Chapter III

Discovering the Self--

Women and the Spiritual Quest

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the
inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
... , concentration
without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, ...

(T.S. Eliot. Four Quartets)
In the earlier chapters, we examined the attempts made by women at self-actualisation within the familial and social spheres. We found that very few women succeeded in their attempts. The quest for self-knowledge by the protagonists and their urge to know the self in itself devoid of typecast roles or social trappings take on psychological and spiritual dimensions in the works of the two writers. The psychological aspect will be examined in Chapter Four. The present Chapter attempts to explore the spiritual aspects of the quest for self-realisation. It is important to note that even while stressing the spiritual aspects in their novels, both Patrick White and Margaret Laurence are sceptical about religiosity. That they are against institutionalised religion (Christianity) is seen in their critical questioning of its empty rituals. Despite the religious frameworks which entail religious interpretations, emphasis is laid on the need for freedom and the question of choice and responsibility which reveals the existential rather than dogmatic approach of White and Laurence to spirituality in their works. The novels offer varied meanings and interpretations. In this study, some of the concepts found in the novels, are interpreted according to the Vedāntic principles. Another aspect which becomes relevant is the underlying structure of the quest. This aspect will be examined in the next Chapter along with the psychological connotations of the quest. This Chapter consists of two sections. The first section will analyse the attitude of the protagonists towards orthodox religions. The second section will explore the possible Biblical interpretations of the novels as
well as the various frames (Existential or Vedantic) that enable an assessment of the process of self-realisation.

Against religion

Religion. Yes, that's behind all my books. What I am interested in is the relationship between the blundering human being and God. I belong to no church, but I have a religious faith. In my books I have lifted bits from various religions in trying to come to a better understanding; I've made use of religious themes and symbols (Patrick White. "In the Making" in Patrick White Speaks 19).

I don't have a traditional religion, but I believe there's a mystery at the core of life (Margaret Laurence quoted in Valerie Miner's The Matriarch of Manawaka 18).

I don't have any feeling, of loyalty to the traditional Christian religions, but I do not really believe that God is totally dead in our universe. A lot of my characters, like myself, inhabit a world in which they no longer believe in the teachings of the traditional church, but where these things have enormous emotional impact... [The Bible] seems to express certain symbolic truths about the human dilemma and about mankind (Laurence in Donald Cameron ed. Conversations with Canadian Novelists 111-2).

The statements quoted above vividly express the attitudes of the two writers and their protagonists to traditional religion. White's statement also highlights the confluence of various religious ideas in his novels. The statements further reveal the use of religious frames by the two writers to explicate the ultimate reality or what Laurence calls "the mystery at the core of life." It is the same mystery that impels the protagonists to move beyond the cocoon of their existence in an attempt at self-realisation.
Let us now consider the varying attitudes of the protagonists towards orthodox religion. It ranges from an acceptance of Christian grace and humility in the case of Laura Trevelyan in *Voss* and Mrs. Godbold in *Riders in the Chariot* to Hagar's open defiance in *The Stone Angel*. While Rachel Cameron (*A Jest of God*) and Vanessa MacLeod (*A Bird in the House*) display a certain amount of scepticism, Mary Hare (*Riders in the Chariot*), Theodora Goodman (*The Aunt's Story*) and Ellen Roxburgh (*A Fringe of Leaves*) seek alternate means to counter the fetters of traditional religion. What begins as parodies of faith by Stacey MacAindra (*The Fire-Dwellers*) and Alex Gray (*Memoirs of Many in One*) results in a total absence of religious faith in Morag Gunn (*The Diviners*) and Elizabeth Hunter (*The Eye of the Storm*). The following sections will examine the protagonists range of reactions to conventional religion viz., acceptance, scepticism, parodying, seeking alternate means, open defiance and total rejection.

Despite their questioning of the narrow limits of traditional Christianity, Laura Trevelyan in *Voss* and Mrs. Godbold in *Riders in the Chariot* accept the tenets of Christianity in spirit. The first glimpse of Laura, in the opening scene of *Voss*, shows her as sceptical, having rejected the conventional religion of the Bonners. She is seen as a rationalist questioning the shallow conventions.

... she had been softly sceptical, perhaps out of boredom; she was suffocated by the fuzz of faith. She did believe, however, most palpably, in wood, with the reflections in it, and in clear daylight, and in water (V 9).

Such an attitude challenges, for instance, Mr. Bonner's idea of a
boring God whose Divine Will approximated Bonner's will (Y 349). At this juncture, Voss mistakes her for an atheist and tells her that atheism is self-murder because the atheists usually are incapable of conceiving the magnificence of the Divine Power (Y 89). However, Voss' later comment in the same chapter is perceptive of Laura's true position. "You are an Apostle of Love masquerading as an atheist for some inquisitorial purpose of your own..." (V 90). Though she rejects the outward trappings of religion like Church attendance, she follows Christianity in its true spirit. For instance, her emotional state during the birth of Mercy is comparable to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother. Earlier in the text, there is a reference to this. In a paragraph full of sexual overtones, when Voss prescribes a white pill for her ailment, he warns that it will entail great suffering. "If I have suffered the Father, she smiled, then I can suffer the Son" (V 269). In fact, it is her doctrine of the three stages of man's spiritual progression that constitutes the central theme of the book. "How important it is to understand the three stages. Of God into man. Man. And man returning into God..." (V 386). John and Rose Marie Beston in "The Theme of Spiritual Progression in Voss," show how the doctrine is explicated in Le Mesurier's poem 'Childhood.' Through such a doctrine, she stresses the need for humility and understanding, and as Veronica Brady further points out "[Laura] is an oracle whose message is of hope and of human acceptance" ("In My End is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of Voss" 19). By taking such a stand, Laura "not merely resists the ideology of the Bonners but even the absolute claims Voss makes upon her" (Brady 23). That
she is honest about her feelings is her virtue. She speaks out openly: "Ah, God, ... , I do have faith, if it is not all the time" (V 330). Such an openness enables her to accept the need for sacrifice.

'I cannot [sacrifice] enough, that is obvious, but something of a personal nature that will convince a wavering mind. If it is only human sacrifice that will convince man that he is not God' (V 370).

The same holds true for her understanding of human suffering. Her suffering during her fever and Voss' last days in the interior re-enacts the passion of Christ: 'Dear Christ, now at last I understand your suffering' (V 386). This scene in the novel is comparable to the enactment of Christ's Passion by the nun in Hopkins' poem "The Wreck of the Deutschland."

Describing Mrs. Godbold, the narrator of Riders in the Chariot comments: "For was not the simplest act explicit, unalterable, even glorious in the light of Him?" (RC 270). This explains Mrs. Godbold's attitude to religion and life alike. In her article "The Edge of Error," Dorothy Green quotes the last verses of Matthew 25 ("Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these the least of my brethren, ye did it unto me") and states that "Mrs. Godbold is a living example" of this (41). Her duty to God is inseparable from her duties as wife and mother. That is why, Leonie Kramer's question in her article "Patrick White's Götterdämmerung," "Is her 'almost vegetable existence' compatible with illumination?" (18), comes as a misreading of the whole novel. Mrs. Godbold's conception of the chariot is realistic rather than abstract.
Mrs. Godbold remained a seated statue. The massive rumps of her horses waited, swishing their tails through eternity. The wheels of her chariot were solid gold, well-axled, as might have been expected (RC 67).

She is seen doing household work alongside praising the Lord through hymns (RC 229). In this way, she combines the temporal and the eternal.

Her attitude to religion is closely knit with her attitude to life as a mother.

Faith is not less persuasive for its fluctuations. Rather, it becomes a living thing, like a child fluttering in the womb. So Mrs. Godbold’s faith would stir and increase inside the grey, gelatinous envelope of morning, until, at last, it was delivered, new-born, with all the glory and confidence of fire (RC 231).

Such an attitude enables her to be accommodative when Himmelfarb questions her about his being a Jew.

‘I do not know Jews, except what we are told, and of course the Bible; there is that’ .... ‘But I know people,’ she said, ‘and there is no difference between them, excepting there is good and bad’ (RC 219).

By this belief, she provides maternal service to Himmelfarb after his mock-crucifixion. This, perhaps, is the reason why the sheets she launders become the sheets to receive the body of Himmelfarb. Her attitude towards the question of good and evil contrasts her from Harry Rosetree, who Judas-like betrays his faith and Himmelfarb. In all, she emerges as an individual "completely free of theories about faith, or belief, or revelation, from all discussions of which she shies away" (Dorothy Green 41).

Both Rachel Cameron in _A Jest of God_ and Vanessa MacLeod in _A Bird in the House_ are sceptical of the religious teachings offered to them, though they never openly express their defiance. At the beginning of _A Jest of God_, Rachel views God as a Cosmic
Comedian taunting people for His perverted sport. This position leads her to reject both her mother's Church which is too plain and Calla's Tabernacle which has "too much gaudiness and zeal" (JG 41). From this position, she moves to an understanding which follows St. Paul's dictum. "If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (JG 135). This enables her to take her final position of understanding. She is even able to say in a jocular tone: "God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God" (JG 202). Her new found wisdom accommodates compassion not only for men but also for God. While Hagar's attitude is one of outright irony, Rachel at least puts up with it outwardly for fear of displeasing others.

I didn't say God hadn't died recently, within the last few years, but a long time ago, longer than I could remember, for I could not actually recall a time when He was alive. No use to say that (JG 39).

In her mind, she rejects the synthetic smoothness that exists in her mother's Church which,

shows a pretty and clean-cut Jesus expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain, just this nice and slightly effeminate insurance salesman who, somewhat incongruously, happens to be clad in a toga, holding his arms languidly up to something which might in other circumstances have been a cross (JG 41).

Though sceptical, Rachel never takes an atheistic position like her dead father. She condemns the superficiality of Calla's Tabernacle in a similar fashion.

How can anyone bear to make a public spectacle of themselves? How could anyone display so openly? I will not look. I will not listen. People should keep themselves to themselves—that's the only decent way (JG 35).
This is her reaction to the jazziness of hymn singing and people's speaking in tongues. Her unconscious speaking in tongues is a mockery, for she never experiences the peace of mind that accompanies such an event. In his article "Politics and A Jest of God," Kenneth James Hughes points out the possible Greek comparison. The two Churches refer to the polar opposites i.e., the prototypes of Apollo and Dionysus. Rachel rejects both the tight control over emotion and the excessive outward display of it. Thus, even when she turns to God in her hour of need, she cries for a secular relationship with God.

My God, I know how suspect You are. I know how suspect I am. If You have spoken, I am not aware of having heard. If You have a voice, it is not comprehensible to me. No omens. No burning bush, no pillar of sand by day or pillar of flame by night (JG 171).

Towards the end of the novel, Rachel rejects both the Old Testament God of Anger and Punishment and the New Testament God of Redemption and opts for a God who "would be a human-type being who could be reached by tears or bribed with words" (Kenneth James Hughes 41).

Like Rachel, Vanessa MacLeod in A Bird in the House, is faced with different religious sects: the Mitigated Baptism of her maternal Grandparents, the United Church of her parents and the Pentecostal religion of Noreen, their housemaid. The Biblical stories kindle the creative spirit in her. This has been examined in the previous Chapter. There is a mild irony in her response to her Grandmother's reaction, when she says that in the Sunday School they taught her about "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle."
I was not astonished that my grandmother thought the bloody death of Jonathan was very nice, for this was her unvarying response, whatever the verse. And in fact it was not strange, for to her everything in the Bible was as gentle as she herself (BH 7).

Initially, she is fascinated by Noreen's abundant knowledge of Heaven and Hell and her communications with spirits through the Ouija board. When Noreen's statement that "[a] bird in the house means a death in the house" comes true with her father's death, Vanessa bitterly hates the religion represented by Noreen as a prison from which she battles to get out (BH 109). When Noreen comforts her by saying that her father will be in Heaven with God, she retorts angrily against any comfort that religion has to offer. "He didn't need to be saved," .... "And he is not in Heaven, because there is no Heaven. And it doesn't matter, see? It doesn't matter!" (BH 110).

Stacey MacAindra in The Fire-Dwellers and Alex Gray in Memoirs of Many in One express their dissatisfaction of the rigid norms of Christianity through parody. However, an important difference between the two characters has to be noted. While Stacey's secularism arises out of her total submersion in her household roles, Alex's secularism is her way of combining her sexuality and spirituality.

The protagonist of The Fire-Dwellers, Stacey, is more liberal in her attitude to religion than all the other protagonists. For her, God is another individual or her own masked self with whom she can hold conversations in order to get out of the confusions of daily life.
God knows why I chat to you, God--it's not that I believe in you. Or I do and I don't, like echoes in my head. It's somebody to talk to. Is that all? I don't know... . Sorry, God. But then you're not dependent upon me, or let's hope not (FD 56).

She is so deeply immersed in her roles as wife and mother that she cannot get out of them to devote her time to religion. Even Matthew, Mac's father who talks about religion is seen only as a diversion and she frequently tries to protect her children from his awkward and delicate questions. She constantly pleads with God to safeguard the interests of her children and husband, in a similar fashion.

-Stacey, how dare you complain about even one single solitary thing? Listen, God, I didn't mean it. Just don't let anything terrible happen to any of them, will you? .... -Please. Let them be okay, all their lives... (FD 65).

Patricia Morley describes Stacey's conversations with God as a "silent dialogue with a God in whom she does and does not believe" (Margaret Laurence 104). God, for her, is both an omnipotent figure and a helpless one like human beings. Her mock dialogue with God on the Day of Judgement reveals this. On the one hand, she feels God will condemn her to Hell for not being sure of herself and on the other hand, she feels He Himself will be uncertain about His Existence (FD 7). Patricia Morley also points out that the entire episode of the Richalife propaganda "is a secular parody of the religious vision of the Promised Land: 'Both spirit and Flesh Altered'" (103).

The parody extends from the obvious pun in the name to the evangelical testimonials at rallies by those who believe the pills have altered their lives. Thor is the prophet of this pseudo-religion, preaching the good news... (103).
Such a parody helps Stacey to realise the foolishness involved in man's ways towards God and religion, when once the identity of Thor is revealed. Stacey's reaction to this is yet another comic parody of the common Christian prayer. "Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways, as some goon once said. Reclothe us in our rightful mind" (FD 247). Further, as Elisabeth Potvin rightly points out, Stacey realises that Thor's offer of "secular religion is a cheap substitute for old-fashioned salvation" ("A Mystery at the Core of Life": Margaret Laurence and Women's Spirituality, 33). More importantly, as Potvin states, "Laurence inverts the mundane and sacred: hairdressers become priestesses, supermarkets become temples and Stacey communing with the birds is described as a prophetess" (32).

In Memoirs of Many in One, Alex Gray describes her search for an identity in the following terms:

Had I been a nun I could have told my beads. I could have meditated if I had been a Buddhist. I could have done almost anything if I had an identity, .... But I hadn't found the frame which fitted me (MMO 49).

This search for an identity whets Alex Gray's desire to find a spiritual frame within which she can operate. Such a search operates on two levels: On a real plane, it takes on the force of finding a Saviour who would unravel to her the mysteries of life. That she ends up with an old derelict in the park, is part of the comedy and satire which White uses. The religious search is coupled with sexuality. Whereas she expects to find a break from her past sins, she ends up perpetuating her sexual license. For instance, the attitude of the Mystic from the park is sexual.
"... I am seized by the wrist, by a steely, yet clammy, male hand. The force of obsession brings us close together, breast to breast, mouth to mouth" (MMO 102). Instead of being taught by the mystic, she teaches him to differentiate between flesh and spirit. Similarly, with the Dog which she brings home to atone for the sin of killing her husband's dog, thus causing her husband's death:

He [the Dog] has landed on my bed, and lies there in the lion couchant position, fringed paws outstretched, the purple tongue waiting to savour the salt of human flesh, or do his real job of absolving sin (MMO 106).

