of the novel, Happy Valley, has ironic overtones. It is, in fact, 'the gloomy and scattering study of a small Australian community.' Happy Valley extends more or less from Moorang to Kambala, where there was originally gold, and it received its name from the men who came in search of gold. The people who came to exploit the mineral wealth of this place called it Happy Valley, "sometimes with affection more often in irony." 'Happy' is the first indication of White's contempt for the jaunty, sentimental optimism which is reputedly the Australian way of looking at the things. 'Happy' is not the least appropriate word to describe the mental condition of the people of this town which, later, came to be called Happy Valley. The characters, including Dr. Halliday, father of two
children, are alienated completely. "They are struck in loneliness as their town is struck in snow through the long winter." A sense of frustration and failure of dreams afflicts all the characters doomed to lead unhappy lives. Unfulfilment is the leading theme of the book. Not even a single character, including Margaret Quong, achieves the redemptive vision or realization. The novel begins with an epigraph from Gandhi: "It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering, which is the one indispensable condition of our being... The purer the suffering, the greater is the progress." It ends with hints of philosophic resignation, not with the possibilities of resolution. Geoffrey Dutton finds the structure of the book "taut enough, from the irony of the title to the picture of the Australian mountain town, enclosed by nature, burst open by human beings, to the deaths and destroyed loves which are too honestly unelevating to be called tragedy."

So, ironically enough, the sombre and grim atmosphere of Happy Valley offers no cheer to its characters. On his return from Europe, Dr Halliday, muses over the place:

There was an underlying bitterness that had been seared deep and deep by time, with a furrow here and there and pock marks in the face of black stone. Over everything there was a hot air of dormant passion, of inner war, that no body seemed to be conscious of. In Sydney you went to parties, in Happy Valley you fornicated or drank. They lead an almost stagnant life. The tight circle is broken when Dr Halliday comes there with his tubercular wife and two children and the book comes to an end with the abortive
elope of Halliday and his mistress, the music teacher, Alys Browne. The discovery of Moriarity's dead body forces Dr Halliday and Alys Browne to return; she to her music lessons in the school and he to his family. The novel which begins with a still birth ends with the double death of the Moriartys. But for these characters and with the exception of Margaret Quong and old Furlow, all other characters are solitaries who fail to belong to the place. The problem faced by the reader is not the problem of individual failure but of the failure of the settlers to strike roots into the soil of the country. 20

The main problem of Happy Valley—and its people is isolation. The place is isolated and cut off from the rest of the world as people are from each other. It is a world literally analogous to Eliot's 'Wasteland' because the residents refuse to give themselves up in making an effort to form a meaningful relationship. The root cause of the isolation in Happy Valley is that the people who live here are settlers, if not exploiters. They came to this place in search of gold. They do not find any relationship with the place as such. Since gold has been exhausted, Happy Valley cannot satisfy them. The result is frustration and alienation or rather repulsion in certain cases. Not only are they alienated from Happy Valley but also from other settlers or even their families. They have no meaningful connection, whatsoever, with the very environment of the place. The main character of the novel, Oliver Halliday, in his misery of being married to a tubercular wife Hilda, feels that "Happy Valley is unreal, removing itself into a world of allegory of which the dominating motif is pain"
Vic Morarity, for instance, is faced with the contrast between the distinguished figure she married in Ernest and the pathetic man about to have an asthma attack: "Her whole life was a series of attacks . . . she had not bargained for this . . . she punched at the cushion and frowned" (p. 108). Attitudes of Oliver and Vic are not sympathetic to their partners who offer them no joy because of physical handicaps beyond their control. It is exactly on the lines of their relationship with the place. Since the place does not offer them gold, (which they expected) they have no contact with it. Oliver fails in establishing a meaningful relationship even with his children. In an effort to know Rodney better, Oliver takes him out on a shooting trip. They fail to communicate with each other, as Stan Parker fails to establish a relationship with Ray in The Tree of Man. Patrick White makes it clear that the meaningful relationship requires cultivation over a long period of time and cannot be struck through conscious efforts. They are without sympathy and compassion in recognising the frailties of each other and avoid all forms of self-control. As they are there because of their greed, so is their attitude towards love, friendship and sex. Instead of facing the problems in religious or existential way, which could have sublimated their frustrations or disappointments, Oliver and Vic try to escape the bitter realities of life. With the human condition pictured as one of isolation and suffering, subject to vulnerability and fear of death, Happy Valley shows people's "attempts to find values that can make the condition endurable."
they seek it in friendship or in love, but find that friendship is inconstant and that love fades." Friendship in Happy Valley is nothing but casual acquaintance.

The most enduring friendship of the novel is between Margaret Quong and Rodney Halliday. In school, the nine year old Rodney is subjected to brutal attacks by his classmates during the break and after the school. Margaret Quong is ridiculed by the girls because of her being half Chinese, half Australian. Both of them withdraw into themselves. This feeling of fellow-sufferer becomes the basis of their friendship. The only fleeting moment of recognition comes in the meeting between Margaret Quong and Rodney Halliday. "After a school yard fight, Rodney looks across the classroom at Margaret. He senses that here is someone with whom a meaningful relationship can be formed (p. 60). They meet at noon and to comfort and console Margaret, Rodney gives her the prized possession, 'a sea shell'. The friendship between the two is just an escape r relief from the otherwise unhappy life, and as such, cannot become substantial in Patrick White's world. This relationship is one of the pure efforts at oneness with others or the environment, and is doomed from the very beginning. Later, on the eve of his departure to Sydney, Rodney goes to see Margaret and finds her "with folded . . . arms . . . against the door like the women you saw along the street leaning against their doors and talking in green gloom that the dahlias made" (p. 304). Margaret talks about the shell and the two form a meaningful relationship for a brief moment. This relationship,
the purest of all others in the book, does not promise any redemptive vision because of its flawed basis, an escape from the world of suffering.

