Conclusion

We have identified that the central myth in White's novels is the quest-myth, all the protagonists extending the quest started by Theodora Goodman through "that solitary land of individual experience, in which no fellow footfall is heard" (AS epigraph). All these quests taken together point the theme of the life journey, which is to be continued until "long wandered man" (Milton XIII, 313) is brought safely home. The supreme motif is the journey through the depth of Hell toward the light of Heaven, in Frye's terms, it is the dialectical movement from the daemonic to the apocalyptic world, for the road which brings salvation to modern man, is a road which first leads downwards into the depths of the self. The mythic descent engenders agony or martyrdom of the self which results in a redemptive revelation, and the mythic hero "finds himself no longer going down but going up, climbing out on the other side of the world" (Frye, Anatomy 239). Critics have described in White's work the suffering and sacrifice. These dominate his work as they do the Gospels, the Bible, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, and Blake. Hence, White's vision of God, Man, and the Cosmos is essentially mythic. And myth serves as the structural and epistemological principle to reflect this vision.
A certain sense of space was necessary to set off White's vision, and Australia proved to be the ideal setting. White believed that Australia, the "country designed for human torment, where even beauty flaunted a hostile radiance" (FL 248) was the "plane where great mysteries are revealed" (V 217). The continent is therefore in Frye's terms both "daemonic" and "apocalyptic", as it is a place of suffering and salvation. Voss feels "compelled into this country" (V 83), and he goes into the desert fortified by the outrageous myth of his own divinity. But the "immense country" (V 216) reduces him to the state of humility and love, and truly humbled, having learnt that he is not God, he is nearest to becoming so (V 387). Himmelfarb, another German, driven out of his native country because he is a Jew, lands in Australia though "no thought of that country had ever entered his head before" (RC 193). It is here that he realizes that it was not accorded to him "to play the part of a Messiah" (RC 192), and as it did for Voss, acceptance of his humanity takes him closer to divinity. For both men, Australia is the place of transformation and death. Though Ellen Roxburgh, an Englishwoman, is also destined for the same pilgrimage, she survives the ordeal and returns to society. "It was Mrs. Roxburgh who made the decision" to go to Van Dieman's Land (FL 11), and in Fringe as in Voss
the penetration into the uncharted interior becomes a metaphor for the inner psychic journey of the protagonist. Peeled down to the final layer of the self's darkness, Ellen arrives at the truth of herself. From this core she rebuilds herself anew and is eventually absorbed into the fabric of society.

The intense suffering that Voss, Himmelfarb, and Ellen go through is experienced by all White's protagonists and right from The Aunt's Story White uses the mythic journey of descent and return to define the theme of 'redemptive suffering. We are shown personal despair and arrogance transformed in a moment of understanding to a sacramental completeness achieved after a dramatic struggle with the "great monster self". Within that completeness is integrated the outcome of the suffering that mind and body have endured, all the grasping exploration and self-probing accomplished under driving torment. All White's protagonists yearn for this completion or totality and seek "the invisible depths beneath the surface of moving forms, the illuminated distance beyond the deceptively garish immediate" (Scheick 135-36) to perceive the truth. Theodora Goodman looks beyond the bone "to come a little closer to truth" (AS 60). Stan Parker "look(s) into distances" and tries to penetrate "beyond the wood, beyond
the moving darkness" (TM 27, 151). Voss probes the silent, illuminated distance where forms dissolve into "illusory substance . . . (and) quickly turn to shadow" a "somewhere always just beyond (his) reach" (V 172, 181). Mary Hare "look(s) deeper than was commonly decent" for "those depths which her instinct told her could exist", and Alf Dubbo focusses "obsessively on some distant standard" (RC 33, 316). Hurtle Duffield and Rhoda Courtney envince a "compulsion to plumb the depths" "to arrive at some unspecified end" (Vs 104, 166). Elizabeth Hunter yearns for "an inconceivable something you have always it seems been looking for" (ES 544) and Ellen Roxburgh hanker(s) after something deeper." (FL 104). Eddie Twyborn's quest is "from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet become" (TA epigraph).