On an imaginary plane, the search culminates in her roles as Cassiani, the nun and Sister Benedict. We see her as Cassiani, the nun, with unexpectedly blue eyes, sweeper of mouse droppings, lover of Onouphrios, the monk, who is rejected by the 'Christians' of Nisos, as an evil-eyed sorceress; as Sister Benedict, who on the Feast of the Kippers leads the frailest member of her order into the bush, there to learn the source of goodness. In both these instances, she ends up realising her own sensuality. "My own body is unbelievably strong and helpless" (MMO 115).

The amusing search does not end with all this, for Alex breaks conventionalities in an unconventional extreme. In one of her fleeting visits to the Church, she totally abuses the items of ritual. To scrub her lipstick out, she uses holy water from the stoup.

I dried myself on a pamphlet advertising a retreat, then I sat for a moment to give thanks to Whomsoever it is in this gloomy Irish sanctuary. From the glances of various custodians I realised the Holy Spirit would have wished me to move on (MMO 39)."
Through all this, Alex untiringly tries to see her own contribution to the establishment of identity or as she puts it: "the continuity of being--though imposter--nun, sorceress, failed wife-mother, mere woman, in my various allotted lives" (MMO 80). Witness, Veronica Brady's comments on Alex's religious search. Brady is of the view that the novel,

canvasses the possibility of God, and of a God who shows himself, erupts into the here-and-now. This possibility would provide the "frame" Alex is looking for, but it is a frame which is not so much an order, scheme or structure but a frame in the original sense of the word, a movement or process ("Glabrous Shaman or Centennial Park's Very Own Saint? Patrick White's Apocalypse" 77).

While parody expresses dissatisfaction of existing religious norms, some of the Whitean protagonists choose alternate forms of religion. Thus, both Theodora Goodman (The Aunt's Story) and Mary Hare (Riders in the Chariot) are nature mystics and holy fools. While E.Twyborn in The Twyborn Affair embraces the Byzantine heritage and combines aspects of the physical and spiritual in her London brothel, Ellen Roxburgh replaces the Lord God of Hosts by the God of Love.

The roles played by Theodora and Mary Hare as nature mystics will be examined in the subsequent section dealing with the various aspects of their self-realisation. However, a brief note on their roles as holy fools is relevant here. Theodora and Mary, along with Bub Quigley (The Tree of Man), Harry Robarts (Voss) and Arthur Brown (The Solid Mandala), belong to the class of holy fools in White's novels. These so-called crazy persons possess a greater understanding of things around them and bring in a multidimensional view of the world that is beyond the bounds
of rationality and intellect. They seem to illustrate Blake's ideal: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand, / And Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the Palm of your hand / And Eternity in an Hour." In an article entitled "The Terrible Nostalgia of the Desert Landscape," Karin Hansson describes the simpletons as "explorers in their own right" who "by means of very elaborate symbolism are strongly connected to the landscape. Their voices, their skins, and even their words are often 'sandy' ... to indicate their special insight" (31).

Tracing the etymology of the words "fool" and "simple," Patricia Morley concludes that these terms are not derogatory in White's usage but which characterise their nature as spiritual elects. According to Morley, White uses "the divine fool as a simple soul, nearer than the average man to God" (The Mystery of Unity 86). By equating 'simple' to 'humble' and 'pure,' White offers his simpletons a purity of heart that ensures divine unity (Morley 87). Incidentally, humility, simplicity and pureness of being are the qualities that White considers the criteria for self-realisation. But these same qualities make them suspect in the eyes of the society they live in. For instance, Norbert Hare (Riders in the Chariot) accuses Mary of not sharing her intuitive knowledge of the chariot. Mrs. Hare's remarks about Mary in her journal also proves Mary's grasp of reality.

Her statements stop a person short. Will not deny that M's remarks usually contain the truth. But the world, I fear, will not tolerate the truth, at least in concentrated form (RC 166).

Similarly, George Goodman, The Man Who Was Given His Dinner, Miss. Spofforth and Holstius recognise Theodora's powerful
insight into reality. The Olive Schreiner epigraph to the third section of the novel and Holstius' plea to Theo to accept society's verdict of her madness, clearly reveal the relative nature of oppositions such as \textit{sanity/madness} and appearance/reality. Their spiritual insight and mystical faith in nature prove true Melville's statement in \textit{Moby Dick} that "man's insanity is heaven's sense."\footnote{According to Cynthia Vanden Driesen, the lives they lead, prompted only by instinct and intuition and not by empty convention, "dramatise the fact that these non-rational processes might in fact be more conducive to true clarity of vision" (in Ron Shepherd and K. Singh ed. \textit{Patrick White: A Critical Symposium} 79).}

What begins as an experimentation of various religious thoughts in \textit{Riders in the Chariot}, takes a turn to \textit{differentiate} between conventional Christianity and the natural religion of the aborigines in \textit{A Fringe of Leaves}. There is a sharp contrast made between the Church that holds the Lord God of Hosts and the chapel which propagates the idea of God as Love. A third strain comes through Ellen's acquaintance with the aboriginal religious thought. Describing the "negative mysticism" that operates in the novel, Veronica Brady, in her article "\textit{A Fringe of Leaves: Civilization by the Skin of Our Own Teeth}," states that "if Ellen Roxburgh is an epic protagonist, then hers is an epic of a world without God or rather, one in which He remains silent" (128). The conventional religion followed by her husband and mother-in-law proclaims the Lord God of Hosts. Ellen realises its inadequacy even at the beginning of the novel. She thinks that
"it was her origins which made her believe more intensely in the Devil than in the Deity" (EL 109). She realises that right from her Cornwall childhood "rocks had been her altars and spring-water her sacrament" (EL 222). Hence, the novel lays stress on physical necessity and the perfect adaptation of the aboriginal ways. For Ellen, worshipping of the Roxburgh God has been by rote and merely a lip service to please others. Her move away from this conventional religion first occurs during the Christmas celebration in Van Dieman's Land.

There was little in this austere temple to provoke those who look upon decoration as an incitement to sin and Popery, nor inspire others of shy sensibility who need signposts before they can venture along the paths of private mysticism (FL 94).

This celebration kindles her doubt and culminates in her confronting the dark side of her personality, thus accepting the flesh and natural things: "... she had taken it for granted that her Christian faith insured her against evil, until on Christmas Day doubts came faltering into her mind, ..." (FL 98). It also acquaints her with simplicity and necessity for survival. This helps her to see the cannibal episode as a sacrament she had partaken, in much the same spirit as the aborigines, that is to consume the strength of the individual who dies. As Veronica Brady remarks in her essay "A Properly Appointed Humanism,"

Cannibalism becomes a kind of "transubstantiation in reverse" as Ellen is taken up into the life according to nature, into the community of suffering, vulnerability and oppression represented by the aborigines. The power of this is signalled by the "single flute note endlessly repeated"—an image, ..., which recalls the story of the Carib devils who consumed a ritual morsel of the enemy god... (65-6).

Ellen's reaction here is in perfect harmony with her earlier
rejection of the God of the winning side at the Church, for that institution justifies human cruelty. It is this, which later makes her reject completely what conventional religion has to offer. To Mr. Cottle’s routine questions, her replies are full of understanding.

‘I don't know what I any longer believe’ ....

‘I do not know, Mr. Cottle, whether I am true, leave alone Christian,’ ....

‘If I was given a soul, I think it is possibly lost,’ she said...

‘Only my conscience, and that can be more terrifying than any unseen criminal’ (FL 347-8).

Such an attitude enables her to attain a sense of realisation in the crude and primitive chapel built by Pilcher, since his chapel does not divorce knowledge and experience.

The interior was bare, except for a log bench and a rough attempt at what in an orthodox church would have been the communion table... . Above the altar a sky-blue riband painted on the wall provided a background to the legend GOD IS LOVE, in the wretchedest lettering, in dribbled ochre... .

She did not attempt to interpret a peace of mind which had descended on her (she would not have been able to attribute it to prayer or reason) but let the silence enclose her like a beatitude (FL 352-3).

In her article "A Fringe of Leaves: Civilization by the Skin of Our Own Teeth," Veronica Brady makes an interesting connection between Pilcher’s chapel and the Dostoevsky epigraph to The Solid Mandala: "it was an old and rather poor church ... but such churches are the best for praying in" (133).

In The Twyborn Affair, the Hindu concept of rebirth and re-incarnation finds a secular parody. Through the successive avatars as Eudoxia--Eddie--Eadith, the protagonist tries to
understand the **mystery** of being and existence. Apart from this aspect, the novel also deals with the ideas put forward by the Bogomil sect. The **Bogomils** (Lovers of God or Beloved of God) flourished between the tenth and fourteenth centuries and were known to have practised all manner of sexual perversions (*A.P. Riemer. "Eddie and the Bogomils--Some Observations on The Twyborn Affair"* 12). The **Bogomil** concept of dualism, that is, the gulf that exists between the imperfect world and the perfection of God is twisted in this novel to refer to the intrinsic ambivalence of human nature and human experience. Furthermore, this religious concept is used by White to refer to the ambiguity that exists in the relation of the sexes and in marriage.

Tonight again we [Angelos and Eudoxia] have been over the Bogomil heresy without my coming any closer to what essentially it means. Perhaps it's that way with any heresy, more than most others those of sexuality (*TA 77*).

... the Holy Ghost presides, even in the souls of unbelievers, as he does over most marriages. A. to E., Boyd to Joanie Golson, Eadie Twyborn to Edward her Judge. Sometimes the Holy Ghost is a woman, but whether He, She or It, always there, holding the disintegrating structure together (or so we hope in our agnostic hearts) and will not, must not, withdraw (*TA 78*).

Thus, both sexuality of any sort, and marriage are suspect in the eyes of the protagonist. There is also a sceptical attitude towards traditional Christianity.

She [Eadith] continued obsessed by the image of her mother in a church pew, black gloves clamped to the prayer-book. She had heard of Italian peasant-women crawling as they licked the floor of the church commemorating their saint, and once in a half-sleep, Eadith visualised Eadie standing at the end of a platform in the underground, herself licking at the stretch of filth separating her from possible redemption (*TA 403-4*).

**Eadie's** appearance at a Church is hinted to be of no signifi-
cance. On the other hand, her acceptance of the sexual ambiguity of her child in itself leads to her redemption. Hena Maes-Jelinek in her article "Altering Boundaries," draws attention to the "deep sense of the mystery of both man and God" in the novel. Just as the various perspectives on E. (by Joanie Golson, M. Pelletier, Mme. Reboa and his/her diary) fail to reveal E.'s sexual identity, the nature of God "whether He, She or It" and His existence remain uncertain (171). On the one hand, such treatment reveals E.'s scepticism to religion (very similar to Stacey's in The Fire-Dwellers) and on the other, the human nature of the divine, encountered in A Fringe of Leaves. The coupling of sexuality and spirituality finds its natural culmination in Memoirs of Many in One.

The sceptical questioning of the Gods of the Establishment in the other novels studied in the earlier sections, takes the form of open defiance combined with internalisation of the rejected values in Hagar Shipley in The Stone Angel. In terms of attitude to religion, the characters in this novel can be divided into conformists and nonconformists of Scot Presbyterianism. Jason Currie leads the list of conformists which also includes Doris and Marvin. The nonconformists include Bram and John. Hagar occupies a middle position, in that she sees religion as establishing order which she would like to adhere to in her actions, but against which she revolts unconsciously. The conformists are again superficial in their attitudes and thoughts about religion. Jason's teaching includes "the sense of divine calling to work, in other words the Protestant work ethic" (Andre
Dommergues. "Order and Chaos in The Stone Angel" 64). Jason believes that "[t]he devil finds work for idle hands... God helps those who help themselves. Many hands make light work" (SA 8). Hence, Jason never squanders time or money. Bram occupies a diametrically opposite position and in a way, it is the unconscious revolt in her mind to Jason that attracts Bram to her. Nevertheless, Jason is superficial in attaching importance to status and prestige in Church matters. The minister thanks all those who have contributed generously to the building of the new Church and includes Jason's name first in the roll call. Jason's reaction explicitly reveals his attitude. 'Father sat with modestly bowed head, but turned to me and whispered very low: "I and Luke McVite must’ve given the most, as he called our names the first"' (SA 16). Hagar's attitude to religion is one of amused scepticism, which at best, turns into indifference. Her scenes with Minister Troy are comical. For instance, her description of him runs as follows:

... minister is plump and pink, and if he met John the Baptist in tatters in the desert, stuffing dead locusts into that parched mouth for food, and blazing the New Kingdom out of those terrible eye sockets, he would faint (SA 38).

Unlike Doris or Marvin, Hagar has no use for religion. Justifying Hagar's rejection of heaven as "an ersatz goal," Elisabeth Potvin, in her essay "A Mystery at the Core of Life," states that "Justice and love are irreconcilable according to the harsh Calvinist doctrine" (29) and matches Hagar in withholding mercy and compassion. "Ought I to appeal? It’s the done thing. Our Father--no. I want no part of that. All I can think is--Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg" (SA 307).
The pride, which dominates all her human relationships, extends to the Divine also. As she tells Mr. Troy, prayers have not wrought anything for her.

"I've never had much use for prayer, Mr. Troy. Nothing I prayed for ever came to anything . . . If God's a crossword puzzle, or a secret code, it's hardly worth the bother, it seems to me" (SA 119).

Hagar sees God as somebody unseen but who exercises power over human beings. Even in the cannery scene with Lees, she senses the omnipotence of God. "We sit quietly in this place, empty except for ourselves, and listen for the terrible laughter of God, but can hear only the rapid chuckling of the sea" (SA 234). In his article "The Paradox of The Stone Angel," Claude Pollack sees this remark as capturing Hagar's paradoxical belief that "although God is absent, he is responsible, and he rarely misses a chance for a good laugh" (272). As Sandra Djwa rightly perceives, "Laurence's version of a cruel God who sports with human misery . . . may be a fusion of the Jehovah of Canadian prairie fiction with her sense of the appallingly difficult existence of the Somali tribesman" ("False Gods and the True Covenant" 44-5). It also explicates man's inability to understand "the irony of human existence" from his "restricted vantage point" (Sandra Djwa 45). However, the lesson she learns from Lees is that no individual or event is the cause, for life is determined by many causes. As Lees explains the causes of his child's death,

"I can't figure out whose fault it could have been." . . .

'My granddad's, for being a Bible puncher in the first place? Mother's for making me prefer hellfire to
lavender talcum? Lou's for insisting nothing could happen to him? Mine, for not saying right out, long before, that I might as well not go, for all the good it was doing me?" (SA 234).

This leads Hagar to believe that no individual or God was responsible for her son's death.

The culminating point of the sceptical attitude to religion is the total absence of any conventional religious thought in the lives of Elizabeth Hunter (The Eve of the Storm) and Morag Gunn (The Diviners). Though Mrs. Hunter does not adhere to any one form of religion, she does accept the supreme, overwhelming presence of the divine during her moment of illumination in the 'eye' of the storm. This aspect will be explored in detail in the subsequent section of this Chapter. In the case of Morag, there is an initial questioning of God's mercy when she confronts the deaths of her parents. Later, there is a total overshadowing of the traditional 'God' figure by several 'diviners' who help her in probing the mystery that underlies life. That Christie, the garbage collector, Royland, the diviner, Catherine Parr Traill, the pioneer-settler and Jules, the Metis singer impart several important things about life, and that these help her as a creative artist, were examined in the Second Chapter. However, the important fact to be noticed is the emergence of a "personalised religion" which takes into account the myth and magic embodied in the ancestral heritage. Treating the 'diviners' in the novel as 'shamans,' Melanie Mortlock concludes that these figures grant Morag "unusual intuitive insight" to accept and willingly relinquish "life's many gifts (or, in mythic terms, God's grace)" as also "the rules of physical and psychological
survival" ("The Religion of Heritage: The Diviners as a Thematic Conclusion to the Manawaka Series" 138-9). Michel Fabre ("Words and the World") sums up this idea succinctly and to quote him:

Divining thus amounts, ... , to being able to read the meaning inscribed in the world, in nature, and in events by the hidden hand of God. It is the ability to discern a design or a "pattern," ... , calling to mind the Jamesian metaphor of "the figure in the carpet" ... [or] according to the metaphor in Carlyle's Sartor Resartus ... the visible manifestation of essence and being (253).