Oliver's relationship with Alys has striking similarity between the relationship of the Happy Valley and its inhabitants. Frustrated by the tubercular wife and attracted by Alys' interest in music, Oliver finds an opportunity to escape into another world. The relationship starts when Alys comes to the Doctor with a cut in her hand. Oliver, tired by the all night ordeal of delivering a baby and interrupted during his lunch "... bound her hand ... manipulated her hand as if it were a parcel of bones and tissues, detached from the body" (p. 76). Later, he regrets his own behaviour and goes to Alys to apologise for his rudeness. Through music, a relationship emerges which provides Oliver an escape from his oppressive isolation. "I am not in love with Alys Browne. It is only a matter of gratitude for this fresh chord struck" (p. 124). Oliver's turning to Alys "for intellectual comfort when seen in the perspective of other novels suggests the sin of intellectual pride."22 Both find no satisfaction in sex. When Oliver wakes after his first sexual experience with Alys, he leaves ruminating "well, it's time." Alys does not see him to the door. In their conscious pursuit of happiness the lovers plan to elope to America but fate intervenes in the shape of dead body of Moriarty and they come back. The relationship ends in frustration as it started as an escape from suffering which is the ultimate reality in Happy Valley. Patrick White shows that redemptive vision is possible not by negating suffering, but by accepting it, experiencing
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it and sublimating it. The sense of general failure in *Happy Valley* results from the failure of its characters in establishing a rapport with the environment. The novel remains bleak and ends with a philosophic resignation, which is not a solution, but just a resolution tenuous and tentative:

This is the part of man, to withstand through his relationships the ebb and flow of seasons, the sudden hostility of the rock, the anaesthesia of snow, all those passions that sweep down through rough negligence or design to consume or desolate, for through Hilda and Alyx he can withstand, he is immune from all but the ultimate destruction of the inessential outer shell. (p. 327)

The *Tree of Man* portrays the active interaction of the relationship between man and his environment. Stan Parker, the Adam of Genesis, faced with the power of the bush, turns upon it with a marvellously creative blend of feeling, part sympathy, part domination. Stan's assault on nature is not that of the exploiters, like the characters of *Happy Valley*, but of a person, who turns to the virgin and chaste land, prompted by the urge of compulsion. His purpose is to establish an intimate rapport with the bush, and to be a part of 'the great Australian emptiness.' The land by the intervention of Stan Parker, the hewing and delving Adam, becomes a place, the place supports the family and the family encourages a community. Although Geoffrey Bardon feels that the novel primarily deals with human relationships, yet it begins with an assertion, reminiscent of Genesis, of the power of the land and concludes with an affirmation of the continuity of earth's life.

Patrick White, we are told, was left, after demobilization, with the alternatives of remaining in "what I then felt to be an
actual and spiritual graveyard, with the prospect of easing to be an artist and turning instead into that most sterile of beings, a London intellectual or of returning home, to the stimulus of the time remembered. Keeping in view his avowed intention to "discover extraordinary behind the ordinary," White puts Stan Parker as a midway pioneer between an ordinary farmer and an aggressive explorer. The beginning of the novel is quite significant. Stan Parker starts his assault rather reluctantly:

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

Through the sound of the axe and his further activities, Stan Parker establishes the power of his will, yet he is unhappy as he knows that his effort is out of accord with the rhythms of natural life about him, "... the young man, after sighing a good deal, and turning in his bags, in which the crumbs of chaff still tickled and a flea or two kept him company, flung himself into the morning" (p. 13). Thus the duality of Stan's nature is suggested in the beginning itself. The man who uses the axe sympathiser with the trees which he must fell. There are two sides to Stan's visionary sense, his closeness to nature and his closeness to God. His closeness to nature is a derivative theme harking back to D. H. Lawrence. His problem arises out of his desire to strike a balanced relationship with nature. Another dilemma he faces is the 'nostalgia of permanence
and the fiend of motion':

Then more than at any time, the nostalgia of permanence and the fiend of motion fought inside the boy, right there at the moment when his life was ending and beginning. (p. 14)

Kirpal Singh observes that in The Tree of Man, White has "defined for us the two essential forces in man that ultimately characterise his attempts at selfhood: these forces, White has termed 'the nostalgia of permanence' and 'the fiend of motion'. "29 Stan Parker wants to discover something to identify with permanence, something which does not wither away with time and which can release him from the forces that bind him to the treadmill of routine.

Amy Parker has been described as a foil to Stan Parker. Her nature is opposed to Stan's deep involvement with the life of nature. What Stan wants to experience and idealize Amy wants to possess. Amy and Stan appear to be the two aspects of the same personality. This disjunction is the main cause of the deep-rooted tension in the novel which cannot be eased till Stan's death. Both of them are isolated from the early stages of life. It is their common aloneness that attracts them to each other. Both have difficulty in dealing with people socially, "all these people ... breathing in one room" (p. 19). Stan, we are told later, never had a friend. Amy, on the other hand, had never been loved nor felt affection for any human being (p. 21). Beyond this common loneliness, Stan and Amy are quite different. Stan is totally committed to the land and its rhythms. He accepts and rejoices in its harshness and
distances, whereas Amy hates the wind and the distance and the road and is jealous of their omnipotence. The wife is frayed by her consciousness of what she cannot possess, whether in the form of nature or in the sensibility of her husband. Stan is one for whom the flow of existence is sufficient. His bodily action suggests the welcome he gives to whatever comes his way. "All was good almost that could come to this pass. . . . The strength of his hands shaped the metal. It would have been possible at such times to shape almost anything into a right shape (pp. 110-11). Amy is excluded from closeness to nature and closeness to religion. White portrays her, by the close of the book, as "a superficial and sensual woman when the last confessions are made" (p. 425). Thus, the powers of good and evil are intermingled within the same family. In the face of the natural process, Stan remains open to religious experience. By contrast, Amy tries "to halt the flux in which she is immersed by possessing it. She must possess her husband, her son, the child rescued by the floods, the poetry of Madeleine's life, Con the Greek, the commercial traveller Leo."3

Stan, whose soul has refused to stay in the box in which his mother tried to put it, receives intimations of the immortal world from the reading of Shakespeare and the talk of gold and ebony from a stranger's lips. The psychic promptings of his childhood do not leave him alone and in his constant questioning and doubting of the life he leads, Stan longs for selfhood which may bring peace and contentment. "Each time he feels an instinctual oneness with the environment around him, we know
he is moving towards the final triumph of his longing."\textsuperscript{31} In defiance of the tradition of bush literature, Stan does not find fulfilment through the possession of land and human relationships. He is always searching for something beyond the immediacies of experience. Occasionally, he peeps into the reality of the things: "Only sometimes the touch of the hands, the lifting of a silence, the sudden shape of a tree or presence of a first star, hinted at eventual release . . ." (p. 46). Stan typically achieves his moment of lucidity in the presence of elemental forces in nature. He pits his might against the might of elemental forces like the great floods in the spring of their life and the fire which threatened Durilgai.

Stan Parker, though made small by the force of fire, is "not humble and is not ready for the vision'. His mental adultery with Madeleine shows clearly that his identification with nature is not yet complete. Comparison of this scene with the one under mulberry tree is quite rewarding. Here Stan is able to resist the overt sexual moves of Amy Parker. (p. 149).