For White's protagonists, the invisible dimension corresponds to the hidden depths in the self, and they know that their "soul must experience first, as if by some spiritual droit de seigneur, the excruciating passage into its interior" (V 137). White emphasises that this inner quest to explore the depths of one's own repulsive nature is more than irresistible - it is necessary" (V 167). "To peel down to the last layer" is essential to arrive at the core of Reality. For White, the core of Reality is the inner world
of man, and the quest undertaken by his protagonists take them from the outer to the inner world. The archetypal quest, as Frye points out, can take two forms, either around a circumference-
"a cyclical movement within the order of nature" - or from a circumference to a centre - "a dialectical movement from that order into the archetypal world" (Anatomy 162-63). The latter movement is towards spacelessness, and timelessness, the one in which White's visionaries move. This movement towards the centre is a movement towards the Divine, towards an "endlessness" (ES 551), the "end-less indi-godd" (Vs 642), the point of epiphany when "One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums" (TM 477). However, the point of epiphany may be experienced only when the dragon, the self, is slain, as the dragon symbolises the space between the individual and God. White's protagonists, who are paragons of virtue, struggle through life to overcome the "great monster self". Voss, Hurtle Duffield, and Elizabeth Hunter, caught in the prison of their own selfhood come to realize that the self is nothing. Arthur Brown has to "untie the knot" and break free of his evil self, personified in Waldo, his twin. Eddie Twyborn enclosed in falsehood has to destroy his pseudo-existence and come to terms with his inner self. And all the protagonists move towards a dissolution of
the false self, a self-destruction which results in the rebirth of a new self. The metamorphosis is a characteristic feature of the mythical hero. Cassirer remarks:

The limits between the different spheres are not insurmountable barriers; they are fluent and fluctuating. There is no specific difference between the various realms of life. Nothing has a definite, invariable, static shape. By a sudden metamorphosis everything may be turned into everything. If there is any characteristic and outstanding feature of the mythical world, any law by which it is governed - it is this law of metamorphosis.

(Essay on Man 81)

Those who refuse to change, to go through the process of metamorphosis remain spiritually dead. In all White's novels there is the contrast between the "living", and the "living-dead". In White's world every individual is capable of perceiving the Infinite, only most choose not to. Caught in the material world and cocooned in a false self they fail to make any meaningful connection with the inner Reality. Mrs. Goodman, Fanny Goodman,
Amy Parker, Madeline, the Bonners, Mrs. Chalmers-Robinson, the Rosetrees, Mrs. Courtney are all people "who have not yet learnt to reject appearances" (V 229). Fanny Goodman's dreams centre on a house of twenty rooms: "In one room there will be ivory, and in another gold, and in another amethyst" (AS 30). Amy Parker clings to her possessions and craves for solidity and permanence, Belle Bonner is bored when people cease to talk of things, Mrs. Rosetree thinks of trinkets of a semi-precious nature as things "that would last" (RC 485), and Mrs. Courtney's affections and enthusiasms are for any becoming attitude, from kneeling with face unveiled in Church to wearing pretty aprons. In White's vision, Australia is a place in which these people who "would retire into the brick tombs which they had built to contain their dead lives" (TM 461) are no longer viable. As Riemer points out, "White insists that man must be destroyed materially before he is able to ascend to a visionary height of achievement which liberates his soul, which allows him that intuition of infinity that is the clue of life" ("Visions of the Mandala" 124). Hence, Theodora Goodman tears the tickets meant for her passage back to Australia, and changes her name: "This way perhaps she came a little closer to humility, to anonymity, to pureness of being" (AS 269); Elizabeth Hunter, stripped of
her human imperfections in the storm is left "without any trace of the wilfulness or desire to possess" (ES 63) and thus attains the "endlessness" of "pure being" (ES 551); and Ellen Roxburgh when stripped of her clothing and jewellery comes closest to her true self. All White's novels demonstrate that possessions, will-power, permanence, and deception must be sacrificed before the individual is granted divine grace.