The range of reactions, that characterises the attitudes of the protagonists to religion, reveals explicitly their head-on confrontation with religious conventions. The scepticism expressed and the seeking of alternate forms of religion also reveal the "eclectic" and "non-dogmatic" religious approaches of White and Laurence (Peter Beatson 167). Further, such approaches may be viewed as attempts to re-define "religion and spirituality in a way that enables women to recognize the spiritual in all areas of their lives, not simply in relation to the institutional church" (Carol Christ xvii). Such approaches also reflect the questioning of "the good-evil, light-darkness dichotomy of Christian religion" and the Judaeo-Christian tradition which associates light with good and dark with evil thus "excluding a part of human nature as sinful in essence" (Helen Buss 26). Tracing Laurence's shift from "androcentric orthodox religion to 'gynolatric'" or "woman-reverencing," spirituality in the Manawaka novels, Elisabeth Potvin concludes that Laurence equates "spiritual freedom" not to "a question of either/or, but instead an acceptance of the possibilities of both/and" ("A Mystery at the Core of Life" 27). This statement holds good for White's
Almost all the protagonists confront the traditional form of religions. The reason for this, arguably, is that both Laurence and White view religion as a factor that bind women to conformism in much the same way as other social conventions. Thus, going against orthodox religion is a necessary step for the move towards the liberation of the self. In both the writers, there is an evolution from conformism to orthodox religion to a secular and personal form of religion. Thus, whether the protagonist breaks away or conforms to religion, the final outcome is to gain a truer sense of one's identity. Describing the growth in identity as something akin to self-realisation, Sandra Djwa justifies "the rejection of false gods as enabling the individual to win through to the true spirit which can inform the flesh which the now lifeless convention has denied" ("False Gods and the True Covenant" 50). The gods in whom the women have belief is a mysterious god glimpsed through a secular path and by coming to terms with the dark side of one's personality. Thus, the novels neither moralise about good or evil nor present an abstract doctrine, but open to "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" (William Walsh. Patrick White's Fiction 124). Laurence and White may be termed 'religious' only in their intentions to reveal 'the clarity of being' hidden from individuals (Walsh 125).
Terms like self, self-realisation, illumination are value-laden and can take on various connotations. Hence, it becomes important to define them (though they defy any simple definition) in the sense in which they are used in this section.

Self may be defined as an individual, an ‘I’ with an urge to know itself.³ At the precise moment of awareness, the ‘I’ reflects itself as both the subject and the object. This brings us to the question of true and false selves, which may be differentiated as the idea of what one is according to oneself as opposed to the idea of one by society. In his book Existentialism, John Macquarrie refers to this distinction as the gap that exists "between existence and essence, or between facticity and possibility, or between the self one is and the self that is projected" (203). He further points out that it is this ‘gap’ which brings in a sense of alienation as also sets the process of self-realisation going.

Self-realisation may be defined as the moments when the self arrives at an unqualified intensity of thought and feeling. William Walsh defines these "moments of heightened existence" as moments when the individual "seemed about to break out into the world of otherness, or at least to be on the brink of being released from the cell of self" (Patrick White's Fiction 22). At such moments, the distinction between the observer and the observed ceases to exist. As J. Krishnamurti puts it, "Consciousness itself is the I." The distinction between the self and self-consciousness is no longer present.

Women and the Quest for Self-Realisation
Being and consciousness have become one; the thinker and the thought have merged; all division, identification or contradiction have ceased. Nothing is lost, all has become one. Only the distinctions are abolished not reality (Luis S.R. Vas ed. The Mind of J. Krishnamurti 191-2).

This statement finds an echo in Dr. Radhakrishnan’s definition of self-realisation as "the process, as well as the result, of balancing the different sides of our nature, body, mind, and spirit, the objective and the subjective, the individual and the social, the finite and the infinite" (Eastern Religions and Western Thought 36).

The moment of realisation is without any feeling of pride or greatness. In other words, it is a state of being aware of and giving out love, compassion and understanding. Thus, there is an intense awareness but there is no reaction, analysis, evaluation, comparison or argument.

Even though concepts like self-realisation and illumination are nearly synonymous, subtle differentiations can be made between them. Self-realisation is a gradual process and thus, a series of events may bring about the awareness. On the other hand, illumination is usually a single/isolated moment of great awareness which may be epiphanic. Thus, self-realisation accommodates illumination as its ultimate point of awareness. In his essay, "The Function of Imagery in Patrick White's Novels," Michael Cotter defines illumination as "a final culminating moment in which the whole of life is given meaning; in which the "inklings of transcendence" that manifest themselves at different points in a character's life assume ... full scale proportion" (in Ron Shepherd and K. Singh ed. Patrick White: A Critical
The quests for self-realisation undertaken by the protagonists in the two writers may be assessed within the frames mentioned below. A common feature which almost all the protagonists share is their urge "to be a pilgrim of the imagination and understanding on a path that leads to light" (Clara Thomas. "Towards Freedom: The Work of Margaret Laurence and Northrop Frye" 88). The first step in this process involves "emptying the self of the socially approved constituents of personality including communally sanctioned moral values and sentimental social or religious illusions" (Robert S. Baker. "Romantic Onanism in The Vivisector" 204). According to Hilary Heltay, the world of perception that opens up when the characters cross the socially defined limits "has its foundations in love, nature, art, and faith, in utmost simplicity and madness" ("The Novels of Patrick White" 92). However, such a movement also results in the alienation and isolation felt by the protagonists. On the positive side, alienation from society helps the characters to come to terms with reality (or what White calls "pureness of being") devoid of any trappings. This idea can also be found in Vedanta and Existentialism. For instance, The Bhagavad-Gita sees reality as being enveloped by maya or 'illusion.'

As a flame is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an embryo is wrapped by the amnion, so This [the Eternal or Brahman] is enveloped by it [māya] (The Bhagavad-Gita trans. Annie Besant. III. 38 59).

A similar idea may be discerned in Sartre's reference to the world as a "varnish" on the surface of being-in-itself and concealing it (cited in Robert G. Olson's An Introduction to...
Existentialism 39). Carol Christ voices a similar idea in her discussion of women's spiritual quest. She describes "nothingness" as a spiritual experience which necessitates "a stripping away of the facade of conventional reality that allows us to confront our own depths and to see the world without illusion" (Diving Deep and Surfacing xviii).

Another feature of the quest is the protagonist's attempts to choose for oneself. This entails accepting total responsibility for one's actions. This attitude that "the individual must accept responsibility for his [her] own life and make of it what he [she] can" (David Tacey in Ron Shepherd and K. Singh ed. Patrick White: A Critical Symposium 37), is what White and Laurence have in common with Existentialism. Patricia Morley's description of the existential nature of Laurence's vision is equally appropriate for White's vision.

Man is rarely free, .... The other side of the coin is bondage, entrapment, alienation. Some of the bonds are forged by her characters for themselves; some are imposed from without, .... Laurence depicts an often agonizing struggle to break these bonds, to overcome alienation, to achieve an integration both personal and social which is imaged as a freedom to love and to accept love, to share, to meet and to touch ("The long trek home: Margaret Laurence's Stories" 19).

Another Existentialist feature which the writers seem to insist on, is the direct confrontation with love and death. These two topics are tabooed in the societies depicted by the two writers and hence, the necessity to break the taboos.

Let us now consider the important criteria that are emphasised by the writers in relation to self-realisation. Intuition occupies an important part in the quest. One of White's
illuminati, Mordecai Himmelfarb (Riders in the Chariot) states that "[t]he intellect has failed us." This remark, according to Patricia Morley, "reflects a contrast between two sorts of knowledge--spiritual wisdom and purely abstract rationalism" (The Mystery of Unity 6). The 'elect' in both White and Laurence despise the intellectual curiosity combined with spiritual sterility. Emphasis is laid on the acceptance of the non-rational modes of knowledge. The aim, as Dr. Radhakrishnan puts it, is to harmonize "[b]ody and mind, instinct and intellect [to] become the willing servants of spirit and not its tyrannical masters" (Eastern Religions and Western Thought 37). Further, intuition enables the self to perceive the full meaning and significance of the moment of insight at that very moment and not afterwards as it happens in the case of objective knowledge and intellect.

Another criterion of importance is suffering. The major hurdle in realising the self is the incapacity or the refusal to see oneself squarely as one is. Suffering forces this insight and awakens awareness. "Suffering is but intense clarity of thoughts and feelings which makes you see things as they are," says J. Krishnamurti (Luis S.R. Vas 207). The Gandhian epigraph to White's Happy Valley equates suffering with spiritual progress. More importantly, empathy with suffering implies certain spiritual purity. It can also be seen as a way of obliterating the distinction between self and other.

Another facet of self-realisation that can be discerned is the heightened awareness of the textures of experience and a perception of the nature of reality in all its aspects. Thus, it
is a moment when the individual is most deeply in touch with the inner self and most open to the world around. Carol Christ defines illumination as "a powerful experience of finitude or limitation in which social structures and structures of consciousness which had provided meaning in a person's life are called into question and recognized as less than absolute" (Diving Deep and Surfacing xiii). This necessitates a movement beyond distinctions such as good and evil; illusion and reality; joy and suffering; life and death; and that of the self and the other. Experience imparts knowledge of the world and through it, the knowledge of the self. According to Vedānta, this is the knowledge that the ātman in every individual partakes of the Brahman (the Cosmic Soul/Divine Essence/ Absolute Reality etc.) as also the fact that the ātman and Brahman are one and the same. This enables the questers to achieve realisation in the midst of worldly affairs. This also explains the return to society of the self-realised women in the novels of White and Laurence. They operate within the confined limits of society but are aware of what is beyond these limits. Peter Beatson gives a comprehensive summary of the relationship between the questers and society, and to quote him:

As the body is to the core of being, so society in general is to the unique individual. This relationship is expressed through a typical nodal pattern... An individual at the centre undergoes a supreme moment of exhilaration or despair. From this central character circles of awareness radiate out, through one or two who are intimately involved in the experience, to others who are less intimately concerned but still have some intuition of the significance of the mystery, to a periphery that swirls about, sometimes indifferent, sometimes repelled, sometimes fascinated, sometimes concentrated on the centre with murderous hatred (The Eye in the Mandala 122-3).
In the novels of Patrick White, women undertaking quests for self-realisation may be classified under two heads: Earth Mothers and Illuminati. Earth Mothers, through their bountiful, protective and understanding nature give endlessly. They also respond to everyday life in a simple and direct manner through instinct and intuition. The illuminati, on the other hand, move away from society and their experience of self-realisation gives them knowledge of the self and knowledge of the world. While Earth Mothers may gain an illumination and thus form part of the latter category, the reverse is not always possible. Mary Hare and Ruth Godbold in Riders in the Chariot are fine examples of Earth Mothers. Theodora Goodman (The Aunt's Story), Laura Trevelyan (Voss), Elizabeth Hunter (The Eye of the Storm), Ellen Roxburgh (A Fringe of Leaves) and Eadie Twyborn (The Twyborn Affair) are illuminaries. Ellen Roxburgh combines the qualities of both categories in her personality. The same may be said of Mary Hare and Ruth Godbold though they fit into the former category more appropriately.

Patrick White stresses on humility and simplicity as necessary conditions for self-realisation ("The Prodigal Son"). This search for "pureness of being" which is described in T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" as "[a] condition of complete simplicity /Costing not less than everything," is a recurrent motif in the novels of White. The need for discarding inessentials is expressed in terms of Hinduism. In an early short story, "The Twitching Colonel," Patrick White uses the onion-peel image to
describe the process of self-realisation.

"Only in dissolution is salvation from illusion": "I shall strip myself, the onion-folds of prejudice, till standing naked though conscious I see myself complete or else consumed like the Hindu conjuror who is translated into space" (606-7).

A similar image is used by Mary Hare in Riders in the Chariot: "Eventually I shall discover what is at the centre, if enough of me is peeled away." The idea embodied in the above statements is the knowledge of everything/nothing that are inherent in being. Let us now analyse the novels of the two writers in the light of the ideas discussed above.

The Aunt's Story

Theodora Goodman is the first of Patrick White's characters who undertakes a quest for the realisation of the self. Through her character, White puts forth ideas which are to become recurrent themes in his later works. In her lonely search for the self, she undergoes suffering. As Thomas L. Warren rightly remarks, "[s]uch suffering functions as a means of paring away layers of superficial being until a central core of the self is found" ("Patrick White: The Early Novels" 134). During the course of the novel, Theodora asks: "Why then, ... , is this world which is so tangible in appearance so difficult to hold?" (AS 272). Her search for self-knowledge provides the answer. It is because the world and reality are veiled by illusion or what in Vedānta is termed maya.

At the beginning of the novel, we see Theodora being defined in terms of the roles forced on her by society: an ugly spinster
with no bright chances of marriage, a good companion in the service of old Mrs. Goodman, her mother and an aunt to her niece. Further, she is also unfairly compared with her sister. Theodora's loneliness at this stage is alleviated by a series of figures: her father, the Man Who Was Given His Dinner, Moraïtis and Miss. Spofforth. They prophesy Theodora's vision.

`You'll see a lot of funny things, Theodora Goodman. You'll see them because you've eyes to see. And they'll break you. But perhaps you'll survive...' (AS 45).

.... there is much that you will experience. You will see clearly, beyond the bone... . But there will be moments of passing affection, through which the opaque world will become transparent, and of such a moment you will be able to say--my dear child (AS 63).

Theodora's insight into things is established early in the novel when she is "riding round Our Place with Father":

Theodora looked at the land that was theirs. There was peace of mind enough on Meroe. You could feel it, whatever it was, and you were not certain, but in your bones. It was in the clothes-line on which the sheets dropped, in the big pink and yellow cows cooling their heels in creek mud, in magpie's speckled egg, and the disappearing snake. It was even in the fences, grey with age and yellow with lichen, that tumbled down and lay round Meroe (AS 24. emphasis added).

This kind of insight reaches a climax in her statement of faith to Gen. Sokolnikov in the Jardin Exotique section. There are times when Theodora sees the world as "a little crystal ball that she could hold in her hand, and stroke and stroke" (AS 151). This gives the realisation of the coexistence of sūnyatā and all-pervading Brahman or that 'Everything is nothing, and nothing is everything' (AS 152). This, in turn, enables her to answer the General's question whether she believes in saints. 'I believe in a pail of milk,' said Theodora, 'with the blue shadow round the rim.' .... 'And the cow's breath still in it' (AS 152).
Alongside such moments of insight, Theodora also realises her own destructive nature [in Beatson's words, "The Fall is a necessary prerequisite for the Resurrection" (The Eve in the Mandala 36)] as is seen in her instinct to kill her mother and in the hawk shooting incident with Frank Parrott. On one occasion, she takes the kitchen knife "very thin and impervious" with an aim to kill her mother but at the right moment she realises that this does not cut the knot' of her bondage. The mandalic significance of the 'knot' becomes evident in reference to Arthur's knotted marble in The Solid Mandala which is considered a symbol of perfection and wholeness. "I am guilty of a murder that has not been done, she said, it is the same thing, blood is only an accompaniment" (AS 123). On waking up, Mrs. Goodman significantly comments on Theodora's appearance as one who has seen a murder.