Washed by the floods, exalted by the fire and buffeted by the hard realities of life, Stan moves towards the realization where he can have maturity and understanding in respect of real truth and shedding off the qualities he previously took pride in. One of the earliest illuminations comes to him in the storm passage in part two of the book. Stan is at first exultant in the rain, and then feels his selfhood being attenuated.\textsuperscript{32}

The storm humbles Stan and makes him realize the futility of physical strength, social position and status. He acknowledges
his weakness and the might of the storm. The storm does for Stan Parker what the flood at Glotonbury and the fire in his own township could not do. Stan, who was brought up in a reverence for religion, but never prayed to God, now seeks His help and prays to God for company and in praying he achieves a kind of semi-mystical experience. But this vision does not give Stan complete realization as he is powerless to interpret or explore his experience. He himself does not understand it. For him, to possess this state more continuously would be to draw nearer to the condition of Bub Quickley with his wet mouth and a rapt smile.

The storm does not offer a final realization, but it does give him a glimpse of the final identity which Stan now longs for. But as he ages, the sense of fulfilment and identity with the natural world that he had felt as a young man in the storm, becomes more difficult to sustain. The departure of the children, the infidelity of Amy, his own physical deterioration lead him to a "sense of staledness and futility and impending death"33 "at a time when his life is at a low ebb."34 This helps Stan attain complete oneness with his environment. The realization comes through a vision of various concentric 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) of which Stan is the centre.

In the ordinary and familiar setting, Stan Parker experiences a mandalic vision. He feels that he is at the centre. Indeed, he becomes the centre of a series of circles.
which had formed mysteriously from his random and apparently symmetrical environment. It is after this vision that Stan gets the final illumination, and the central conflict—the nostalgia for permanence—is solved through the intimate realization of the working of environment:

So that in the end there were the trees. The boy walking through them with his head dropping as he increased in stature. Putting out shoots of green thought, so that, in the end, there was no end. (p. 480)

Circular in its structure, the novel ends where it started. The only change which takes place is in the attitude of Stan Parker. Paul M. St. Pierre, remarks that the conclusion of the novel seems more than a word play... because the tunnel is circular, its end is a vanishing line that advances with the advance of the quester’s own eye.

The strength of The Tree of Man comes not from Stan’s enlightenment as from his blundering towards it, his bewilderment and uncertainty, his painful effort to interpret such knowledge as is imparted to him. Stan does rise above the involved scrub, with the simplicity of true grandeur. It becomes clear towards the end that he is purged in spirit as a result of a lifetime devotion to his environment. The ultimate inference is that the natural and the human and the divine are intrinsically and harmoniously blended.

Voss offers yet another variation on the theme. Johann Ulrich Voss’s attitude is neither selfish nor greedy (like the inhabitants of Happy Valley) nor a blend of feelings part sympathy, part domination (like that of Stan Parker). He wants to deify
himself by registering his supremacy over the Australian Desert. "I will cross the country from one end to the other. I have every intention to know it by my heart." Patrick White has caught the mood of man during the Second World War: "It [Voss] was conceived during the London blitz, was influenced by the arch-megalomaniac of the day . . . and was developed during months spent trapesing backward and forward across the Egyptian and Cyrenaican Deserts." In Australian Literature, the Bush has figured as a contrast with the city. It stands for the wild against the sown, the hard school of manhood against the soft life, primitive virtue against artificial corruption, all the streams issuing from the Eighteenth century Romanticism. The Bush is the country of the mind in which man stands unprotected before the fundamental issues.

Voss tells Le Mesurier: "Why I am pursued by this necessity of crossing the desert, it is no more possible for me to tell than it is for you . . . " (p. 33). But right from the beginning, it is clear that Voss wants to prove the power of his will over the Australian landscape. The warning, "Deserts prefer to resist history and develop along their own lines" (p. 67) further provokes Voss's will and pride. In Sydney, Voss is almost universally called 'unique' or queer fellow not because of his physical appearance but for his general outlook towards life. Laura notes some striking affinities between the desert and Voss:

'You are so vast and ugly . . . I can imagine some desert, with rocks, rocks of prejudice and yes even hatred. You are so isolated. That is why you are fascinated by the prospect of desert places in which you will find your
Because of his innate pride, Voss wants to exalt himself to Godhead by conquering the desert which alone is inimical and hostile to him.

William Walsh notes that Australia is almost "another character in the novel. It is not a dead desert, it is alive and is an influential force." The will to know and subdue this continent prompts Voss to undertake his arduous odyssey. The knowledge of the continent does not mean a mere acquaintance with it; rather, it means full experience along with the one with the blacks who form the most potent part of Australian environment. Out of all the characters it is Jackie alone who possesses the knowledge of the 'Great Australian Emptiness'. He becomes a legend amongst the tribes of the great country through which he travels constantly, with the "shifting and the troubled mind" (p. 421). Deeply troubled by Voss's determination, Laura realizes that "knowledge is never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind" (p. 446).

Voss, in his obdurate pride, does not understand and is not ready to accept all this. As a result, he is alienated from the very beginning. But for Laura, who peeps into the mind of Voss and realizes the true motif of the journey, none has any rapport with Voss. Even his companions do not stand on equal footing with him. They simply dislike him for the force of his will. What Voss does not realize is that the conquest over the
environment is not possible. The only way to strike identity or attain oneness with environment is to establish a meaningful rapport with it through understanding and humility. William Walsh beautifully sums up the theme of Voss:

In Patrick White's eyes the supreme gift of man, existing in a context of surliness, ugliness and cruelty, is precisely the clarified consciousness that Voss attains only in the moment of dissolution. Whatever Voss discovers in the end is known already. Rather than changing himself, Voss changes his notion about himself in that he makes a true assessment about his position in the context of his environment, rather too late when physical destruction becomes imminent.

Voss is provided with many chances at redemption. At Sydney Laura Trevelyan tries to save him from damnation and destruction. He is sure of his strength: "None, he realised, with a tremor of anger, 'is conscious of his strength. Mediocre animal-men never apprehend the power of rock or fire, until the last moment, before those elements reduce them to nothing" (p. 61). The irony is implicit in that even while stating the truth, Voss does not realize his precarious position. At Rhine Towers again, Voss experiences a glimpse of oneness with environment. He is charmed by the beauty of the place:

As bronze retreated, veins of silver loomed in the gullies, knobs of amethyst and sapphire glowed on the bastion which fortified from sight the ultimate stronghold of beauty.