In the quest for truth White's protagonists have their sense of "being" outside the compass of "normal" society. They seek deeper rewards than are promised by wealth, property, and social rank and are thus brushed aside as being different, like the little crook-neck pullet which is pecked at by the other hens "because they don't like the look of it. Because it's different" (Vs 13). In their isolation, the protagonists conform to Frye's tragic heroes who "are wrapped in the mystery of their communion ... which is the source of their strength and fate alike" (Anatomy 208). They belong to the alazon group as they are imposters, in the sense that they are self-deceived - Ellen Roxburgh, Eddie Twyborn - or made dizzy by hybris - Voss, Himmelfarb, Hurtle, Elizabeth Hunter - the latter inevitably leads to their fall (Anatomy 217). Voss's, Himmelfarb's, and Hurtle's hybris is their aspiration to
godhead. It is the irony in tragedy that this gesture toward the stars should upset the hero's balance and deliver him to the chaotic powers of darkness. The ironic mode veers toward comedy with the reconstruction or rebirth that follows which is a purging off of old corruptions. This form of fiction, says Ihab Hassan, is open (qtd. in Sequeira 22).

Joined to the mythical scheme of quest is the rhythmic alternation of opposites - the polar elements that go to compose our mixed unity. John Colmer refers to the dialectical struggle between the polarities - mind and body, matter and spirit, natural and artificial, male and female, the individual and society, the wisdom of silence and the folly of speech, good and evil, the coloniser and the colonised - reflected in White's fictional world (Patrick White). In fact, White weaves his matter out of polarised worlds. His visionary characters are constantly pitted against the spiritually dead which involves them in the perennial mythic battle between good and evil. As opposed to the "chattering monkey society" (Frye, Anatomy 38), the protagonists distrust words, for as Arthur says, "Words are not what make you see" (SM 57). White is scornful of intellectual knowledge and Himmelfarb transcends his emptiness only when he rejects the intellect which
George Goodman, George Brown and Waldo Brown cling on to. For Alf Dubbo "words have always been the weapons of the whites. Only he was defenceless" (RC 371). Mary Hare's mother complains of her daughter because she "will not learn to converse. Her statements stop a person short. Will not deny M.'s remarks usually contain the truth" (RC 466). Eddie Twyborn "would have liked to say something to his mother, but hadn't learnt the language as do natural linguists and normal sons" (TA 160). The process of communication for White's protagonists does not mean a resort to words, for "there's a point you can't sort of talk beyond" (Vs 536).

Unlike the "huddlers" of society for whom Australia represents only material wealth, White's protagonists are absorbed with what Manning Clark calls "the spirit of place" (Discovery 26), and have a close communion with nature. Theodora knew it "in its utmost intimacy" (AS 31). As a child she would go down to the creek, and take off her clothes and float in the water: "soon her brown body was the shallow, browner water. She would not think, she would drift. As still as a stick" (AS 36). For Mary Hare, nature is her "path of existence" and she would often lose her identity in trees, bushes, inanimate objects (RC 12, 83). In Ellen's youth, "rocks had been her altars and spring
water her sacrament" (FL 248). Nature is the "quintessence of themselves" (TM 355).

White believed that like the Aborigines, one had to establish an intimate relationship with the land to achieve a true identity. The aborigines in his novels merge thoroughly with the landscape: their "skin (is) wedded to the trunk of a tree" and their bodies "were solid as wood, sometimes they would crumble into a haze of black dust" (V 191, 363), and they project a challenge to the white man in their ease in the landscape of suffering and hardship. The land is sacred to them as it is inexorably bound with the "Dreaming". Berndt explains the concept:

The Dreaming denotes the long past-time when culture heroes and totem ancestors lived on earth. They participated in the process of shaping the world, to make it habitable and humanized, preparing for the emergence of a human population. Since these beings are believed to be just as much alive today as they ever were and will continue to be, the dream-time is no Golden Age but still part of the present. . . . both 'totemism' and the
Dreaming . . . link man with the non-empirical world, establishing a firm foundation on which belief in the essential unity of man as part of his natural environment rests. . . . What the spirit beings did and do serves as a model for what goes on . . . in all aspects of every day activity.