This type of a destructive instinct termed "The Great Monster Self" in the novel, looms large and is exorcised in the Jardin Exotique section. This exorcism is an attempt to achieve the desirable state which resembles "nothing more than air or water." The epigraph from Henry Miller to this section with its emphasis on "the great fragmentation of maturity" subtly explains Theodora's journey. At Hotel du Midi, people lead illusory lives. They take on aspects of people known to Theodora, for instance, the relationship between Katina Pavlov and Theodora recounts her relationship with Lou, her niece. But Katina may also be taken to represent the positive side of Theodora herself. In such a case, Lieselotte represents Theodora's destructive nature. With the final destruction of the hotel by fire, Theo's
link with the realistic illusion breaks and she realises the need for **humility**, **simplicity** and suffering in order to **gain** a knowledge of the self. One way by which she achieves this is by stripping herself of all the factors determining the ego. She gains anonymity by relinquishing some material objects including her rail tickets. She also refers to herself as Miss. Plinkington and presumes that "**[t]his way** perhaps she came a little closer to **humility**, to anonymity, to pureness of being" (AS 269). On the one hand, the assumption of a different name may suggest the acceptance of "everything and nothing" in one stroke and on the other, a newer form of ego-assertion. That Theodora has reached a state of acceptance is evident in her performance of menial tasks like scrubbing and washing the shack. She also refuses to go with Mrs. Johnson "[b]ecause she firmly intended that this game for the soul of Theodora Goodman should be finally hers" (AS 281). This marks Theodora's progress in her quest when she makes her own choices and accepts responsibility for them. Perhaps, this is the reason for her arrival in the American West and not returning to Australia. Commenting on Theodora's destination in the American West which is considered as Abyssinia, Patricia Morley makes an interesting observation that links the American autumn to the Australian spring and sees Theo "embracing all continents, all seasons" (The Mystery of Unity 69). This may also be taken to suggest Theo's escape from the spatio-temporal bounds.

Theodora's conversation with Holstius emphasises and explains her vision. Holstius emphasises the need to let go of her past.
'Your sense of permanence is perverted, as it is in most people. We are too inclined to consider the shapes of flesh that looms up at us out of mirrors, and because they do not continue to fit like gloves, we take fright and assume that permanence is a property of pyramids and suffering. But true permanence is a state of multiplication and division. As you should know, Theodora Goodman, Faces inherit features. Thought and experience are bequeathed' (AS 284. emphasis added).

The mathematical metaphor brings to mind a similar image used during Stan Parker's vision in The Tree of Man: "One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums." According to Thomas Warren,

White's use of the mathematical metaphor suggests his Platonism; for Plato, mathematics bridges the worlds of being and becoming. There is infinite possibility for multiplication and division in mathematics, as well as in the universe, and that infinitude constitutes permanence ("Patrick White: The Early Novels" 138).

Elaborating these ideas, Warren states that, in this passage, Patrick White has stressed the point that for

[t]hose who suffer in humility and simplicity glimpse a World beyond that described by those who favor the reasonable life. The vision is of the unity that the universe possesses and which should be man's base for his view of reality (137).

With the advent of Holstius, the different threads of the novel are drawn together.

'You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow,' Holstius said. 'Or flesh and marble, or illusion and reality, or life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman, you must accept .... there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality. Each of your several lives is evidence of this' (AS 278).

Acceptance of the paradox of life instead of trying to reconcile them is itself a form of realisation. Such an understanding of the ultimate reality underlying one's knowledge of the world helps Theodora to gain her vision. In this respect, Holstius may
be viewed as the reality which Theodora recognises only after she has broken the illusions of the world: whether Merœ or Jardin Exotique. She has progressed to such a state that she is known by herself rather than as a daughter or an aunt. The representatives of society cannot understand her view of reality or her relationship with the universe. Hence, the suitability of the Olive Schreiner epigraph: "When your life is most real, to me you are mad." The epigraph may be taken to suggest the relative nature of madness. However, in relation to the novel, it may be taken to suggest the inability of transcribing such moments of awareness into words or communicate it to fellow humans.

Voss

While discussing Laura's journey towards self-realisation, it is important to bear in mind the fact that, for her, it is not a lonely search like Theodora's. Both Laura and Voss progress together in the path of self-knowledge. Veronica Brady in her article, "In My End is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of Voss," describes Laura as a "twinning device" of Voss, similar to Waldo and Arthur Brown in The Solid Mandala (24). Thus, Voss' journey across the landscape is paralleled by Laura's journey through her mindscape. This concept of doubling will be elaborated in the Chapter on Techniques. While Laura teaches Voss the need of humility in accepting human weakness before God, it is because of her relationship with Voss that she herself returns to her religious faith. Laura's relationship with Rose Portion also gains significance in the novel.
At the beginning of the novel, Laura is portrayed as an intellectual prig and a religious skeptic. Though on a higher rational plane than the others in her immediate circle, Laura is described as being 'suffocated by the fuzz of faith' (V 9). Like the other illuminati, however, Laura is intuitively perceptive. "She did believe, however, most palpably, in wood, with the reflections in it, and in clear daylight, and in water" (V 9). Again, she is also totally self-sufficient, a quality which makes her alienation from others easy. However, unlike Theodora or Mary Hare, Laura does not reject human relationships: "Yet, in spite of this admirable self-sufficiency, she might have elected to share her experience with some similar mind, if such a mind had offered" (V 9). This accounts for her instant liking for Voss. She attributes her strength to "arrogance" and "will" (V 75), qualities she shares with Voss. Her brief, yet significant, meetings with Voss, awakens her to the fact that only by humble surrender can both of them be saved. Again, this is a move away from her rational stand.

With the return of faith, Laura becomes involved with Rose's life. Earlier, her only reaction towards Rose Portion is her repulsion of the physical body. However, it is only through Rose that Laura learns about the true nature of suffering. As Rose tells Laura, '... I was not meant to suffer, not then, or now—you would have said. But sufferin' creeps up. And in different disguises. You do not recognize it, miss. You will see' (V 76-7). Laura also understands from Rose's lifestory that some superior power operates and so suffering cannot be resisted by her will alone. This is why, while accepting Voss' proposal,
Laura tells him that their only hope of salvation lies in praying together. Her involvements with Voss and Rose grow simultaneously. She begins to identify closely with Rose and thus, her impassioned plea to her uncle and aunt:

‘Do you not understand the importance of this life which we are going to bring into our house? Regardless of its origin. It is a life. It is my life, your life, anybody’s life. It is life. I am so happy for it. And frightened. That something may destroy this proof of life...’ (V 224. emphasis added).

Laura's identification with Rose grows closer and closer that on certain occasions, she physically experiences the sense perceptions of Rose. "Once she had felt the child kick inside her, and she bit her lip for the certainty, the shape her love had taken" (V 227). At the time of Mercy's birth, the midwife tells Laura: ‘Well, you are that drawn, dear, about the face, anyone would think it was you had just been delivered of the bonny thing’ (V 230). As Geoffrey Dutton correctly points out, such a "visible token of love" seems far-fetched (Patrick White 27). While Dutton's comment is acceptable, one has to take into account the effect of such an experience in Laura's progress towards self-realisation for which Rose's death acts as a climax.

She describes her reactions to Voss:

... 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 face of Death as I had found it on the pillow (V 239. emphasis added).

This quotation assumes importance because it stresses the onset of the dissolution of Laura's ego and the shedding of superficial
layers of existence. The significance of this passage lies in Laura's experience of "everywhere and nowhere" simultaneously which is very similar to Theodora's experience of "everything and nothing." Furthermore, Laura's acceptance of nothingness (sunyata) frees her of the fear of death which is crucial to self-realisation. Describing this instance as "the moment of the eclipse of the self, of its dissolution into wind, earth and the ocean beyond, through which it attains to a greater understanding and love," G.A. Wilkes sees it as a high point in Laura's quest in his essay "A Reading of Patrick White's Voss" (Ten Essays on Patrick White 135). That she realises the value of suffering and the worthiness of a virtue like humility, is evident in her remark.

Laura begins praying in earnest and surrenders herself completely to God.

'My prospects . . . are in the hands of God' (V 308). Laura could not answer. This is the point, she felt, at which it will be decided, one way or the other, but by some superior power. Her own mind was not equal to it (V 313).

Laura's words echo Le Mesurier's earlier in the novel.

'In the beginning I used to imagine that if I were to succeed in describing with any accuracy something, ..., then I would be expressing all truth. But I could not... . Until I became aware of my power. The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming' (V 271).

Laura grows in her spiritual stature. In an attempt at complete surrender, she even prepares herself to sacrifice Mercy whom she greatly loves: "You see, I am willing to give up so much to prove that human truths are also divine. This is the true meaning of
Christ" (Y 371).

The final stage in Laura's self-realisation is her understanding of her suffering as well as feeling intuitively Voss' illumination. While both Laura and Voss struggle to decipher "the simplicity of a great idea," it is she who, by undergoing the passion of Christ, understands the message central to the novel. 'How important it is to understand the three stages. Of God into man. Man. And man returning into God...' (V 386). She also understands that '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' (V 387). Through this understanding, her moment of awareness comes to her in a flash.

' ... there are certain beliefs a clergyman may explain to one from childhood onward, without one's understanding, except in theory, until suddenly, almost in spite of reason, they are made clear. Here, suddenly, in this room, of which I imagined I knew all the corners, I understand!' (V 386)

The religious significance of Laura's concept of the three stages of spiritual progression so well brought out by John and Rose Marie Beston, is essentially Christian ("The Theme of Spiritual Progression in Voss"). They see Laura as a Virgin Mother and a Female Christ in a novel where Voss is the Christ-figure or John the Baptist, Jackie, a Judas figure and Judd, a Peter figure. However, a Vedantic interpretation is also possible in seeing man (jīevātma/individual soul) as a part of God (Paramātma/Cosmic Soul). In every human life, the Divine Power is continually veiled by maya (illusion) and avidyā (Ignorance). By escaping this illusion, an individual realises the Divine Essence (Brahman).
Laura's importance in the novel does not stop with her experience of illumination. In coining to live in society and working for social progress with the knowledge gained through this profound experience, Laura emerges as the centre of interest in the novel. Veronica Brady brilliantly sums this up in her article, "In My End is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of Voss":

White comes to a classical humanistic position, asserting in effect that this world is not all that we can know or aspire to, but that it is what we can be sure of and must trust in. In this sense to go on living in the city of man, honestly and true to one's personal values, is more heroic perhaps than to die, however, splendidly, in the desert (17).

How Laura translates and combines her visionary experience with life experiences has been dealt in the section "Women as Teachers" in Chapter Two. Since she understands that all truths are partial, except "the greatest truth," she allows myths and legends of Voss to grow where it cannot be avoided. She never loses sight of reality and that is why she emphatically states that:

‘Voss did not die,’ ... ‘He is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it’ (V 448).

Riders in the Chariot

As suggested in the opening paragraph of this section, Mary Hare and Ruth Godbold gain self-realisation through their roles as Earth Mothers rather than their roles as the feminine part of the quartet of riders. Mary Hare is close and sensitive to Nature and Mrs. Godbold cares maternally, not only for her children but also for the other three riders—Mary, Himmelfarb and Dubbo. It
is interesting to note the difference in the modes of perception of the four riders. Cecil Hadcraft sums up comprehensively in his article "The Theme of Revelation in Patrick White's Novels":

... their modes of reception are varied—in a fit or seizure, in intellectual contemplation, in a sensual or physical joy, in a tortured or drunken insight. And their acceptances correspond to their sensibilities—as compensation, as understanding, as accepted mystery, as a subject for expression (40).

Such a difference springs from the fact that their knowledge of the chariot comes from different sources. Mary Hare comes to know of it when, in an unusual moment of understanding, her father refers to the chariot. Himmelfarb gathers knowledge from his readings in Kabbalistic writings. Ruth Godbold knows the chariot from the hymns she sang as a child in England and Alf Dubbo from a book of paintings.

While looking into Mary Hare's character and her self-realisation, the personality trait which strikes the reader is her closeness to nature. This trait enables her to move unhindered in the wild bush like any burrowing animal. She understands the natural world well, even though her link with the human world is rather tentative. Himmelfarb and Mrs. Godbold enable her to reach out to the human world. Her closeness to nature also enables her to conceive of the chariot in terms of natural occurrences.

That Mary Hare is different from others is revealed in her statement early in the novel. 'I am not afraid,' she said, 'of anything. Or not of the things people are afraid of (RC 9). As for her relationship with nature, her early years in Xanadu may be described as Edenic.
She scattered **crumbs** instead, and birds came down, hobbling and bobbing at her feet, clawing at her shoulders, and in one case, holding on to the ribs of her hat (EC 38).

Every morning ..., she had put a saucer of milk, but the snake remained to be converted. She would wait, and eventually, of course, perfect understanding would be reached (RC 39).

She believes in the good of all existing things. Her belief in nature is essentially transcendental.

`... I have no proper gift, of words, I mean. Oh yes, I believe! I believe in what I see, and what I cannot see. I believe in a thunderstorm, and wet grass, and patches of light, and stillness. There is such a variety of good. On earth. And everywhere' (RC 58).

This enables her to fix her identity close to nature.

Now she recalled with nostalgia occasions when she had lost her identity in those of trees, bushes, inanimate objects, or entered into the minds of animals, of which the desires were unequivocal or honest (RC 82. emphasis added).

Such an attitude helps her in building a strong sense of good and evil. That is why she questions Mrs. Jolley's **justification** for killing the snake. She also feels that it is difficult to distinguish between good and evil. She sees nature as essentially good and human beings as bad and cruel. In fact, in close moments of contact with humans, she connects them to some object in nature. For instance, in moments of understanding, she sees her father as "a distressed or desperate animal" (RC 23).

Mary Hare shows complete ignorance of the Bible and conventional Christian religion.

She found the Epistles too dry, and did not go much on the **Revelations**—... '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 (RC 49).
She also replies in a similar vein to Himmelfarb when he asks her about relating the chariot to redemption: "My own house is full of things waiting to be seen. Even quite common objects are shown to us only when it is time for them to be" (RC 155). She does not foresee or work consciously for redemption but allows things to take their natural course. Thus, she progresses gradually from nature to love of man through her relationship with Himmelfarb:

Whether she had suspected a moment before, probably for the first and only time what it was to be a woman, her passion was more serious, touching. Urgent now that she has been reduced to the status of a troubled human being (RC 30).

Thus, Himmelfarb's crucifixion and his ensuing suffering have a great impact on her. "So Miss Hare was translated. Her animal body became the least part of her, as breathing thoughts turned to being" (RC 432). In his exposition of Riders in the Chariot, Colin Roderick perceives that:

To Miss Hare, Himmelfarb's passion is a transfiguring agent: "she had entered that state of complete union which her nature had never yet achieved" that is to say, ..., that she had at last glimpsed the divine in man (70. emphasis added).

Patrick White's statement early in the novel is suggestive of Mary Hare's final insight.

..., her mind would venture in foxy fashion, or more blunderingly worm-like, in search of a concealed truth. If fellowship with Himmelfarb and Mrs. Godbold and perhaps her brief communion with a certain blackfellow, would confirm rather than expound a mystery, the reason could be that, in the last light, illumination is synonymous with blinding (RC 24).

Just as she glimpses the cosmic soul in the individual—Himmelfarb, she herself surrenders to the magnificence of Nature. In terms of Vedanta, she has reconciled ātman and Brahman.
Walking and walking through the unresistant thorns and twigs. Ploughing through the soft, opalescent remnants of night. Never actually arriving, but that was to be expected, since she had become all-pervasive: scent, sound, the steely dew, the blue glare of white light off rocks. She was all but identified.

So Miss Hare stumbled through the night. If she did not choose the obvious direction, it was because direction had at last chosen her (RC 439-40).

Ruth Godbold, always presented with her brood of children and always found helping other people, is the perfect Earth Mother archetype in Patrick White's novels. She is also the only one who has known suffering from a very young age. She mothers her brothers and sisters, when their mother dies. Like Hardy's Tess, she faces tragedy when her younger brother is crushed under the wheels of the cart, while haymaking and she brings the body home. Such an incident, awakens her compassion and she offers help without differentiating. As she tells Himmelfarb, people are not to be differentiated by their religious faith or any other thing but by their inherent good or bad natures (RC 219). Such an attitude enables her to care for Mary Hare, Himmelfarb, Alf Dubbo and Tom Godbold when they are ill. Like Mary's bond with Nature, Mrs. Godbold's bond with daily life is very strong. She finds exaltation in simple acts of routine because of her unswerving devotion. For instance, as Mrs. Chalmers-Robinson's maid, Ruth attempts to express her belief, not in words, nor in the attitudes of orthodox worship, but in the surrender of herself to a state of passive adoration, ... . Or, in the performance of her duties, polishing plate, scrubbing floors, mending the abandoned stockings, ..., she could have been offering up the active essence of her being in unstinted praise (RC 245. emphasis added).