'A C H H H!' cried Voss upon seeing. This is for the moment, pure gold. The purple stream of the evening flowing at its base almost drowns Voss. (p. 128).
The beauty of the place becomes intolerable for Voss, and he gets drowned by it, though momentarily. He comes out of the situation with the realization that "he had been wrong to surrender to sensuous delights, and must now suffer accordingly" (p. 129). Almost similar situation arises at Jildra under the impact of Laura's love:

The simplicity of the clay-coloured landscape was very moving to the German. For a moment everything was distinct. In the foreground some dead trees, restored to life by the absence of hate, were glowing with flesh of rosy light. All life was dependant on the thin lips of light . . . (p. 179).

Voss, at this moment, is absorbed in his discovery that each visible object has been created for the sake of love. Even the stones are smoother for the dust. On both the occasions, Voss establishes a deep relationship with nature. He could also establish his true identity with it, but he fails to do so as his is not the quest for realisation but for the conquest of the environment.

The expedition moves on and Judd reminds the leader of the approaching Christmas. The German has known it but has preferred to ignore as the Christmas celebration can betray some weakness in his mind. The Christmas can provide Voss with an opportunity of having personal understanding with the other members of the party, but he keeps himself aloof. Watching from the distance, Voss feels envious of Judd and others who are celebrating Christmas. "As he saw it now perfection is always circular [and a single person cannot make a circle], enclosed. So that Judd's circle was enviable" (p. 198). In his conscious and determined effort to keep aloof, Voss finds Christmas rites as pagan and refuses
to partake the piece of liver offered by Judd. He feels distraught and "Left alone, Voss groaned. He would not, could not learn, nor accept humility . . ." (p. 199). The celebration is disturbed by the barking dogs. Voss realizes that "it is probable that blacks have driven off the cattle, there is nothing we can do for the present" (p. 202). This is followed by the author's cryptic comment: "So Christmas began" (p. 202).

Voss, in his pride, fails to become one with the environment and even his companions. It becomes evident at this stage that the German is marked for destruction. He does not realize that his strength, as compared to the might of the desert, is just insignificant. He is forewarned of the might of the desert in the shape of the aboriginals, who are introduced for the first time in White's fiction and have been presented as an antithesis to all pervading Voss's potential will. Not that they cross their will against that of Voss, but their existence is purely a passage, from moment to moment, without the direction given by will. They drift as easily as smoke and are responsive to the play of the physical life around them. "During the morning a party of blacks appeared, first as shreds of shy bark glimpsed through the trunks of the trees, but always drifting, until finally they halted in human form upon the outskirts of the camp" (p. 204). The authorial intrusion reinforces the point that "some of the men even grew noble in the stillness of their concentration" (p. 204) against the obscene and ugly behaviour of Turner, a representative of the sophisticated Whites. Voss, for once, realizes only too well that the abos are beyond the absoluteness of his will. He rebukes Turner and moves towards
the Abos to offer his hand:

'Here is my hand in friendship.'

At first the blackfellow was reluctant, but then took the hand as if it had been some inanimate object of barter.

Each of the Whitemen was transfixed by the strangeness of this ceremony. It would seem that all human relationships hung in the balance subject to fresh evaluation by Voss and the Black.

Then the native dropped the hand. Voss appeared somewhat saddened by the reception his gesture has received.

'They are at that stage when they can only appreciate material things.'(p. 205)

Even this assessment by Voss is soon refuted by the Abos who drop the rags of the bag of flour.

But these incidents do not make Voss realise his true position and fail to bring home the lesson that probably communion with nature is possible but the will to conquer it is damnable. Rodney Mather's conjecture that in Voss Patrick White either indulges in 'self projection' of 'private fancy' is too simplistic and naive. In fact, the complexity of the theme of the novel makes its articulation difficult. Voss, who wishes to conquer the Australian landscape, is also the Voss who wants to befriend the blacks.

As the expedition marches forward, alienation as well as the isolation of Voss increases. As the party rides through the desert, the resistance form nature, through the blacks is felt by the party. Purely from the elemental beings, they assume a bodily shape and form a circle as if to challenge Voss's portentous will. They steal an axe, a bridle and a
compass. Probably slightly uncertain about his victory over the environment, with the help of his royal instrument 'the royal will,' Voss sends Palfreyman, the symbol of religion amongst the members of the expedition. Pal's death with a spear in his side awakens the dormant fears of Judd as well as others who feel themselves as the victims of sacrifice like goat- and sheep. So, the man-animal Judd pronounces the split and Voss is left with Harry Robarts and Le Mesurier. Voss has already read Le Mesurier's prose-poem and knows his mind. For Le Mesurier, the oneness with environment is possible through the complete disintegration of the self in death, then the spirit is distributed everywhere, as the ultimate fulfilment, "after you have scattered it, grant that it shall be . . . in the rocks, and in the empty water holes and in the true love of all men, and in you Oh God! at last" (p. 297). Thus, deserted by his companions, impelled by Laura's love and impressed by the prose-poem of Le Mesurier, Voss submits himself to the blacks. He accepts the witchetty grub offered by the blacks quite willingly as opposed to his obdurate refusal to partake the piece of liver offered by Judd earlier, a sort of a communion wafer, on the eve of Christmas. Voss's submission: "I am no longer your Lord Harry," or "I have no plans," evinces the admission of his mistake. He has not conquered the environment but become a part of it. In the epilogue, Judd tells Laura and others: "The blacks talk about him to this day. He is still there—that is honest opinion of many of them—he is there in the country, and always will be" (p. 443). Voss becomes a myth. His Realisation is as complete as his identification through
simplicity and humility in his last days. Laura's last words are quite significant: "You did not die . . . he is there still, it is said in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down by those who have been troubled by it" (p. 449). The environmental aspect of identity is to be found to a limited extent in Riders in the Chariot and The Eye of the Storm. In the Riders, Mary Hare strikes identity through her oneness with nature and Elizabeth Hunter, in The Eye of the Storm, gets the visionary experience when she establishes a complete rapport with the environment.

Patrick White intended Mary Hare to be a creature of the environment. That is why she has been projected as the reject of a decaying gentry and is at home with twigs, insects and animals and the earth. The name Mary Hare is suggestive enough in that the spiritual [Mary] and the animal [Hare] are suggestive of her departure from the human norm. Like Theodora Goodman, Mary as a child suffers from isolation because she is the daughter of the dilletante member of a landed gentry and the isolation within the family is rooted in her ugly looks. She is considered as an intruder into her parents' lives. She arouses nothing but repugnance in Norbert Hare. He cries out, "By George, Eleanor, she is ugly, ugly." In her self-absorbed and convention-ridden mother the feeling of suppressed scourge is too obvious to be concealed by ostensible affection. Mary's candid nature further accentuates her isolation. Neither of her parents is "pleased by her habit of telling blunt truths." She develops a kind of apathy towards human beings after her
implication in her father's suicide.