(qtd. in Manly Johnson, "Twyborn" 166-67)

White saw this concept of "dreaming" as extremely relevant to contemporary Australian life, and remarks:

The Australian Aborigines, from whose metaphysics we whites can learn so much, have a saying, "He who loses his dreaming is lost". As I understand, "dreaming" can be interpreted as his links with the past, his spirit life, his connections with tree, rock, landscape, his totems, in more sophisticated terms, his spirituality, God (however much it may shock some of us to hear that word, an affront to her intellectuality). As I see
it, loss of faith, our "dreaming", is the prime disaster which has overtaken most of the world in the latter part of the twentieth century. ... In this world of Hypocrisy and Cynicism we must get back our "Dreaming", our faith, as the Aborigines see it, in soil and country and spirit life, and for the whites of the Western world, our faith in one another.

(Patrick White Speaks 151, 158)

Thus we see that White's employment of myth, whether Christian, Classical, Jewish, or Aboriginal, is his way to give order to what he sees as the "immense panorama of futility and anarchy" that is the contemporary world. White's myth is ubiquitous in time as well as place. It is a dynamic factor everywhere in human society, it transcends time, uniting the past (traditional modes of belief) and the present current values and reaching toward the future (spiritual and cultural aspirations).

In White's portrayal of Aborigines, there is a progression from Jackie to Alf. While both of them represent the dispossessed Aborigine, Alf Dubbo's achievement is denied to Jackie. Jackie's dispossession occurs when he casts his lot in with Voss. He then
neither belongs to his people nor to the white men, and attempts to resolve the crisis by joining the desert Aborigines. He angrily shouts at Voss "this is my people... Jackie belong here" (V 364) but knows that he is not yet free of "the terrible magic that bound him, remorselessly to the white men" (V 394). He had hoped to break free by killing Voss, but the killing does not release him, and he becomes possessed with "the great spirit" he had killed. Eventually he dies in "a swamp, during a thunderstorm, at dusk" (V 427). Similar to Jackie's, Alf Dubbo's alienation occurs when there is contact with the white man. Brought up by a Reverend, he is separated from Aboriginal society. However he transcends his situation by watching and interpreting the world, the Reverend's Christ, and the memories of his Aboriginal culture, and absorbing them into his own existence. This harmony between the Aborigine and the white Australian that White perceives can be achieved is carried on in A Fringe of Leaves. The protagonist moves beyond the explorer in Voss by making the contact that Voss failed to make with the Aborigines. While he remained alienated from them, Ellen is drawn into a common humanity. Again unlike Voss who does not regard the Aborigine as having anything to contribute to the process of self-discovery, Ellen acknowledges that it is through them that she has been able
to come to terms with the dark side of herself. By attaching Christian imagery to the act of cannibalism, White also presents what Michael Cotter calls the "organic inter-relatedness" of the two cultures ("Fragmentation" 177).

Transcending the warring opposites White perceives a world which is unified and reconciled. The "one orderly product" becomes the integral mode of life: it includes life entire, and the novels progress towards this vision of wholeness. The "two irreconcilable halves" that Theodora Goodman was asked to accept are reconciled when the spiritual and material, good and evil, male and female are integrated in Elizabeth Hunter, Ellen Roxburgh, and Eddie Twyborn, respectively. Finally, "One and no other figure is the answer to all sums" (TM 477). White's myth thus provides the image of unity, and as the "blundering human beings" of his novels succeed in working out their relationship to God, they acquire depth and meaning, and they progress towards the achievement of a harmonious resolution of the vicissitudes of experience.