This passage emphasises Ruth's adoption of the karma marga of self-realisation which stresses the need to perform one's duty
with devotion and without any desire for the ensuing benefits (cf. The Bhagavad-Gita III. 7-9).

It is this unswerving devotion that enables Mrs. Godbold to empathise with the fallen human beings at Khalil’s brothel. Her understanding and compassion reach their culmination when she encounters her dead husband in the street.

Mrs. Godbold's self was by now dead, so she could not cry for the part of her which lay in the keeping of the husband she had just left. She cried, rather, for the condition of men, for all those she had loved (RC 288).

Patricia Morley observes that Ruth has attained a state of equanimity (The Mystery of Unity 173). More importantly, by universalizing her personal grief, Mrs. Godbold gains realisation of the same reality present in every man.

Mary and Ruth together provide instinct and emotion to the intellect and imagination of Himmelfarb and Alf Dubbo. Illumination, thus, becomes collective in the novel. Though Himmelfarb’s crucifixion and the events that follow emphasise the illumination, Ruth is more illumined in her daily thoughts and deeds. Though she does not fully understand the significance of the Easter egg and lamb, it is she, not the Rosetrees (Himmelfarb’s fellow men), who offers them to him. The scenes after the crucifixion and those preceding Himmelfarb's death show Ruth as a ministering angel. Expanding this idea, Colin Roderick remarks:

To Mrs. Godbold the Jew's agony is a means of expressing the supreme love: she takes the bruised soul home to her shed near the post office, and in him she, too, glimpses the illuminating power of redemption; but she sees nothing either peculiarly Jewish or peculiarly Christian about Himmelfarb--"it is the same," she said; "men are the same before they are born. They are the same at birth... . It is only the coat they are told to put on that makes them any different" (70).
However, her little acts of kindness assume Christian symbolism. She would work fast and skilfully, even while remembering painful things: how the women, for instance, had received the body of their Lord... . And would lay the body in her whitest sheets, with the love of which only she was capable (RC 411).

Similarly, her vision of the Chariot is firmly rooted in the fearth.

Mrs. Godbold remained a seated statue. The massive rumps of her horses waited, swishing their tails through eternity. The wheels of her chariot were solid gold, well-axled, as might have been expected (RC 67).

This is Mary's conception of Ruth's chariot. Ruth's own explanation somewhat reflects her character. "She had her own vision of the Chariot. Even now, at the thought of it, her very centre was touched by the wings of love and charity" (RC 489). 

In her article "Patrick White's Götterdammerung," Leonie Kramer questions whether Ruth's "almost vegetable existence" is compatible with illumination (18). There are two arguments possible in support of Ruth. At the end of the novel, she has realised two different things. As a mother, she sees beyond what is evident (women as producer of children).

Finally the woman sitting alone in front of the deserted shed would sense how she had shot her six arrows at the face of darkness, and halted it. And wherever her arrows stuck, she saw other arrows breed. And out of these arrows, others still would split off, from the straight white shafts.

So her arrows would continue to be aimed at the forms of darkness, and she herself was, in fact, the infinite quiver. ‘Multiplication!’ (RC 489. emphasis added).

Like Stan Parker, she too has been given to understand the Platonian thought of the infinite possibility of multiplication and division as constituting permanence. The image of "the
straight white shafts" brings to mind the simple phenomenon in physics of the disc of spectral colours showing as white when turned fast. In this respect, she includes within herself all the varied ramifications of the world. Going by Vedāntic views, Ruth has realised not only that ātman is but a manifestation of the Brahman but also that the ātman in each individual is to be sought and respected for its own worth.

Patrick White's description of Ruth Godbold at the end of the novel puts to rest all doubts regarding her illumination. Like Laura earlier and Ellen later, Ruth returns to civilisation with the added knowledge of her vision. "Now she could approach her work of living, as an artist, after an interval, will approach and judge his work of art" (RC 491). This statement suggests that Ruth has reached the state of stithaprajna (i.e., an individual who is not affected by the endless flux of life).

That evening, as she walked along the road, it was the hour at which the other gold sank its furrows in the softer sky. The lids of her eyes, flickering beneath its glow, were gilded with an identical splendour. But for all its weight, it lay lightly, lifted her, in fact, to where she remained an instant in the company of the Living Creatures she had known, and many others she had not. All was ratified again by hands.

If, on further visits to Xanadu, she experienced nothing comparable, it was probably because Mrs. Godbold's feet were still planted firmly on the earth (RC 491-2).

This passage shows that Ruth understands the pull of material life even in her moments of transcendence. In fact, she has gained the wisdom to see the transient perfection in everyday life.
The Eye of the Storm

From this novel onwards, a shift in White's attitude and treatment of what Elizabeth Hunter calls, "the utmost in experience" can be noticed. The earlier novels portray this experience as something characteristic of the "burnt ones," the moment of insight has otherworldly, abstract overtones of the chariot or the mandala (Leonie Kramer. "Patrick White: 'The Unplayed I'" 65). However, in The Eye of the Storm, there is no "triumphant emergence of the occulted greatness" but "[a] self-centred, possibly mediocre personality is subjected to an experience that radically alters her perspective and her perception--in her own way" (A.P. Riemer. "The Eye of the Needle: Patrick White's Recent Novels" 258). Whereas the other protagonists consciously strive towards self-awareness, the moment of insight is just given to Elizabeth Hunter. This is evident in the structuring of the moment of illumination, not at the end of the novel as in the earlier novels, but much earlier. Elizabeth Hunter does not die but lives on for about fifteen years after the episode. In the words of A.P. Riemer,

... the vision becomes quite general and all-pervading. It remains, consequently, quite unspecific. All we are given, all that Elizabeth Hunter experiences, is the general sense of illumination (ecstasy in the strict sense of the term)... ("The Eye of the Needle: Patrick White's Recent Novels" 257).

Though the moment of insight itself becomes an annihilation of the self, the conscience takes a rebirth and continues to live. Thus, there is a conscious recalling of the moment of illumination by Mrs. Hunter, which incidentally brings about her death. Quoting Simone Weil's views on death, Peter Beatson remarks that "[d]eath tests and crowns the quality of life." Simone Weil is of
the view that "the instant of death is the centre and object of life ... [and that] it is the instant when for an infinitesimal fraction of time, pure truth, naked, certain and eternal enters the soul" (The Eye in the Mandala 51).

Before we go on to analyse Elizabeth's illumination, it is worthwhile to consider a pertinent question posed in the novel by Dorothy, Mrs. Hunter's daughter and subsequently criticised by Leonie Kramer in her article "Patrick White: 'The Unplayed I'."

In the novel, Dorothy wonders:

Why was it given to Elizabeth Hunter to experience the eye of the storm? That too! 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 (ES 71)?

In her article, "Patrick White: 'The Unplayed I'," Leonie Kramer comments that:

The essential thing is that the experience itself is curiously elusive; and it is a construction which does not arise from within Elizabeth Hunter's being, but which is imposed on her by the author, as a 'big scene' might be given to a leading actress (66).

Kramer also says that Mrs. Hunter "preserves her moment of illumination" because of White's insistence and "not through his account of the mysterious logic of motivation and experience" (68). Countering these arguments, in his article, "The Gothic Grace and Rainbow Aesthetic of Patrick White's Fiction: An Introduction," William Scheick rightly observes that,

such moments, not by transcendence but of immersion, not of cognition but of a "sensation" of blinding light and deafening silence, not only occur but specifically do so because the human self is sensual, mendacious (masked), materialistic, and superficial--all of which demarcate the subjective nature of that self, existing amid visible surfaces, as well as the incompleteness of that self, unable to close with the depths of its own objectivity (141).
The entire passage may be interpreted as a vivid description of the momentary insight/awareness which pierces the veil of illusion thus revealing the self in its subjective and objective aspects.

In the text itself there are two possible explanations to this query. According to Sister de Santis, Mrs. Hunter was chosen because,

> [she] was also a soul about to leave the body it had worn, and already able to emancipate itself so completely from human emotions it became at times as redemptive as water, as clear as morning light (ES 12. emphasis added).

Narrating an incident similar to Mrs. Hunter's, the Dutchman tells Dorothy that "God had willed us to enter the eye" (ES 69). A new explanation becomes possible when we look into the Marjara Nyāya or cat-hold theory propounded by Rāmānuja which posits the belief that God chooses (and it is not in the hands of the human beings) the individuals whom He wants to enlighten. The only virtue expected from the individual is to surrender completely to God just as the kitten completely trusts the mother cat when the latter carries it by its neck to safety. It is interesting to note that Laura, in fact, aspires to achieve this humility and does so towards the end of Voss. At the moment of illumination, it can be seen how Mrs. Hunter surrenders completely to the force of Nature and later tries to seek alone "whatever the eye is contemplating for me [her]" (ES 532).

Elizabeth Hunter's moment of illumination takes place at the Brumby Island. Furious with her mother's attempts to capture Edvard Pehl's attentions, Dorothy runs away. In a solitary
moment, Mrs. Hunter acknowledges her own guilt. She recognises the type of relationship she has had with her husband and children and the lust she has kindled in her lovers, the latest among them being Edvard Pehl: "To confess her faults (to herself) and to accept blame when nobody was there to insist on it, produced in Elizabeth Hunter a rare sense of freedom" (ES 401). Having overcome the desire for possession, she searches for Dorothy and Pehl. Meanwhile, the storm gathers. For safety, she climbs on the shelf of a wine bunker. For once she is overpowered and surrenders herself unquestioningly.

She lay and submitted to someone to whom she had never been introduced... . She could not visualise it. She only positively believed in what she saw and was and what she was too real too diverse composed of everyone she had known and loved and not always altogether loved it is better than nothing and given birth to and for God's sake.

It must have been the silence which woke her. No, not woke: she had been stunned into a state of semi-consciousness from which light as much as silence roused her (ES 408-9).

She is shorn of her identity.

Just as 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; ... (ES 409. emphasis added).

The moment lasts for what seems eternity and she is entirely at the mercy of Nature. "She did not feel she could endure further trial" (ES 410). The death-cry of a bird brings her back to reality. The moment of insight has taught her life and death, calm and ferocious activity. She sees herself as "an old woman and foolish, who in spite of her age had not experienced enough of living" (ES 410).
At the end of her moment of insight, Mrs. Hunter also realises that her material delusions of beauty, strength and power of attracting others are gone. "For the eye was no longer focused on her, she could tell; and as it withdrew its attention, it was taking with it the delusions of her feeble mind" (ES 410-1). This enables her to come back to social life and pleasures but the whole episode offers her enormous power of understanding others, understanding love and understanding her own weaknesses. She also touches the lives of others with this knowledge.

As against Sister de Santis' opinion on love as "a kind of supernatural state" (ES 157), Mrs. Hunter puts forward a realistic interpretation: "The worst thing about love between human beings,'... 'when you're prepared to love them they don't want it; when they do, it's you who can't bear the idea'" (ES 11). She also confesses her love of power and possessions, be it dolls or jewels (ES 156). Later, she desires to bind people to herself (ES 87), which is seen in her extra-marital love relationships with Athol Shreve and Arnold Wyburd. In this respect, she resembles Any Parker in The Tree of Man and Alfreda Courtney in The Vivisector. However, she manages to move beyond their one-dimensionality through her powers of honest confession and self-examination. As Veronica Brady points out in her article "The Eye of the Storm,"

The Eye of the Storm explores and even succeeds in demonstrating major implications—..., Elizabeth Hunter here achieves 'salvation', that is, completeness of existence, not by denying but by affirming everything in her life, her failures as well as her successes, down to the last physical humiliations of old age (62).
She also realises the need to take charge of one's life. "Whatever is given you to live, you alone can live, and re-live, and re-live, till it is gasped out of you" (ES 399).

The repetition of the eye of the storm occurs towards the end of the novel. Dorothy and Basil plan to leave Mrs. Hunter in an old-age home. This affects her deeply, though she bravely announces: "nothing will kill me before I am intended to die" (ES 399). As she bitterly tells Flora Manhood: "This morning they drove the temperature out of me for good and all" (ES 430). This is followed by her plea to Flora to leave the bottle of sleeping pills. When this is rejected on the grounds of morality, she decides her final course of action. When she says that she will withdraw her will and thus die, Flora only replies that it is not as simple as she thinks. With a pun on the word 'do' in "I am the one who must do ... " (ES 531), she attempts to gather enough strength into her body to put her feet on the ground and walk steadily towards the water (ES 532). She re-lives her moment of insight. In a humble acceptance she calls out to her husband. In utter simplicity, she surrenders and is ready to perform "whatever the eye is contemplating" (ES 532). In a final moment of oneness, she withdraws her soul from the body and unites it with the cosmos. "Till I am no longer filling the void with mock substance: myself is this endlessness" (ES 532). Commenting on this passage, Carolyn Bliss identifies "the familiar and prototypical elements" such as "the surrender of will, the immersion in creation, and an infinite outward flowing of the dissolved and expanded self" (142). In his article "Patrick White's The Eye of the Storm," A.R. Venkat perceptively remarks:
She [Mrs. Hunter] comes to understand that 'happiness' is being protected. Nature may be violent but one feels protected when one realizes that one is a part of nature. She might also be at peace just as the sea birds are. **Death**, as she is made to realize, is an evacuation (37).

The attitude expressed to death in this novel resembles that of Heidegger, who points out the inevitability of death even while stressing the awareness it creates in the individual regarding the 'totality' and 'self-transcendent' nature of existence (Robert Olson 192-212).

Though the validity of Mrs. Hunter's illumination is itself questioned, one thing is certain. She uses her insight wisely and well. As Veronica Brady brilliantly sums up in her article "The Eye of the Storm":

There is no attempt to disguise her occasional cruelties, her pride, her insensitivity to the claims of her husband's gentle love or of her children. But this is because White has no false illusions about human beings; the best most of us can do is to learn to live with what we are—as Elizabeth Hunter does. So, even she, for all her failures as a human being, is able therefore to achieve dignity and a certain nobility (66).

**A Fringe of Leaves**

The mysticism of the 'mandala' and 'chariot' gives way to the down-to-earth treatment as is seen in the humanistic depiction of Ellen's character and her experiences. Thus, White creates a new ethic stressing on qualities like 'survival' and the relative nature of 'savagery' and 'morality.' In her article "A Fringe of Leaves: Civilization by the Skin of Our Own Teeth" Veronica Brady presents these ideas succinctly and to quote her:
She [Ellen] learns how to survive, how to come to terms with that savagery which, White suggests, is not just a feature of life in so-called primitive societies but is endemic to the human condition even to "highly civilized" Australia (124).

As befitting the epigraph from Louis Aragon, love which is the last chance for human survival is given importance here. Thus, the love and compassion that characterises the relationship between Mrs. Hunter and Alfred during his last days in The Eye of the Storm develops into a permanent understanding in the Ellen-Austin relationship.

In the novel, Ellen makes two important entries. One, into high society through her marriage to Austin. Another, into the aboriginal tribe after the shipwreck and after her husband and the other men are killed by the aborigines. Both these entries set up various oppositions: natural and artificial; indigenous and metropolitan; civilised white culture and coarse aboriginal culture. In her entry into society, Ellen is the docile and diligent pupil who gives herself to be moulded by her mother-in-law to suit social norms. In the entry into the aboriginal tribe, the Gluyas self of Ellen asserts itself. Earlier, it is asserted once during her seduction by her brother-in-law, Garnet Roxburgh. This, in turn, goes back to "the presentiment of evil" which Ellen foresees during her visit to St. Hya's well.

Like Ruth Godbold earlier, Ellen also qualifies as an Earth Mother. This is shown in her relationship both with black children and the children at the Commandant's house.

The young children might have been hers. She was so extraordinarily content she wished it could have lasted for ever, the two black little bodies united in the sun with her own blackened skin-and-bones (FL 230).
The young Lovell children move closely with Ellen on her return and insist on tales of the black children.