Mary Hare chooses to live alone at Xanadu aware of her different temperament and afraid that the people's so-called sophistication might corrupt her. In her desire to comprehend the individuality of things around her, she turns to nature, people being false. She can feel the shape of the things in order to know their qualities: "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 fledgeling from its shell, breaking an afterbirth, were now hung with dying ants, she observed with some distress" (p. 15). For Mary Hare, as for D. H. Lawrence's Viennese Lady, only the other world of pure being matters. She has "... taken her place in the realities ... she knows what life consists of. ..." Having known the reality, Mary identifies herself with the objects of nature. She feeds milk to a snake and feels sorry for the death of her goat. She sucks pebbles and stones. The centre of Mary's character depends upon "her effort emphatically to become, not merely to grasp, the nature and existence of what she encounters in the non-human world." White shows the difference between ordinary people and Mary Hare: "She had seen them letting themselves down into the cold black secret rock pools, while remaining enclosed in their own resentful gooseflesh. Whereas she, Miss Hare whose eyes were always probing, fingers trying, would achieve the ecstasy of complete annihilating liberation without any such immersion." Mary Hare's insight into the 'real world', her vision
about the chariot and her relationship with Himmelfarb come through her total identification with the environment. Alf Dubbo, the half-caste aboriginal, realises this and projects Mary in his painting as second Mary:

So he painted her [Mary Hare's] hands like the curled, hairy crooks of ferns. He painted the second Mary like a long tail possum, in a dream time womb of transparent skin or at the centre of whorl of faintly perceptive wind. (p. 455)

The storm is central to the structural design of The Eye of the Storm. The life-time experience of Elizabeth Hunter, her past, present and future converge on that single moment so that the storm scene becomes the microcosmic enactment of the whole novel. "By an interchange between the detailed events, in the storm episode and the developments of Elizabeth Hunter's inner progress in turn expressed in terms of her past experience, White conveys most powerfully what it is to understand the condition to which she aspires, both at that moment and more permanently."47 It is during this storm that Mrs Hunter achieves a most complete self-knowledge admitting her faults and privileges, seeing herself as a flaw at the centre of this jewel of light.48 In fact, she comes to know herself so well that she claims to have experienced not enough of living (p. 412). Her return to the ordinary world for further trial reflects neither self-evasion (like Basil), nor forgetfulness (like Dorothy). Rather, she hopes to be allowed the experience of that state of 'pure living' that was granted to her once.

This clear and important vision of 'pure being' has been the lot of Elizabeth Hunter alone of all White's fictional protagonists.
A detailed discussion on this point in Chapter II shows how Patrick White prepares Elizabeth Hunter, a sensual, selfish and even malicious woman, for this vision. It is through her complete identity with the environment that she acquires true insight: and the state of pure being that passeth all understanding. Not only does she confess her past guilt, she also partakes the communion wafer (the chip of the felled tree) and the communion wine (the sweat of the wood cutter) and it is after this alone that she becomes one with the environment.

A Fringe of Leaves, the most important novel in the treatment of relationship between man and his environment, offers the triangular problem of Australia involving the White Rileys, the Convicts and the Aborigines. Thematically too, the novel delineates the quest for identity problem which is socially relevant as it helps the protagonist regain her lost place in society. In this novel White abandons the "negative and basically antihumanist view of society." The first two novels, Happy Valley and The Living and the Dead, do not offer much solace to the characters. The later protagonists, Theodora Goodman, Stan Parker, Voss, the quartet‒Mordecai Himmelfarb, Mary Hare, Alf Dubbo and Mrs Godbold‒, Hurtle Duffield, the identical twins, Arthur and Waldo, and Mrs Elizabeth Hunter neither recognise nor embrace the positive values like community and social order. The protagonist of A Fringe of Leaves, Ellen Roxburgh after her experience as a farm girl, Ellen Gluyar, a lady of a big house in Roxburgh family, a compliant adulteress, a domesticated slave of some black tribe, the beloved of Jack Chance, the escaped murderer convict, comes
back to integrate herself into the fabric of society to which she can make a useful contribution with her rich and variegated experience. She achieves her insight into the unity of man. For the first time she succeeds in striving for "a wholly authentic and deeply moving resolution of the dualities that lie at the heart of our existence as solitaries and social animals." 50

The main argument of this novel is Virgil (as Odyssey was of The Aunt's Story and Lear of The Eye of the Storm). Austin Roxburgh gives a translation of Virgil to Ellen Gluyas as a token of his consideration for the lumpish farm girl. The epigraph from Ibsen, asking the society about the 'gnawing things in their house' brings home the hidden meaning of the novel. Linked as White's fiction is to "Ibsen and Ibsen and White both to Virgil, as Virgil is linked to Theocritus, we follow a developing investigation into the relationship between nature and human nature, relationship which lies at the heart of the world crisis whether characterised primarily as ecological, agricultural or psychological." 51 Ellen Roxburgh, in her quest for identity, solves the riddle of dual relationship between man and his environment and between man and man.

Patrick White modelled The Eye of the Storm on Fraser Island and used the story of Eliza Fraser's shipwreck and four month's sojourn with coastal Kabi Tribe in his struggle with the Great Australian Emptiness to form a recognizable pattern of "the cat's cradle of human intercourse." 52 White fuses the several variations of the Fraser legend 53 and adopts it to suit
his design adding to it the psychological complexity and passion.54

The novel shows how an individual can cope up with his alienation from the environment. Ellen is caught up in a dilemma, a maze. Her maze is, in one sense, the complexity of her life at Cheltenham, but in another, it is the maze of uncertainty about who she is, "the farmer's daughter" or a "spurious lady." Three pictures of Ellen stand out in her life, a young maiden immersing herself in St. Hya's well for the cure of some unknown disorder, dreaming of a Pagan god as a lover; a lady whose husband contemplates her coming down the stairs elegantly dressed and adorned with jewels; and the one in which an aboriginal woman strip her White woman's clothes, cut her hair and then adorn her head in her own way with feathers. After passing through the gamut of complex circumstances and experiences, Ellen tries to find her identity where her self and non-self may be synthesized. The situation is best understood through the clash between persona and mystique participation in the process of individuation.55 "Ellen avoids the dangers of the persona (Her mask is that of a gentleman's wife) and of the participation mystique which binds the people together until they become something other than themselves and usually something less."56