In White's novels not only are old myths re-formulated and given a new form, but they are also interrogated and dismantled. Marriage, which Laura calls "the myth of happiness" (V 329)
is dissected to reveal the material motives for marriage, the isolation, "the foreclosure of identity" (Edelson 231) and the woman's lot in marriage. Fanny Goodman's dreams of marriage centre on riches. The husband is seen as the provider who makes "a great deal of money (in order to) buy diamonds and lovely furs." She would also have children: "Fanny was safe now, she had children, possessions, she could dispense with love" (AS 30, 119). In the marriage between Stan and Amy, "the woman . . . was absorbed into the man . . . And the man consumed the woman" (TM 33). After her marriage, Belle Bonner "had been forced to curb herself in many . . . ways" (V 426). Mrs. Duffield decries the role of the father in a family:

Oh, the father! The father's right enough -
to get on top - flick flick - then when 'e's
ironed you out, off 'e gets, and there isn't
nothing more to it, till the congratulations
are 'anded out. The father! Does the father
know what it is to be a walkin' pumpkin most
of every year? Was 'e ever bloodied, except
when 'e cuts himself with the razor? Not
Dad! Who wipes their little bottoms? Who
wipes away the snot? And bears with the bellyaches? I reckon it's the mother who has the right to decide what is right an' reasonable for 'er children.

(Vs 71)

Stan Parker's detachment from his wife and children is replayed in Elizabeth Hunter's and Eadie Twyborn's relationship with their family. White exposes adulterous wives and alienated children, and in Twyborn, Eddie's longing to be united with his parents is White's attempt "to rebuild the mythically perfect unity of parent and child" (Durix, "Masks" 42).

In Fringe, Jack's decision to return to life in the Australian bush with the Aborigines, rather than face the "civilized" world explodes the myth that the Aborigines are a savage race, and enforces that savagery is endemic to "highly civilized" society. The novel also destroys the myth that the Australian interior is no place for a woman. Ellen Roxburgh not only survives her ordeal (unlike Voss) but returns to society and reintegrates herself into social life.
Twyborn re-defines the gender of the Australian by dissolving the categories of male and female and recreating the myth of the Androgyne - the original Androgynous Adam: "When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the first man, He created him androgynous" (qtd. in Campbell 153). Thus, underlying the quests of White’s protagonists, who are engaged with an inner struggle between the antinomies of their being is the concern with the Australian identity. And, with a re-thinking of social norms and a reconstitution of society, White creates his own vision of Australia and the Australian. In this respect, as Brady remarks, "concerned as he is not only to reject what he calls 'the Great Australian Emptiness' but to offer an alternative to it, White can be called a Utopian writer" ("Question of woman" 185). However, as pointed out earlier, White only suggests likelihoods and does not make decisions for society. The ambiguity of the endings - White’s protagonists either become "mad" (Theodora and Arthur) or they die (the only exception is Ellen Roxburgh) - pointed out by critics, demonstrate that White’s novels do not have a closed or pre-determined end, but remain open. As Bradbrook points out, "White’s 'myth of Australia' is not one that is simply to be accepted, it is an open myth offered to the reader for his participation" (141). Accordingly the endings of the novels are
suited to Eric Bentley's note on conclusions:

A pessimistic ending tells us that nothing can be done. An optimistic ending tells us that nothing need be attempted: since everything is already alright, we should feel reconciled to the All. It is in fact hard to put an ending on a play that does not have some such conclusiveness, optimistic or pessimistic. Yet an attempt - often known as the bitter ending - has been made from time to time, and it is bitter because it is not a true ending at all, but is open at the end. We associate it with tragicomedy, and it has a special point in activist drama, polemical drama, drama of Commitment, because it says: what happens after this is up to you, the public.

(qtd. in Styan 285)