Innocence prevailed in the light from the garden, and for the most part in her recollections; black was interchangeable with white. Surely in the company of children she might expect to be healed? (FL 342. emphasis added).

In fact, it is her closeness to children that keeps Ellen sane during her sojourn. Similarly, there is a near maternal element in her relationship with men. Her relationship with Oswald is a good example. She realises that, "[w]omen on the whole are stronger because more knowing than men, for all the knowledge men lay claim to. We also learn to numb ourselves against suffering whether of the body, or the mind..." (FL 67). Such a knowledge does not make her arrogant but helps her in understanding people.

In one of her early journal entries, Ellen writes:

> Often on such a night at Z., a country to which I belonged (more than I did to parents or family) I wld [sic] find myself wishing to be united with my surroundings, not as the dead, but fully alive (FL 92).

Such an attitude helps her to survive in the aboriginal tribe. She takes pain and suffering in her stride. Miss. Scrimshaw's comment early in the novel is accurate.

> `... I only had the impression that Mrs. Roxburgh could feel life has cheated her out of some ultimate in experience. For which she would be prepared to suffer, if need be' (FL 17. emphasis added).

In Ellen's life with the aborigines, one thing assumes importance and that is, hunger, and life revolves in assuaging this hunger. For instance, even death is followed by feasting as is seen in the fish-feast following the death of the child which Ellen nurses.
There was the occasional opossum, snake or lizard, and once or twice the huntsmen brought in a species of small kangaroo... . On a memorable evening Mrs. Roxburgh snapped up from under her masters' noses a segment of roasted snake, which produced in her an ecstasy such as she had never experienced before (FL 237-8).

This experience is contrasted with the dainty nibbling which goes by the name of eating in civilised upper class society.

The recurrent emphasis on hunger is a way by which Patrick White prepares the ground for Ellen's cannibalism.

She found herself stooping, to pick it up. There were one or two shreds of half-cooked flesh and gobbets of burnt fat still adhering to this monstrous object. Her stiffened body and almost audibly twangling nerves were warning against what she was about to do, what she was, in fact, already doing. She has raised the bone, and was tearing at it with her teeth, spasmodically chewing, swallowing by great gulps which her throat threatened to return. But did not (FL 244).

This incident enables Ellen to take part in a larger system of values and not the narrow ones posited by the society to which she belongs.

She was less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed by the fact that she had been moved to do it. The exquisite innocence of this forest morning, its quiet broken by a single flute-note endlessly repeated, tempted her to believe that she had partaken of a sacrament... . In the light of Christian morality she must never think of the incident again (FL 244. emphasis added).

The eating of human flesh by the aborigines may seem savage in society's view. But it is the same society which barbarically punishes fellow humans with penal laws. This questioning is provided by Jack Chance, the escaped convict who helps Ellen to return to society. Jack tells her: 'Men is [sic] unnatural and unjust' (FL 253). Further, Veronica Brady says that White has tried to point out in the novel as to how "aboriginal culture which acknowledges the debt to nature is closer to human truth
than white colonial society which doesn't" ("A Properly Appointed Humanism: Australian Culture and the Aborigines in Patrick White's A Fringe of Leaves" 67).

Ellen accepts her transgressions—adultery and cannibalism. She never tells it openly either to the Commandant or anybody else. But her return to civilization suggests that she has learnt to combine and unite all aspects of life. Just as the cannibalism of Ellen is a crucial episode in the novel, so is her moment of illumination at the crude and primitive Chapel built by Pilcher.

She did not attempt to interpret a peace of mind which had descended on her (she would not have been able to attribute it to prayer or reason) but let the silence enclose her like a beatitude (FL 353).

In Jill Ward's view, this moment represents a part of the cumulative growth in awareness which is at the heart of the mystical visions. Such moments are not intended to lend themselves to intellectual scrutiny . . . for Ellen it represents a cessation of the struggle against the warring aspects of her nature ("Patrick White's A Fringe of Leaves" 80-1).

With such an understanding, Ellen moves once again into society. Towards the end, she is also on the verge of accepting a marriage proposal from Mr. Jevons. Criticising this act, Carolyn Bliss says that "[i]t is disconcerting to find a woman such as Ellen Roxburgh, a woman whose very survival testifies to her enormous strength, meekly accepting the fate of her sex in the shape of the merchant Jevons" (154). In the context of Ellen's experiences and realisation, this view is debatable. Further, Bliss contradicts herself later in her book by interpreting Ellen's reply to Miss. Scrimshaw as the embodiment of "Ellen's understanding of the task her life has set her: to love as well
as she can while never well enough. She thus turns back to life as we leave her" (165). The picture of a "troubled bull-frog of a man" awakens her compassion and sympathy for the frailty of human beings, a quality she shares. Such an understanding enables her to correct and check Miss. Scrimshaw's Promethean longings to soar and reach the elevated heights.

‘I was slashed and gashed too often,’ ... ‘Oh no, the crags are not for me!’ .... ‘A woman, as I see, is more like moss or lichen that takes to some tree or rock as she takes to her husband’ (FL 363).

It is an affirmation of love and successful human relationship or what Helen M. Gilbert calls "the symbolic rebirth towards which we may aspire even though we remain in a continual state of flux" ("The Prison and the Font" 22). Ellen's affirmative stance proves true her words early in the novel. "I discovered another world. Which will remain with me for life, I expect. Every frond, and shred of bark. My memories are more successful than my sketches" (FL 27).

The **Twvborn Affair**

The novel unfolds the complex relationship that exists between Eadie and her sexually ambivalent child, Eudoxia-Eddie-Eadith (referred to as E.). Eadie herself is guilty of a lesbian relationship with Joanie Golson, which E. obviously resents. As she later realises,

> love was difficult. 'Quite a trapeze act in fact ... I only ever really loved, and was loved by, my little flea-ridden dogs. I could talk to them and they understood. Children and parents fail one another...' (TA 424. emphasis added).

Consequently, there is no single moment of realisation for Eadie
but only a gradual acceptance of her child's sexual ambivalence.

At the beginning of the novel, there are recurrent references to Eadie's ageing since her tragedy. The tragic event is that of Eddie running away on the eve of his marriage to Marian. Eadie is upset about two things: the social disgrace it involves and the attempted escape of her son.

There are reasons for Eadie's strained relationship with her child. In the first place, she considers her child as restricting her freedom. "The child atrocious all afternoon. Threw tantrum after tantrum. Nanny useless. Don't know why intuition didn't warn me against conceiving" (TA 68). Later, she resents E.'s sexual ambivalence as something which projects her own lesbianism.

Anywhere else it might have been unbearable to realise that the son with whom she had wrestled, perhaps even tried to throttle in the agony he had caused while forcing his way out of the womb where he was not wanted in the first place, had become the mirror-figure of herself (TA 149. emphasis added).

From this position she comes to the understanding that children and parents fail each other mutually and not one-sided as she had feared earlier: 'I hope you're not going to make us pay too dearly, Eddie, for being your parents' (TA 148).

In accepting Eddie as her daughter Eadith at the end of the novel, Eadie shows a change of attitude marked by time. For example, when she finds out that Eadith is actually Eddie, Eadie is full of understanding. In fact her former reaction is juxtaposed with her reaction at the present moment.

'I do wish, Eddie, you'd stop picking that scab on your knee. Sometimes I think you do things just to irritate me'.... Now in this violet, northern light, purged of her mortal sins by age, Eadie might have been prepared to accept a bit of scab-picking in others (TA 422).
Eadie also understands the true nature of her other relationships. She accepts her indifference towards her husband. She also realises her closed-in relationship with Joanie Golson.

I was fond of poor Joanie Golson—the friend I believe you disliked so much you always avoided. Joanie was too possessive. What one wants from a woman finally becomes suffocating (TA 424).

Thus, when Eadie sits in the hotel waiting for E., she realises that she no longer fears or cares for society. "Age had drained her of fear, along with her vices, doubts, torments" (TA 430). She also understands the value of suffering. Her understanding is juxtaposed to the screaming woman: "Down the corridor a woman was hopping screaming, as though she still belonged to the present, some young person no doubt who had not yet suffered enough" (TA 430). Eadie waits resignedly in spite of the threats of bomb blasts. The war-torn London with its bomb blasts is an illusion to Eadie. The waiting itself is real.

What was real was the garden in which she was sitting. She had come out to dry her hair, and was sitting on the discoloured steps amongst the lizards and bulbuls and hibiscus trumpets, waiting for Eadith (TA 431. emphasis added).

Eadie is hopeful of the future. She dreams of "[s]itting in the garden drying our hair together amongst the bulbuls and drizzle of taps we shall experience harmony at last" (TA 432). The concluding paragraphs of the novel fits White's description in Flaws in the Glass as "the Twyborn Moment of grace" (257). The same idea is conveyed in the "unusually fine sunset, if to the east rather than the west" (TA 430). The sunset in the east suggests rebirth as also the coexistence of life and death.
Margaret Laurence

In The Fire-Dwellers, Margaret Laurence describes Stacey's modest realisation in the following words:

I used to think there would be a blinding flash of light someday, and then I would be wise and calm and would know how to cope with everything and my kids would rise up and call me blessed. Now I see that whatever I'm like, I'm pretty well stuck with it for life. Hell of a revelation that turned out to be (FT) 255. emphasis added).

As Cathy Davidson rightly remarks, Stacey has begun to come to terms with "what she was, what she is, what she will be" ("Past and Perspective in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel" 61). In all the four Manawaka novels, Margaret Laurence's protagonists come to terms with themselves and their present by evaluating their past. Just as the past helps in managing the present and manipulating the future, the present, by hindsight helps them to discover the pattern of their lives in the past. There are no profound revelations. Such a realisation helps them to distinguish clearly between what they think is real and what in fact is the reality.

Again the concept of reality is rooted within society and is not pitched in mystical or metaphysical planes. In one sense, self-realisation helps them in accepting their roles (though limited) in society. Almost all the protagonists return to society with the knowledge of attributes like survival, human understanding and communication. In this respect, the meaning of self-realisation, in Laurence's novels, implies standards of ethical and moral perfection rather than mystical vision. As John
Moss observes,

Laurence's protagonists share with most of us on a narrower scale the conflict between roles imposed by gender and what we sense is our essential self somewhere deep within us, surging randomly to the surface ("The Presbyterian Legacy" 75. emphasis added).

Thus, there is no overt religious framework juxtaposed in the novels. The references to religious thought are mainly interpretations. There is no ‘mandala’ or ‘chariot’ guiding and unifying the vision of the protagonists. Memory acts as a unifying agent of the past and the present. Another characteristic which the Manawaka women share is their roles as Earth Mothers. Even in the case of Hagar Shipley, it is her acceptance of her motherhood that gives her the final liberation. All the other women value their motherhood. Interestingly enough, Cathy Davidson points out the role played by memory in the process of self-realisation and to quote her:

Memory, for Laurence, is a self-conscious re-digesting not of former facts but of former impressions—impressions of others, of events, of one's self ... so it is by this process of re-living, not by living that the revelation of a lifetime occurs (62).

The Stone Angel

Hagar Shipley's moment of illumination, if we have to point out a single instance, occurs when she confronts willingly her past deeds and confesses and accepts the responsibility for the deaths of Bram and John to Murray Lees. Hagar meets Lees at a cannery when she runs away from home to escape going to an old-age home (much like Elizabeth Hunter in The Eve of the Storm). Lees also comes to the cannery in an attempt to escape facing the
fact of his child's death. Hagar drinks wine with him who is a perfect stranger and also sinks into sleep close to him. As Andre Dommergues points out in his article "Order and Chaos in The Stone Angel."

The fastidious lady is not ashamed of herself. For the first time maybe, she has established a genuine relationship with a man and understood the meaning of human solidarity (69).

Also, for the first time she outwardly shows her emotion when she openly cries for the deaths of her husband and her son. Even though Lees goes against his word and informs Marvin about Hagar's whereabouts, she forgives him. When he mumbles that he couldn't help it, she wants to say "I know, I know. you really couldn't help it--it wasn't your fault" (SA 252) and finally says: "I didn't mean to speak crossly. I--I'm sorry about your boy" (SA 253). She also reaches and touches his wrist in an open show of affection and regard for a fellow human being.

Furthermore, Hagar's meeting with Lees is followed by her only true and honest confession. Clara Thomas considers this passage as an "unforgettable" example of what Frye calls Kerygma, "the vehicle of what is traditionally called revelation" in The Great Code ("Towards Freedom" 86).

Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances--oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak, the heart's truth?

Pride was my wilderness and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my dead, my dead. Dead by your own hands or by mine? (SA 292. emphasis added).
As J.M. Kertzer puts it, "[r]esponsibility, freedom and guilt are three of the terms by reference to which Hagar must judge her life" ("The Stone Angel: Time and Responsibility" 502). Hagar's freedom is linked to her acceptance of responsibility and guilt. The basic paradox of Hagar's life lies in the fact that she loses the love of her father by breaking the norms to marry Bram and loses the love of her brothers, of Bram and of her sons by adhering to the very norms she herself broke. Hagar also breaks out of the cocoon of either blaming fate for the events or trying to determine the causes. Lees performs the task of educating her regarding the fact that more than one cause determine an event. For instance, John's death is determined by a number of factors. They are: Hagar's conspiracy with Lottie to separate John and Arlene; John drunk, accepting the bet with Lazarus; Arlene, unable to prevent him, deciding to go with him; the unscheduled train bringing food for people on relief crossing the bridge at the same time and thus, causing the accident and the deaths of John and Arlene. Hagar accepts her position and tells comfortably: "No one's fault, where do causes start, how far back?" (SA 240) This serene acceptance is an extension of her earlier statement.

I can't change what's happened to me in my life, or make what's not occurred take place. But I can't say I like it, or accept it, or believe it's for the best. I don't and never shall, not even if I'm damned for it (SA 160).

This brings to mind the Dylan Thomas epigraph to the novel. Hagar fights the inevitable. Thus, her pride is both a strength and a weakness. Commenting on Hagar's realisation, J.M. Kertzer describes it as "a human appeal made in recognition of human
weakness, a reconciliation of people with each other and with circumstance. Forgiveness suggests a concurrence or harmony with others and with life" (506).

The question of pride takes us back to Hagar's past. To recapitulate the events of the past: Hagar's refusal to comfort her dying brother, to accept her sexual urge for Bram, to accept responsibility for John's death and her contempt for Currie-like Marvin, her mockery of the minister--all arise out of her pride. These things have been discussed in detail in Chapter One.

Hagar's retribution for her past deeds comes with her acceptance of responsibility for John's death which is certainly not a heroic death in war as she makes it out to be. In a further step towards understanding, Hagar calls out to her long dead husband in the hospital. This scene echoes Mrs. Hunter's call to her husband Alfred in The Eye of the Storm. Also, Hagar tells Marvin: "You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John" (SA 304). She, thus, acknowledges Marvin's kinship which is something she had denied him at his birth by mistakenly seeing him as a Shipley. Though Hagar herself questions the truth of such a statement, she also understands that it "is a lie--yet not a lie, for it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love" (SA 307). In a further attempt to affirm values of human relationship, Hagar befriends Elva Jardine. She also endures great pain in order to relieve Sandra Wong's pain and heartily laughs over a joke. Hagar's sharing of warmth and love culminates when she parts with her prized possession, her ring, to her
One obvious religious framework commonly observed in the novel is that of the Old Testament story of Hagar, Abraham's second wife, a bondswoman and the child born of the flesh, Ishmael. The parallels are as follows—Hagar—Agar; Clara—Sarah; Bram—Abraham; Marvin—Isaac and John—Ishmael. However, this reading does not take us far. For Marvin and John are so much unlike Isaac and Ishmael. In fact, in the final scene between Marvin and Hagar, Marvin resembles Jacob in wrestling with Hagar, the stone angel and bargaining "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (SA 304). Biblical echoes in the novel include, for example, Hagar's quotation from The Song of Solomon "His banner over me was love" (SA 80) to describe Brain's sexual passion for her. Similarly, Hagar's cry "If he should die, let me not see it" (SA 241) echoes that of the Biblical Agar who says "Let me not see the death of the child" when she fears the death of Ishmael in the desert for want of water. Elisabeth Potvin finds another Biblical echo and points out that "[i]n a parody of apostle Peter, Hagar denies her faith in patriarchy three times, fleeing first her father, then Bram, and then her son Marvin" ("A Mystery at the Core of Life" 28). As Claudette Pollack observes in "The Paradox of The Stone Angel,"

The effect of such references is to allow the reader to accept the archetypal associations without hesitation.