Using the stream-of-consciousness and flash back techniques the novelist telescopes the past as well as the present living of Ellen. She is a lumpish farm girl, daughter of a former lady's maid and a rough cornish farmer for whom she is a farm hand and
the coach-woman who brings him home after his drinking bouts. She is deeply associated with nature. The novelist traces her origin to the northern Cornwall, a country with rugged and jagged coast, barren farmland. Her attachment to nature is further deepened by her charmed familiarity with the stories of mermaids and witches. She fancies herself in the world of legends of Tristern and Isolut and fancies a god as her lover and husband. As a girl, Ellen makes a pilgrimage to St. Hya's Well and immerses herself in its cold black water: "She was soon crying for some predicament which nobody least of all Ellen Gluyas, could have explained, no specific sin, only presentiment of evil she would have to face sooner or later" (p. 98). Ironically, she gets as her husband the invalid Austin Roxburgh, a paying guest at her father's farm, who has much in common with King Mark. After the death of her mother and being troubled by her father (who reacts to her in a way that might be maudlin, but could as well be incestuous), Ellen accepts the extraordinary proposal of Austin Roxburgh, 20 years senior to her in age. She becomes the mistress-of-a-big house in Cheltenham. The excellent Mrs Roxburgh Senior makes Ellen a lady in speech, writing and religion. But her main function, undoubtedly, is to be Austin's nurse. Austin's chief weakness (apart from his chronic sickliness) is a passion for Virgil. Ellen becomes the focus of his desire (untalented as she is) to produce a work of art. He knows the remedies for chapped hands and indifferent grammar. Ellen learns to be a lady meant to control her household and servants, speak and dress with dignity, and write a journal (though not without occasional
recourse to her dialectical forms of Cornwall).

The dichotomy between Ellen Ghiyas, the Pagan living in a dream world, and Ellen Roxburgh, a work of art, tears her apart. The mermaid in Ellen did not die but was simply suppressed. The girl who wanted to get cured of her 'sensuality' by her immersion in a pagan well now responds positively to her husband's love-making and learns from his alarm never to do it again. The separation from her true nature and the repressed sexuality become the main cause of Ellen's alienation. Although she discharges her duties (as a nurse to the invalid) with genuine solicitude, affection and respect, yet she continues to dream of lovers. They come to her unbidden and devour her with passion. Even the cloak of Christianity does not fit her well. During her prayers "she longed to catch a sight of old Mrs Roxburgh's Divine Being, if only as a blaze of departing glory. Perhaps it was her origin which made her believe more intently in the Devil than in the Deity . . ." (p. 109). Thus Patrick White satirises the society with its rituals and ceremonies as it demands the suppression of natural instincts and desires for the sake of polite discourse, rational behaviour and dry intellectual endeavour. At Cheltenham, Ellen becomes unconsciously aware of the various aspects of civilization, which create the barbaric convict system. It gives authority to the invalid Austin and brutal Garnet over others, it extracts sacrifices to its common manners and morals from those who are weak. Austin Roxburgh was more governed by abstract principles and 'loved according to the rules of honour and reason,' but hardly according to the dialectics of feeling. Given to her sensuality and
physicality "She feels that most of her life at Cheltenham had been a bore" (p. 286).

Roxburgh's visit to Van Dieman's Land where Garnet Roxburgh has settled to escape the 'claws of law' for his misdeeds is quite important in the development of Ellen. In the lap of nature, she becomes free and feels at home. She writes in her journal "... I begin to feel closer to the country than to any human being. Reason and the little I learned from books I was given ... tells me I am wrong in thinking thus, but my instincts hanker after something deeper, which I may not experience this side of death" (p. 92). The evocation of her past life which remained subsumed beneath the public-self as Mrs Roxburgh brings her nearer to the wretches or miscreants through the girl Holly whom Garnet first impregnates and then disposes off. The proximity to nature and sympathy for the downtrodden bring to surface her natural instincts and her repressed sexuality. Once again, she dreams of her legendary lover. She feels alternately attracted to and repelled from Garnet Roxburgh, the high class miscreant leading to their coupling in the woods after Ellen's contrived fall from a horse. She is a willing partner in this seduction although she pretends to be a victim:

'I was thrown from my horse, and while I wasn't in my right mind you took advantage of it.' (p. 103)

She is quite aware of the untruthful posture of her ruminations which gets ultimately exposed in Garnet's cryptic rejoinder:

'If that was not your right mind, we shall never know it,' he laughed and declared. (p. 103)
Her attempt to liberate herself from the repressed past helps her gain a "recognition not only of her divided social-self but also a contradiction between the proclaimed morality and countenanced behaviour." Ellen has troubled feelings of guilt about that encounter because she has had suspicion of 'a being' her glass could not reveal (p. 79). What she suspects is that there is the Ellen of darkness to match the Ellen of light.

By this time it is quite clear that Ellen Roxburgh is well on her way to regain her lost identity, pitting honest self-examination against self-deception, projecting her own dark nature outside herself to avoid the pain of recognizing it. This aspect of her personality is projected by Patrick White in the first chapter of the novel through Miss Scrimshaw and Mrs Merivale who, like the chorus of Greek tragedies, throw significant light on the situation and the main characters. To Miss Scrimshaw, Ellen Roxburgh reminds of a "clean sheet of paper which might disclose an invisible writing, if breathed upon . . ." (p. 17). "I will tell you one thing," Miss Scrimshaw vouches, "every woman has secret depths with which even she, perhaps, is unacquainted, and which sooner or later must be troubled [sic ]," (p. 17). Although Mr Merivale wonders as to how Mrs Roxburgh would react to suffering (p. 20), Miss Scrimshaw is only sure that she would willingly undergo suffering for the ultimate in experience (p. 17).

From this point onward, she encounters incidents which lead her to the probings of the metaphysical or religious truth. The journey in the Bristol Maid, a most unsuitable ship for
passengers, is an inner one. The journey motif is significantly seminal to the characters and the events in the novel. The Roxburghs are returning from Australia, the husband returning to the remaining members of the family, the wife returning from her adopted to the original nature, the convict returning to the place he escaped from, life returning to its sources. Now the ship is wrecked and is abandoned for the longboat. Mrs Roxburgh gives birth to a still born child. Eventually, the longboat lands on Fraser Island where the aborigines appear. One is shot and the Captain and Mr Roxburgh are immediately speared to death. The scene shows the impotence of the White Culture before the power of the Australian environment. Austin Roxburgh's death dramatises the futility of the superficially decent and the rational man. Facing a group of armed and hostile blacks, he feels that he must do something. As a man living in the world of Virgil, he finds himself helpless in the savage world and falls with a spear in the neck. The whole incident suggests that Austin has suddenly glimpsed the reality of Australian experience: "He opened his eyes to the cries of Ellen - "Ellen, you are different. The light . . . or the brim of that . . . huge . . . country . . . hat. Raise it, please . . . so that I can see . . ." (p. 214). All the castaways are then stripped and taken away. Then the women appear and Mrs Roxburgh too becomes a slave, nurse to a loathsome child with yaws. Her hair is cropped, she is painted and decorated with feathers to give amusement. She threads her wedding ring on a fringe of leaves and is forced by the application of fire-stick to her tenderest parts to climb enormous trees after possums. She is
rarely fed and once she snaps up the legbone of a girl who has been ritually devoured. She is then spirited away by Jack Chance, an escaped convict. They soon become lovers and the repressed sexuality of Ellen Roxburgh is released at last. So, in the vulnerability of Jack Chance, who turns out to be a murderer of his London girlfriend after catching her 'in flagrante' with a sword swallower, faced with the prospect of civilisation, she begins, half-deliriously, to talk like Mrs Roxburgh of Cheltenham again. The convict is alarmed and runs away back to the wilderness when Ellen finds her on the outskirts of Moreton Bay.

Through Ellen's variegated experience, White poses and seeks to solve the complex question of the relationship between the abos and the Whites on the one hand, and the white rulers and the unfortunate convicts on the other. White also explores the possibility of an alienated White lady's identity in the company of the Blacks and the convicts in suitable environment rather than in the company of the civilised and sophisticated White rulers who hate and torture the Abos and the convicts.

Patrick White has been criticised for perpetuating the racist stereotype that aboriginal culture is both degraded and degrading. Others accuse him of romanticising the Aboriginal rituals and ceremonies at the cost of Christian values. Both the opinions, far from being correct, cancel each other.

Ellen's rich, variegated and complex experience of Australian life is quite suggestive of the novelist's own search for that "properly appointed humanism which, as Edmund Leach believes,
cannot begin of its own accord but man "must place the world before life, life before man, and the respect of others before self interest." 59

The indignities and cruelties inflicted by the Abos on their captives nauseate many readers. They perhaps tend to forget the fact that the Abos have been pushed to the outback of Australia geographically, economically even religiously and socially. They react to this assault of ostracism by treating their captives according to their own customs and traditions. And if original Eliza Fraser suffered from the lack of clothes and food, undoubtedly, Bennelong and other aboriginals adopted by the Colonial benefactors suffered from tortured feet, chafed necks and unwholesome diet. Moreover there are 'gnawing things' in the so-called civilised society as well. Even Ellen is aware of the chain-gangs and floggings in Van Dieman's land: "She may have suffered and been humiliated during her time with the aborigines but civilization has its suffering as well." 60 The aboriginal life in the novel is seen through the eyes of Ellen who endures the first shock as an automaton and then responds instinctively as another human being with the strength of Ellen Gluyas's body and mind and the gentleness of her Roxburgh education. The author launches his fierce diatribe on the savagery of aboriginal life as well as that of the European civilization. Even the much hated cannibalism is not per se. It seems to be the result of compulsion. 'Driven by hunger' Ellen Roxburgh shares the aboriginal's dreadful meal, picking up and eating a piece of cooked human flesh which has
fallen from one of their overflowing dillies. As Ellen is not in a position to explain how "tasting flesh ... had nourished not only her animal body but some darker need of the hungry spirit" (p. 245), she tries to persuade herself that "cannibalism is a sacrament for the blacks."61

Ellen crosses the frontiers of her 'cultural inheritance' for the savage and mysterious world, transgressing the veneer between 'tenderness' and 'ferocity'. Cannibalism becomes a kind of 'transubstantiation' in reverse.62 Ellen voluntarily opts for the primordial natural world, for the community of suffering, vulnerability and oppression represented by the aborigines. The mystique of this felicitous fusion is reinforced in endlessly repeated flute-note. The horror of the situation further vanishes as Ellen unlearns the conceptions of the individual and the society inculcated by the Roxburghs and returns again to the awareness of herself as a part of the larger scheme envisaged by her as a child. She glimpses it once again one night after the shipwreck.63

Patrick White substantiates the theme further through the experience of Pilcher, an embittered man, resentful of the privilege and authority. He understands instinctively the truth about guilt and punishment which Ellen learns more slowly and subtly. Jack Chance describes Australia as a country of "thorns, whips, murderers, thieves, shipwrecks and adulterers" (p. 230). Pilcher tells Mr Roxburgh that the interior of Australia is peopled by the criminals. "That is the injustice about it. How many of us was [sic.] never found out" (p. 135).
Pilcher himself becomes a sole witness to the crimes committed by him in order to survive. The self-discovery converts him into the God of Love, and if the crime of survival brings conversion, there could indeed be no conversion without survival. Pilcher also contributes to the Australian legend, for society in the beautifully evoked cannibal scene, "seems to need a form of cannibalism for survival."64

The presentation of the aboriginals does not suggest that their lives offer a romantic, idyllic alternative to the civilization which Ellen Roxburgh leaves behind. Their life amounts to a hard primitivism, a perception of their lives as a nasty, brutish and without any immediately apparent evidence of spiritual design. Ellen Roxburgh a pure being is reduced to a bestial existence a constant foraging for food. The realm of nature she "shares with them is one of necessity in which 'being' and 'doing' become one but with different connotations . . . and ecstasy becomes filling the stomach with a snake or dugong."65

The exploration of pure being is carried further beyond the confines of any society, White or Abo. When Ellen escapes with Jack Chance, the presentiment of evil associated with the Hy's well and the fantasies about Dmitriev are reconciled in her new experience. The fringe of leaves which concealed her wedding ring is thrown away. The discovery of love, of perfection in bird-song shifting leaves and speckled light, the temptation to postpone the return to civilization shows that Ellen has realised a state of pure being, which, for her, is perhaps not possible in the civilized society where natural instincts are substituted by the
laws of honour. The return of Jack Chance to the Abo world is a very bitter blow to society. Evidently, he prefers the tortures by the Blacks to those by the Whites. The torment of the Abo world is bodily whereas the torment of the White world is psychic. Ellen's change from a farm-girl to a lady must have been more painful than her change from a lady to a native woman, especially because White culture is cut off from the environment of the country itself. H. P. Heseltine believes in Nietzsche's notion that "the basis of society is the reconciliation of cruelty." Lionel Trilling, in the same vein, feels that "the richness of modern literature lies in its discovery and canonization of the primal, non-ethical energies . . . idea of losing oneself up to a point of self-destruction, of surrendering oneself to experience without regard to self instinct or conventional morality." This is exactly what White demonstrates through Ellen Roxburgh. For her, civilization seems just as demeaning as aboriginal life. Leaving Pilcher's chapel, Ellen has a sense of returning to imprisonment. To Miss Scrimshaw's remark on seeing Ellen in garnet gown, "You are wearing the gown I always thought would suit you," Ellen retorts sarcastically, "Because it is my only change of clothes" (p. 313). Viewed in this perspective, Ellen realizes that both the cultures have drawbacks. The Australian culture will be incomplete until it comes to terms with the full range of human possibility, above all, with the claims of nature.