Although the Biblical references and analogies in The Stone Angel strengthen our feelings for Hagar and contribute importantly to the atmosphere and tone of the novel, they do not much affect our understanding of her character or her situation (269).
However, the Biblical references reinforce one thing: the wanderings in the desert by Agar corresponds to Hagar's quest for self-realisation. For Hagar's **quest**, Laurence *transmogrifies* a hospital bedpan into the grail of medieval legend* (Patricia Morley. Margaret Laurence 81)*.

Another critical practice is to place The Stone Angel in the elegiac tradition. In an interesting article, E.J. Hinz and J.J. Teunissen compare the novel with Milton's *Lycidas*. Walt Whitman's *When the Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom'd* and Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward. Angel. Bram*, in his deathbed, reminds Hagar of an "ancient child." Hinz and Teunissen connect this to the episode of Hagar's inability to comfort her brother, and say that the whole episode contains a veiled critique of the major elegiac icon in the Judeo-Christian tradition: Michelangelo's *Pieta* where Mary's grief for her son (both depicted as being of the same age) is that of a grieving lover rather than of a sorrowful mother. Similarly, Hagar's refusal to show any emotion in the scene of John's death, finds a correlative in the lack of expression of grief on the face of Michelangelo's Madonna (484-5).

The final attempt of Hagar to hold the glass of water can be interpreted in different ways. In the Christian sense of redemption, it is the cup of grace which Hagar has humbly accepted thus asserting the continuation of life. But pointing out Hagar's earlier rejection: "Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father--no. I want no part of that. All I can think is--Bless me or not. **Lord, just as You please,** for I'll not beg" (SA 307), Hinz and Teunissen say that Hagar is actually rejecting the masculine Judeo-Christian solution. In their reading, the glass
of water becomes the amniotic fluid and her urgency in getting back to the "sleek cocoon" is followed by the mothering words "There, there."

Both the interpretations point to one thing and that is, Hagar's acceptance of responsibility as also human love and warmth. Whether Hagar is redeemed in the Christian sense or accepts her motherhood (in the sense that Laurence is offering a "female form of consolation"), the effect of coming to terms with the past certainly alters Hagar's present. Her death at the height of understanding prevents any talk of the future.

A Jest of God

In the case of Rachel Cameron, the protagonist of this novel, coming to terms with the fears and inhibitions of her past enables her to break the chains which have bound her for long. Coming to terms with her past, enables her to prepare herself for the present in a better way as well as to plan her future.

Though the beginning of her affair with Nick Kazlick itself serves as an initiation to her realisation, the specific moment occurs when she is in the hospital undergoing surgery for a benign tumour. Under anaesthesia she voices out: "I am the mother now." This cry assumes significance because she has finally come to terms with herself, her surrounding and her relationships. To put in Margaret Laurence's words: "She [Rachel] is beginning to learn the rules of survival" (in George Woodcock ed. A Place to Stand On 32). John Moss sums up Rachel's self-realisation in succinct terms:
When Rachel discovers that the growth inside her is not Nick's child she is carrying but a tumour, the transience of their affair is confirmed. It is a cruel joke that even this growth is benign, but one that shocks Rachel into capitulation to a more complete or integrated self than her rigid adherence to fragmenting roles had allowed. Rachel gets body and mind together, as it were, and accepts herself as a whole person ("The Presbyterian Legacy" 73).

Considering her earlier conflict between her mental fantasies and her outward appearance and behaviour, Rachel has come a long way in uniting her inner and outer selves.

There are other factors which aid Rachel's awareness. One is the late night visit to Hector's funeral parlour. Through this visit, Rachel does away with the Manawaka taboo against confronting death directly. Commenting on the central role played by the consciousness of death in A Jest of God, CM. McLay makes some interesting remarks, and to quote him:

> While human relationships are an attempt to counter isolation, death is a recognition of it,... . In Lawrence, however, death ... accentuates our consciousness of an isolation which already exists. It is only in facing death that we are able to assess life, and to recognize our own isolation ("Every Man is an Island" 62-3).

Also, Calla's timely help enables Rachel to have a healthy friendship with her. Further, Rachel stops worrying about the fleeting relationships she will have with her pupils. Rachel's rejection of Calla's Tabernacle and her mother's Church culminates in her words: "Bless me or not God, for I'll not beg." This shows how far she has progressed and the final sentence of the novel "God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God" (JG 202) is an indication of this. Patricia Morley points out the circular structure of this
sentence and how it identifies "God with mankind as Divine Fool."

Mercy, grace and pity become the basic criteria of relationships.

According to Morley,

[t]his is the culmination of an intricate pattern on the folly of fear and fear of folly. Wrestling with it, Rachel is ready to smile at "that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools." "I should be honoured to be of that company" (Margaret Laurence 96).

Citing Rachel's final stance as the proof of "Laurence's concern with the human condition," Sandra Djwa suggests the possible Existentialist parallels in that Rachel is made to "choose between the nausea of bad faith and the anguish and despair of freedom" as also in her focus on the "process of becoming" ("False Gods and the True Covenant" 49). The culminating point of her realisation comes when Rachel understands and accepts the restrictions within which Nick is operating. She even forgives him for his deception with the photograph.

He [Nick] had his own demons and webs. Mine brushed across him for an instant, and he saw them and had to draw away, knowing that what I wanted from him was too much (JG 189).

Viewed from the present, Rachel's future holds out bright prospects. Above everything else, she takes charge of her life and plans her moves and takes decisions personally. Though this is nothing extraordinary, the fact that it comes from Rachel marks her triumph. The first among these is her decision to take up a job in Vancouver and thus move out of Manawaka. Rachel finally breaks free of her mother's domination over her. To her mother's plea against the move when she cites her poor health, Rachel replies:
It isn't **upto** me. It never was. I can take **care**, but only some. I am not responsible for keeping her alive. There is, suddenly, some enormous relief in this realization (JG 195).

She literally mothers her mother when the latter fervently, even childishly, appeals against the move. Rachel feels like saying "**Hush**, it will be **all right---there.** there. I am the mother **now**" (JG 196). In an article entitled "Politics and A Jest of God," Kenneth Hughes brings in an interesting analogy between Rachel's relationship with her mother and that of the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser, say, Canada and Britain. Mrs. Cameron becomes the imperial power whereas Rachel is symbolic of "a Canada seeking to free itself from an authoritarian colonial past and to make its own **future**" (50-1). Rachel's tumour represents the colonial past and its authoritarian values, while its removal suggests freedom from the colonial state of mind. Following this application of Mannoni's framework, this novel can be seen as a socio-political allegory of the colonial situation.

As Patricia Morley points out,

Rachel's quest, like Hagar's is a search for freedom and joy .... she wins a partial release from fear, a new understanding of her relation to her mother, and an acceptance of the mystery of human personality: the other, in Mannoni's phrase (Margaret Laurence 89).

Rachel also re-works her relationship with **Willard**. She is clear about her thoughts. She now sees that her fear of him was totally baseless and unnecessary.

Regarding her own future, Rachel is realistic and does not fantasise. She keeps her options open. She may marry a middle aged widower, or a longshoreman, or a cattle-hoof-trimmer, or a barrister or a thief" (JG 201). She may or may not have
children. Light-heartedly, she pictures herself as an old spinster wearing outlandish costumes whom Stacey's children will call Aunt. She may feel light-hearted, light-headed, afraid of even going mad (JG 202). Her ironic jest to God ends the novel. This sort of a humour and fearlessly looking into herself will no doubt take her far in life.

There are three obvious Biblical references in the novel. First, is Rachel's fear of losing her pupils (her 'children' as she refers to them). This has its parallel in the mourning of the Biblical Rachel for her unborn dead children. Sandra Djwa's reading of this particular Biblical reference is perceptive in that, it points to the possibility of interpreting A Jest of God as a socio-religious allegory.

In Genesis this is a lament by a barren wife; in the allegory of Rachel in Jeremiah it is a lament by the Israelites who have fallen away from the fruits of the spirit into the worship of false gods: both concepts are contained in Laurence's presentation of Rachel's character (47).

Second, is the reference to St. Paul. "If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." This dictum is central to the novel. Behind such a statement lies the paradox central to Christianity. Third, is the reference to Jonah in the Sandburg epigraph to the novel.

If I should pass the tomb of Jonah
I would stop there and sit for awhile;
Because I was swallowed one time deep in the dark
And came out alive after all.

Rachel has to make the journey into her own self and there confront her repressed side just as Jonah was destined to spend time in the stomach of the whale.

Rachel's crisis is comparable to that of the alienation and
isolation experienced by any human being. She copes with difficulties and grows stronger in the process. As Patricia Morley rightly sums up in her book Margaret Laurence: "She [Rachel] escapes not from society, like some Canadian Huck Finn, but into more dynamic forms of community life" (93).

The Fire-Dwellers

Unlike Hagar and Rachel, Stacey MacAindra is affirmative and does not deny life. Hagar distances herself from others because of pride and Rachel, because of fear. But Stacey is fully involved in life and demands the reader's attention "whether in approval, in dismay or in rueful laughter." Stacey does not separate herself from others and in fact mourns human isolation. Clara Thomas' perception is convincing in this regard and to quote her:

She [Stacey] thinks of herself as commonplace and ordinary but the great achievement of her anxious, rueful, urgent voice is to reveal her extraordinary qualities of love, fortitude, and especially, vitality (The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence 128).

Stacey has come to accept that an epiphanic moment or "blinding flash of light" (FD 255) cannot do miracles in her life. Nor does she see profound implications of being a housewife and a mother. Her understanding, at the end of the book, is how to be a human being.

Stacey's quest for self-discovery takes on a circular form as against the linear movements of the quests of Hagar and Rachel. Clara Thomas compares Stacey's consciousness to an 'eye'
whose pupil expands to accept the world and contracts in sudden fear.

[T]he movement is halting opening and shutting, a broadening and then a narrowing, and the final point of poise in the novel is not Stacey's coming to a revelation or to any new point of departure, 'but her acceptance of her own kind of sensitivity, her own ways of seeing and understanding others—and herself' (122).

Hence, a particular instance cannot be cited as her moment of illumination. There are a series of events that bring about her realisation. The first of these is Mac's accusation of her infidelity. Believing Buckle Fennick, Mac suspects Stacey of going to bed with the former. Outraged and insulted by Mac's accusation, Stacey drives alone to the sea-shore where she meets Luke Venturi, a young artist. She feels that, with Luke, communication is much easier and enjoys having sex with him which, she feels is revitalising.

I'd like to start again, everything, all of life, start again with someone like you [Luke]—with you—with everything simpler and clearer. No lies. No recriminations. No unmerry-go-round of pointless words. Just everything plain and good, like today, and making love and not worrying about unimportant things and not trying to change each other (FD 176).

Clara Thomas points out that Stacey feels this way because Luke treats her primarily as a woman, "as a singular being, freed of the kaleidoscopic wife-mother-housekeeper roles" in which she and others identify her (123). Furthermore, the guilt feeling of unfaithfulness to Mac enables her to get over her clearly erotic fantasies as also avenge his baseless accusation. This affair also teaches Stacey to be independent of Luke or any other man.

Other events which bring about change in Stacey's life are: Jen speaking her first words, as also Katie and Stacey
communicating like real adults after Katie rescues Jen from the hold of Tess Fogler, who forces Jen to watch the brutal cannibalism of the golden fish. In her book *Margaret Laurence*, Patricia Morley brings in an interesting intertextual connection to The *Stone Angel*.

In their mutual concern for Jen, Katie and Stacey encounter one another as persons, without the role-playing structures of mother and daughter; they say we, like Hagar and the Oriental girl in the hospital bedpan incident (106).

Duncan's narrow escape from drowning, the love Ian exhibits for Duncan in the place of jealousy and Mac's demonstrations of his affection for Duncan, aid Stacey's moment of awareness. Further, Buckle's death proves that he is only a masturbator and nothing had happened as Mac suspected and Buckle lied. The final stroke comes when the identity of Thor Thorlakson, the self-important man turns out to be runny-nosed Vernon Winkler from Manawaka. To cite John Moss' conclusion:

Super-male and super-female prove merely human, and Stacey MacAindra, nee Cameron housewife and mother, can have a young lover and can, by choice, turn away from him in favour of the roles of conventional homelife that both sap and sustain her. She discovers the freedom of choice that makes the choice itself irrelevant (74. emphasis added).

The effect of such a realisation is to wipe out the frustrations Stacey had felt in the past. In the present, she accepts change and is also sure of the fact that certain things cannot be changed.

It would be nice if we were different people but we are not different people. We are ourselves and we are sure as hell not going to undergo some total transformation at this point.... I can't take it yeh! I can though. By God, I can, if I set, my mind to it (FD 247-8. emphasis added).
In this way, Stacey more or less decides her future. Rather, she plans to take life as it comes. "If I could absorb the notion of nothing, of total dark, then it would have no power over me" (FD 263). She does not demand this grace and accepts the condition that each one has to work out one's salvation. The condition is very similar to her realisation that she can never again be young or have decent-looking hip. She does not see this as a tragedy, but considers it normal, at the most, ludicrous. This ability to laugh at herself, will no doubt provide her with endurance, patience and wisdom.

Give me another forty years, Lord, and I may mutate into a matriarch.

Stacey heaves over onto her side. The house is quiet. The kids are asleep. Downstairs in the ex-study, Matthew has been asleep for hours, or if not asleep, meditating. Beside her, she can already hear the steady breathing that means Mac is asleep. Temporarily, they are all more or less okay (FD 264. emphasis added).

Stacey does not seek to alter things. Like Mrs. Godbold and Ellen Roxburgh in White's novels, she is satisfied with the transient perfection of the world which is echoed in her prayer. Patricia Morley suggests that the timespan of forty years "is that of the Israelites' desert exile enroute to the Promised Land" (108). Further, Morley points out that mutate suggest evolution of the species and is combined with the alliteration in matriarch which suggests the female head of the family, clan and dynasty. "This mutant joins her family and city in peaceful sleep" (108).

The Biblical framework which provided some insight in the earlier novels, is merely used as a parody in The Fire-Dwellers.
The first instance of this is Stacey's statement "Cain and his brother must have started their hatred like this" (FJD 12) when her two sons fight over a go-cart. The religious parody is at its best in the sections featuring Thor. The Richalife campaign promising rejuvenation is a secular parody of the religious vision of the Promised Land. Thor is the pseudo-prophet. There is an obvious reference to evangelical testimonials, at rallies when people declare the alterations made in their lives by the pills. Similarly, the confessional element involved in the Richalife quiz which each employee and his family is asked to fill in, parodies religious confessions.

Another important Biblical reference is that of Luke's role in altering Stacey's life. Like the Biblical Luke, he is a physician to Stacey who also provides "a temporary unreality" to her by calling her *merwoman* and identifying her with water (Clara Thomas 123). This affair enables Stacey to abandon her responsibilities as mother and wife temporarily and consequently, direct attention on herself. John Moss' comment on Stacey's affair and on the ending of the novel is precise and lucid and to quote him:

There were no scintillating alternatives for Stacey along the way; only variations. A life deeper than she was and a little older Stacey is left at the novel's close to carry on and perhaps even to enjoy life somewhat more, having witnessed it for a brief time from the different perspective afforded by her affair (75. emphasis added).
The Diviners

The river image that opens and closes the novel subtly and vividly captures Morag Gunn’s growth as an individual. At the beginning of the novel, the "apparently impossible contradiction" of the river flowing both ways fascinates Morag. Towards the end of the novel, the same phenomenon urges her to "look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence" (p 452-3). Her recollections range from the Snapshots, memories, reminiscences and songs from her personal past as well as her ancestral past. As John Moss rightly puts it, The Diviners "is a brawling vision in the middle of a life of the various identities that have been achieved, evaded and stumbled inevitably upon, by one person, Morag Gunn" (69).