Through her identity quest, what Ellen, discovers is her proper place in the universe. And she discovers this only in the Aboriginal environment from which previously as a lady of
Cheltenham, she was cut off. This identity helps her learn that beneficent Caesar and the destructive Caesar are the same person, that the Roxburgh's Lord God of Hosts and Pilcher's God of Love are one and the same. She feels that she is responsible to someone, to all those who have been rejected and that no one is to blame and everyone for whatever happens (p. 327). She has realised that this boundless 'garden of Eden' is in itself a Paradise, a hell and a purgatory.

The discussion about the relationship between the individual and environment of the 'Great Australian Emptiness' establishes the fact that White is deeply engaged in the exploration of Australian Experience. It figures powerfully in his works. He describes not only the civilized Australia of masses huddled in the cities on the seashore and devoted to the life of material prosperity but also the Australia of distances, unexplored deserts and dense bushes populated by the native Abos. The environment in White's fiction is an active and powerful character. It resists the onslaught of the exploiters in Happy Valley. It elevates Stan Parker, the ordinary man to the extraordinary heights, it vanquishes Voss, the strong-willed German, it helps Elizabeth Hunter experience the visionary bliss in the Eye of the Storm and resolves the tension between Ellen Gluyas and Ellen Roxburgh. The environment has been used metaphorically by Patrick White. The colonized Australia with its sham of sophistication, polish, urbanity and civilization stands for exploitation, domination, cruelty and smugness. Whereas the Abo world and primordial existence in its naked form represents innocence, gullibility and savagery.
Dissatisfied with the glitter of the civilization, White's protagonists look inward and identify themselves with the environment. They get fulfilment only when a rapport is established between the two. Stan Parker gets deep insight when he becomes one with nature in the storm scene. Voss becomes a legend among the Abor. After participating in the mystic rituals of the blacks, Ellen Roxburgh acquires a deep realization which helps her resolve the tension between the Ellen of the dark and the Ellen of the light.

White seems to mean that man and environment are inseparable parts of the universe and man can realize his true self only through a perfect rapport with the environment. The interaction between the environment and the individual opens new vistas of understanding and solves the problems of identity of the fictional protagonists of White. In his own subtle and ironic way, Patrick White, hints at the possibility of easing out the tension between the White colonisers, the condemned convicts and the harrassed abos. In his novels the individual quest for identity is fused with the quest for a rapport between the Australian Emptiness and the individual. His answer to the problem is summed up in the attitude of Ellen Roxburgh who comes back to the civilized world even as 'a lifer' as "... it is my only change of clothes." After the realization that 'no one is to blame and every one for whatever happens' one can lead a life like the black rose or the hat of Theodora Goodman.
Notes and References


13. John Colmer feels that the novel "explores the lonely quest for truth in an alien materialistic world." John Colmer, "The Quest Motif in Patrick White" National Literature Series (New York: Griffin House, 1982), pp. 192-209; Peter Beatson notes the religious connection of the novel: it explores the implications of the descent of soul into matter, the plight to the incarnated soul separated from its source, and the return of grace, at the end of the cycle, to God. Peter Beatson, The Eye in the Mandala, Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God (London: Paul Elek, 1976), p. 10; Critics like Thomas E. Warren...


15 William Walsh, op. cit., p. 4.

16 D. R. Burns, op. cit., p. 159.


19 Patrick White, Happy Valley (London: George & Harrap, 1939), p. 78. Subsequent references noted parenthetically in the text are to this edition.

20 Patrick White, Happy Valley, op. cit., p. 28.


23 Geoffrey Dutton, Patrick White, op. cit., p. 17.


26 Ibd., p. 38.


The man who was watching the storm, and who seemed to
be sitting right at the centre of it, was at first exultant.
Like his own dry paddocks, his skin drank the rain. He folded
his wet arms, and this attitude added to his complacency. He
was firm and strong, husband, father, and owner of cattle. He
sat there touching his own muscular arms, for he had taken off
his shift during the heat and was wearing his singlet. But as
the storm increased, his flesh had doubts, and he began to
experience humility. The lightning, which could have struck
open basalt, had, it seemed, the power to open souls. It was
obvious in the yellow flash that something like this had
happened, the flesh had slipped from his bones, and a light
was shining in his cavernous skull.

The rain buffeted and ran off the limbs of the man seated on
the edge of the veranda. In his new humility, weakness and
acceptance had become virtues. He retreated now, into the
shelter of the veranda humbly holding with his hand the wooden
post that he had put there himself years before, and at this
hour of the night he was quite grateful for the presence of the
simple wood. As therein sluiced his hands, and the fork of the
lightning entered the crests of his trees. The darkness was
full of wonder. Standing there somewhat meekly, the man could
have loved something, someone, if he could have penetrated
beyond the wood, beyond the moving darkness. But he could not,
and in his confusion he prayed to God, not in specific petition,
wordlessly almost, for the sake of company. Till he began to
know every corner of the darkness, as if it were daylight, and
he were in love with the heaving world, down to the last blade
of wet grass; Patrick White, *The Tree of Man*, op. cit., p. 151.

33 Brian Kiernan, *Patrick White* (London: Macmillan Press,

34 A. P. Riemer, "Visions of Mandela in *The Tree of Man*,”
Southerly, XXVII (1967), pp. 3-19.

Symposium*, p. 99.

p. 33. Subsequent references noted parenthetically in the text
are to this edition.

38 William Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction, op. cit., p. 50.


41 Damodar Rao, "Riders in the Chariot: A Note," The Literary Endeavour, p. 98.


45 William Walsh, Patrick White's Fiction, op. cit., p. 56.

46 Patrick White, Riders in the Chariot, op. cit., p. 12.


49 John Colmer, "Duality in Patrick White," A Critical Symposium, p. 75; In The Aunt's Story and other novels like The Tree of Man, Voss, The Solid Mandala, the protagonists do not come back to the social circle. This appears to be anti-humanist attitude to so many critics.

50 Ibid., p. 75.


52 Patrick White, The Prodigal Son, op. cit., p. 39.
The Fraser legend is known to the public through various works:


Manly Johnson, op. cit., p. 94.


58 Brian Kiernan, op. cit., p. 128.


61 Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, op. cit., p. 244.


63 Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, op. cit., p. 245.

64 Elizabeth Perkins, "Escape with a Convict: Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*" (Elizabeth Perkin's Lecture in English at James Cook University Townville).

65 Brian Kiernan, op. cit., p. 129.