However, the specific instances which bring out Morag's realisation are: (i) her acceptance of Christie Logan as her father and thus, accepting the heritage he has offered her through his 'tales' as her only true heritage. (ii) As a writer, her acceptance of the limitations of the powers of the word. This knowledge is given to her by Royland, the water-diviner, and (iii) the momentary insight offered by the flight of the Blue Heron.

During her visit to the McRaith's home in Crombruach, Morag cancels her earlier plans of visiting Sutherland, a place from where the Gunns were believed to have originated. In answer to Dan McRaith's question, she says:
"I don't know that I can explain. It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality... And also, I don't need to go there because I know now what it was I had to learn here" ... "It's a deep land here, all right" ... "But it's not mine, except a long long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not" ... "Christie's real country. Where I was born" (D 390-1. emphasis added).

Morag realises that Christie, the Manawaka scavenger, apart from bringing her up, has given her a heritage which is truer and more real than what history has to offer. Before Christie dies, Morag manages to go back to Manawaka as also to voice out her realisation to him: "Christie--I used to fight a lot with you, Christie, but you've been my father to me" (D 396). This scene is a touching one in the novel because both Morag and Christie "communicate a massive compound of love, pity, and mourning, shot through with the relieving incongruity of laughter" (Clara Thomas 162-3).

Christie's funeral scene is one of the most powerful scenes in the entire gamut of Laurence's novels. Clara Thomas, interestingly enough, compares it to the scene in the hospital, when Hagar dares Mr. Troy to sing "Old Hundred" for her and then being released into the magnificence of her "Pride was my wilderness" confession (SA 163). Sensing that Christie will be at ease only if he is buried alongside Prin and in the Nuisance Grounds which has formed such an important part in his life, Morag insists on burying him instead of cremating him as Hector suggests. She also insists on a piper playing the final farewell to Christie.

And Piper Gunn, he was a great tall man, with the voice of drums and the heart of a child, and the gall of a thousand, and the strength of conviction. The piper plays "The Flowers of the Forest," the long-ago pi-broch, the lament for the dead, over Christie Logan's grave. And only now is Morag released into her mourning (D 403).
Through music, Christie is connected to the ancestral figure Gunn and thus, a heritage is created which Morag accepts as her own.

*Royland’s* divining for water parallels Morag’s own search for words. She had known all along that words cannot do magic or sorcery but what she has to learn from Royland is the fact that "*the* gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else" (D 4 52). Royland humbly accepts his loss of divining powers. She sees him as "The old Man of the River," "an ex-shaman" whose powers are gone. But he points out to her how, true to her depiction of him "as an elder of the tribe," he can pass it on to somebody else.

"It's something I don't understand, the divining," Royland said slowly, "and it's not something that everybody can do, but the thing I don't usually let on about is that quite a few people can learn to do it..." (D 451-2).

Her realisation, here, is that all forms of divining whether for water, words or heritage may be passed on and thus, does not become extinct.

The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last, what Morag had always sensed she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along, but not really known (D 452. emphasis added).

Morag realises that her own heritage and Jules' will be carried forward by Pique just as she herself, though unwittingly, carried on Christie's heritage.

The instance which offers a visionary insight to Morag occurs when she goes out fishing with Royland. It is then, that she sees the Great Blue Heron, a species facing the threat of extinction. On spotting the boat, the heron takes to flight but
[a] slow unhurried takeoff, the vast wings spreading, the slender elongated legs gracefully folding up under the creature's body. Like a pterodactyl, like an angel, like something out of the world’s dawn. The soaring and measured certainty of its flight. Ancient-seeming, unaware of the planet’s rocketing changes. The sweeping serene wings of the thing, unknowing that it is speeding not only towards individual death but probably towards the death of its kind (D 357. emphasis added).

The emphasised portion of the passage quoted above may be interpreted as the intuitive understanding offered to Morag about Pique’s mission, by the heron’s flight. Like the Great Blue Heron, the Metis are threatened with the fast extinction of their heritage. According to Cheryl Cooper, in "the vision of the heron, Morag glimpses the perfection she has been seeking in her life and art: certainty, serenity, mastery. The heron symbolizes wholeness, the cycle of life and death" (in John Moss ed. The Canadian Novel: Here and Now 96). Apart from her serene acceptance of this fact, Pique also decides to journey back and work for the welfare of her people in Galloping Mountains. Thus, Pique offers Morag the realisation that "[Morag’s] quest for islands had ended some time ago, and her need to make pilgrimages had led her back here" (D 357).

Through such a realisation, Morag has progressed a long way from her initial frustration of being Christie’s ward and her desperate attempts to leave Manawaka and escape the heritage it has to offer. This sets her apart from the other Manawaka heroines. Whereas Hagar, Rachel, Vanessa and Stacey are born and brought up in Manawaka, thus imbibing its values, Morag is an outsider who enters Manawaka society to live with Christie after the death of her parents. Her life with the town’s garbage collector certainly influences her view of Manawaka. Again, her
artistic temperament keeps her out of the normal circle of the other heroines (Vanessa, perhaps, is the only exception).

Such a marginalisation enables her to acquaint herself well with things considered as taboos, according to Manawaka norms. The two main factors here are her direct acquaintance with death and sex. Morag's first knowledge of death comes when both her parents die of infantile paralysis. Later, as a reporter of a Manawaka newspaper, she is asked to report the deaths by fire of Piquette Tonnerre and her children. Later still, she senses closely the end of Jules. "The brief sound in the darkness was the sound of a man crying the knowledge of his death" (D 446-7). John Moss vividly captures the poignancy of the relationship between Morag and Jules:

The tremendous power of his death comes of the complex, almost mystical, relationship Jules and Morag shared, which somehow transcends ordinary passing. Theirs is a story of bonds and affection more enduring than love; of sex more potent than passionate embraces; of a lasting connection between psyches and souls, occasionally complemented by sexual consummation and wordless touching, but needing no such reinforcement to endure ("The Presbyterian Legacy" 79).

Just as death is revealed to Morag in its varying shades, so is her knowledge of sex. Her attitude to sex is more open and overt than that of any other protagonist of Margaret Laurence. While she is in Grade Eleven, she shares her virginity with Jules. The bond between the two strengthens and grows during the next thirty years till Jules' death. For an outsider like Morag, Jules is more of an outsider since he is a half-breed. For instance, after their first intercourse, "[t]hey smile, then, at each other. Like strangers who have now met. Like conspirators"
It is this strong bond which brings them together when Morag decides to walk out on Brooke Skelton, her professor--husband. Her sexual behaviour seems to determine her sexual identity as is seen in her other affairs. The encounters with Harold and Chas teach the fleeting nature of such unions. In her unhappy marriage to Brooke, Morag tries to overcome her inability to have his child by turning to creativity, which again he fails to support. Her frustration with Brooke and her eventual walk out is aided by her three week affair with Jules and the birth of their daughter, Pique. Morag's encounter with Dan McRaith makes her realise the importance of family and place.

Jules visits Pique and Morag from time to time and passes on his songs on Rider Tonnerre and on Lazarus to Pique just as Morag tells her stories about Piper Gunn. During one of his visits when Pique is very young, Jules tells Morag: "Sure, Morag," ... "She's yours, all right. But she's mine too, eh? (D 338). emphasis added). True to his word, Jules shares responsibility of Pique's life by pointing out the future to her. He asks her to go up Galloping Mountains where his brother Jacques lives. Similarly, after his fair trade of the Shipley plaid pin for the Tonnerre knife with Morag, Jules passes on the knife to Pique as his share of her heritage. Whereas Morag's journey was away from Manawaka, Pique's takes her to her own people. Whereas Morag defied conventions, Pique in fact is affirming them. Thus, Morag's life has taught Pique certain things. "Freedom for Morag is the evasion of negative forces; not, as for Pique, the quest for positive ones" (John Moss 79).
The end of The Diviners marks the end of the Manawaka cycle \"[w\ith a resolution of the ME and the NOT-ME into the humility of an acceptance of a place within the ALL\"  (Clara Thomas 170). In terms of Vedanta, it is the realisation of the union of the Self and Not-Self within the Brahman. In Existentialist thought, it is the presence of the being-for-itself and being-for-others within the being-in-itself.

Before attempting comparisons and contrasts of the various ideas discussed in this chapter, it is important to bear in mind that the fiction of these two writers serve as good explications of self-discovery. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s comment in his paper "Patrick White: Laureate of Australia" is perceptive in this regard and can be applied with equal relevance to Laurence's fiction. He compares the novels to "Sudana’s Tower and towers as described in the Buddhist Gandavyuha Sutra":

And all these towers ... each preserves its individual existence in perfect harmony with all the rest ... there is a state of perfect intermingling and yet of perfect orderliness. Sudana, the young pilgrim, sees himself in all the towers as well as in each simple tower, where all is contained in one and each contains all (14).

Conclusion

As the preceding sections show, female protagonists in the novels of Patrick White and Margaret Laurence undertake quests in order to realise the Self. Women in both the writers begin by being frustrated and dissatisfied with the roles assigned to them in society. Thus, their spiritual quest involves the breaking of long-standing habits "of seeking approval, of trying to please parents, lovers, husbands, friends, children, but never herself. 
In probing her experience and asking basic questions, a woman may begin to wonder whether she has ever chosen anything she has done" (Carol Christ 9). This feeling alienates and isolates them from the immediate surrounding of the family and from society at large. Further, almost all of them are self-sufficient (Rachel Cameron in A Jest of God is one possible exception) with a very strong and active ego. Hence, communication with others becomes difficult. The quest for self-realisation, then, is an attempt to understand oneself. This enables them to understand others. Hence, every quest demands a conscious attempt to develop such qualities like love, compassion, humility and simplicity.

Both the writers insist and affirm the value of the survival instinct in their protagonists. It ranges from a blatant adaptation of the aboriginal mode of subsistence in a character like Ellen Roxburgh in A Fringe of Leaves, to learning the simple rules of society by a person like Rachel Cameron in A Jest of God. However, there is a paradox involved in this respect. For instance, qualities like pride, will-power and self-sufficiency go a long way to enable the protagonists in their quest. Characters like Hagar Shipley, Laura Trevelyan and Elizabeth Hunter have to give up their pride, self-sufficiency and arrogance in order to gain an illumination. On the other hand, Rachel Cameron has to substitute these same qualities in the place of her fears and inhibitions in order to gain a little human dignity.

Almost all the characters undergo tremendous suffering before gaining a vision. Both the writers are affirmative and
view suffering as a positive feeling, which strengthens the individual, as also provide self-awareness. Again, suffering ranges from the extreme physical torture which Ellen Roxburgh undergoes in the aboriginal tribe to the mental trauma of all the others (say, Morag's trauma as an outsider in the Manawaka society).

Both Patrick White and Margaret Laurence depict their protagonists as going back to the past in order to understand the present and shape the future. The past is not only the personal past of the individual concerned but also the ancestral pasts of the society and country. Thus, the pioneering days in Australia and Canada respectively are re-created vividly before the eyes of the reader. The ideas mentioned above will be explored in detail in the Chapter on Techniques. However, both the writers move beyond the situation of merely placing their characters in specific situations, to embrace such concerns as human isolation or survival, thus making the experiences universal.

Talking of the past, both the writers insist on the need to acknowledge the experiences and perceptions of the natives as means for understanding the country. Thus, the aborigines and the Metis are vividly presented by White and Laurence respectively. For instance, the cannibalism episode and the heritages offered by Christie Logan and Jules Tonnerre assume importance in the self-realisation of Ellen and Morag, respectively. Morag's frequent reference to the pioneering experience through imaginary conversations with Catherine Parr Traill help greatly in her realisation.
Another common feature which both White and Laurence share is their depiction of a vivid sense of place. Nearly all of them gain their moments of illumination amidst natural surroundings. Witness, Mrs. Hunter's illumination in the 'eye' of the storm and Hagar's in the cannery. The importance given to landscape is a recurring feature in the literatures of both Australia and Canada and the two writers are no exceptions to this trend. Further, the two writers also use landscape to analyse and probe the mindscape of the individuals. This tradition has been made popular in this century by D.H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene. In the New Literatures in English, White and Laurence share this convention with Wilson Harris and Malcolm Lowry. Another point which both the writers emphasise is that women are essentially 'travellers' across the landscape and mindscape and hence, are able to assimilate and understand all the experiences comprehensively. A good contrast is provided by the male protagonists in Patrick White who seek to imprint their impressions and consequently, fail in their attempts to overpower nature. Voss and Stan Parker may be cited as examples.

These being the shared aspects of the two writers, let us now consider the differences with regard to self-realisation. At the beginning of this section, there was an attempt to differentiate between the concepts of self-realisation and illumination. Patrick White lays emphasis on single moments of illumination (consider Elizabeth Hunter's, Ellen Roxburgh's and Laura's illuminations). Of course, Theodora and Eadie go through processes of self-realisation. On the other hand, Margaret Laurence considers self-realisation as a gradual process, which
sometimes requires efforts for a lifetime. Again, White is metaphysical in his approach and deals with such questions as good and evil and appearance and reality. Characters in White deflect from society in a marked manner whereas Laurence's characters work within social restrictions.

Further, White insists on a binding mystical framework of a mandala or a chariot. There is no such binding image in Laurence. In White's fiction, there is a steady evolution from a spiritual, mystical stance to a position of Humanism. The shift occurs in The Eye of the Storm and proceeds steadily throughout the rest of the novels. This vein can be perceived right through Laurence's fiction. The reason, perhaps, may be that White had to consciously and cautiously move to an insider's position whereas, Laurence had this advantage of being of the same sex as her characters. However, in Laurence, the division between protagonists and others is distinctly marked. Though, White begins somewhat similarly in his early novels (as his satirical portrait of Sarsaparilla women show), he moves on to a position where he portrays flawed characters as gaining a vision (Elizabeth Hunter, for instance). However, both writers insist and succeed in seeing and presenting the extraordinary behind the ordinary.

White emphasises on the essential androgyny of the mind. Commenting on the Tiresias motif in The Aunt's Story, Patricia Morley is of the view that the motif points to three aspects of White's vision.
The first is that sex, unlike love and hate, good and evil, is not of ultimate importance... Secondly, the bisexuality suggests a universal or unlimited quality of vision, which is not restricted to the experience of merely one half of mankind... Finally, fertility or creativity is not limited to physical reproduction... (The Mystery of Unity 77).

His all-embracing concern for men and women questers reaches its acme in his creation of the sexually ambivalent Eudoxia-Eddie-Eadith in The Twyborn Affair. White distinguishes between the questers i.e., the sensitive men and women against the materialistic, insensitive people. Bonners and Pringles, for instance, come in for a lot of ridicule. On the other hand, Laurence's concerns are predominantly feminine. She shows considerable understanding of the problems of the opposite sex. Witness, Rachel's final understanding of the restrictions within which Nick operates in A Jest of God.

Another area of difference lies in the depictions of the respective landscapes by the two writers. In Patrick White, landscape is raw, uninhabited nature, whereas in Margaret Laurence, it is peopled with human figures. In White, landscape remains the same, though each individual perceives different aspects of it. Laurence's Manawaka, grows and changes, much like R.K. Narayan's Malgudi. Though both White and Laurence are satirical of restrictive social values, Laurence comes out as being more sympathetic towards humanity in general. Whether this is due to the difference in their sexes is debatable.

The comparison so far leads to one major conclusion. Though there are subtle differences in perceptions of the two writers, their concerns are essentially humanistic. For instance, though the fiction of White and Laurence are not "conventionally
religious," running through their works are "a deep concern with what invests human life with meaning" and "an affirmation of the essential worth of human life" (Frederick Sweet. Profiles in Canadian Literature 50-1). The quests undertaken by the protagonists to unravel the hidden meaning of life assumes psychological significance also. This aspect of the quest will be examined in the following Chapter.