Chapter II

The Conflict

From the Australian landscape the scene shifts to an imaginary suburb of Sarsaparilla, the setting of White's next two novels, Riders in the Chariot and The Solid Mandala. The Vivisector is set in the city. All three novels are structured like a mandala. The mandala, concentric in design, is divided into two hemispheres which represent opposing principles, and is further subdivided into four quarters which form a unified whole. The opposing forces in Riders and Mandala are good and evil, while in Vivisector, as in Voss, they are pride and humility. In each novel there are also four characters who comprise the four quarters. In Riders they are Mary Hare, Himmelfarb, Ruth Godbold, and Alf Dubbo, who are the four riders of the Chariot of God. In Mandala Arthur Brown, Waldo Brown, Dulcie Fienstein, and Mrs. Poulter are the members of the quarternity. In Vivisector Hurtle and the women in his life comprise the quarternity - Hurtle, Mrs. Courtney, Rhoda, and Kathy; and Hurtle, Nance, Hero, and Olivia. The protagonists of the three novels strive towards a mandalic wholeness through the symbol of the Chariot, marbles, and art respectively. In the stories of the four Riders, and the twins Arthur and Waldo Brown, there is a very characteristic movement from adult present
to childhood past while in Vivisector, the narrative moves from the artist's childhood to old age and death, all the protagonists passing through the archetypal stages from innocence to experience, and finally to rebirth into higher planes of awareness.

Riders in the Chariot

When, lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot . . .

(Joyce, Ulysses 345)

Riders in the Chariot is structured around the quarternity of four disparate characters, Mary Hare, a misfit of the Australian gentry, Ruth Godbold, a poor washerwoman, Mordecai Himmelfarb, a Jew, and Alf Dubbo, an aborigine, all of whom, brought together in their quest to "discover the infinite in everything" (RC epigraph) are eventually transformed into the riders of the divine chariot. The chariot, a Christian and Jewish symbol unites the four people in an experience of a God who goes beyond separate creeds carrying them to a higher plane of reality. Each rider has a vision of the chariot discovered first in a chance remark, a hymn, a religious text, a painting, and though the image has individual connotations, each recognizes the other as an "apostle
of truth" (RC 63), "engaged on a similar mission" (RC 304),
involved in the "same madness" (RC 306). Ultimately they are
one, like Jung's Mandala symbol the "quaternity of the One"
(4), the sōhama for all images of God, as depicted in the visions
of the Old Testament Prophets and Blake.

The novel opens with the presentation of Mary Hare's biography
skilfully intercut with her encounters with the other Riders.
Like Theodora Goodman who anticipates her, Mary Hare lives
on a different plane of reality. Nature is her "path of existence"
(RC 12), her identity: "All that land, stick and stone, belonged
to her, . . . Nobody else had ever known how to penetrate it
quite to the same extent" (RC 12). As a child she is rejected
by her father because she is ugly, and drifting "through the
pale waters of her mother's kindness" (RC 21), she grows up
unloved and isolated, treading "softly like a leaf" and avoiding
certain words "because they were breakable. The word LOVE,
for instance, brittle as glass and far more precious" (RC 16).
Her world does not include the human, "she liked animals, birds,
and plants" (RC 18), and her only companions are "sticks, pebbles,
skeleton leaves, birds, insects, the hollow of trees, and the cedars
and attics of Xanadu" (RC 22). Living close to nature, "strocked
by ferns" (RC 12) and embraced by twigs (RC 17) she virtually becomes a creature of the animal world scurrying through the undergrowth and losing her identity in "trees, bushes, inanimate objects" or entering "into the minds of animals" (RC 82). Her perception of the Divine is also through the elemental world and she confesses "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). And, like the Romantics, she recognizes "the Hand in every veined leaf" (RC 61), thus seeing nature not only as a part of her but also apart from her, as a presence to be enjoyed and worshipped, and seeking fulfilment through it.

Right from her childhood Mary Hare is in search of "those depths which her instinct told her could exist" (RC 22). "Eventually", she thought, "I shall discover what is at the centre if enough of me is peeled away" (RC 58). But in the meantime she must endure suffering. When her father drowns in the cistern she feels responsible, and is tortured by a sense of guilt, aggravated further by her tormentor, Mrs. Jolley, the housekeeper, who serves figuratively as the snake in the garden of Xanadu.
In her quest, Mary continually tries "to distinguish with certainty between good and evil" (RC 81) and occasionally suspects "that she too, contained something evil which could take control at times? Some human element" (RC 82). Provoked by Mrs. Jolley, Mary becomes "half ashamed for her own powers of emulating the cruelty of human beings. 'It is I who am bad,' she sighed" (RC 83). The relationship between Mary and Mrs. Jolley is the perennial battle between good and evil in which all White's protagonists are involved.

The vision of the Chariot is first introduced to Mary Hare by her father when in a rare moment of companionship while the two are watching the sunset he asks her "Who are the riders in the Chariot, eh? Mary?" (RC 23). But she is too young to understand "Nor did she think she wanted to, just then" (RC 23). However after her father's death the vision intensifies and she looks for the Chariot: "she would wait, with the breath fluctuating in her lungs, and the blood thrilling through her distended veins. . . . And sure enough, the wheels began to plough the tranquil fields of white sky. She could feel the breath of horses on her battered cheeks. She was lifted up . . . ." (RC 37). When she catches pneumonia, in her delirium she again glimpses the
chariot and perceives that Mrs. Godbold who nurses her also 
shares this vision and mumbles: "Did you ever see the horses? 
I haven’t yet. But at times the wheels crush me unbearably" 
(RC 67). She is anxious to know more about the Chariot and 
mentions it in her encounter with Himmelfarb but at that stage 
the implications of the Chariot are not clear to him, and he 
cannot visualize the riders. When she assures him that they will 
be revealed "only when it is time for them to be" (RC 155), 
he pronounces her to be "the hidden zaddik" (RC 155), and explains:

In each generation, we say, there are thirty-six hidden zaddikhim — holy men who go 
secretly about the world, healing, interpreting, 
doing their good deeds. She burned, a slow 
red, but did not speak, because his explanation, 
in spite of reaching her innermost being, did 
not altogether explain. It is even told, continued 
the Jew, stroking grass, how the creative 
light of God poured into the zaddikim. That 
they are the Chariot of God. (RC 155)

But the words are lost to Mary, for she has not the gift of 
words, "living, not reading about it, had been her life" (RC 60).
Mary who has "love for all living matter" (RC 92) except human beings learns to love them through her relations with the other Riders. The "loving kindness" which she discovered "to exist at the roots of trees and plants, not to mention hair, provided it was not of human variety" (RC 466) she recognizes in Himmelfarb: a "loving kindness which might redeem" (RC 299). In an act of self-sacrifice, she attempts to rescue him when she sees his shack burning but finds that he has been taken to Mrs. Godbold's shed. In her last act of human service to him she warms his feet with her body and at that moment she "was translated. Her animal body became the least part of her, as breathing thoughts turned to being. . . . Miss Hare had, in fact, entered that state of complete union which her nature had never yet achieved" (RC 432, 438). Seeing "the fox-coloured woman from Xanadu lying across the Jew's feet, warming them by methods which her instincts taught her" (RC 436), Dubbo is inspired to paint her in his Deposition as "curled, like a ring-tail possum, in a dreamtime womb of transparent skin" (RC 455), the position of the unborn. After Himmelfarb's death she stumbles homeward and "her instinct suggested, . . . that she was being dispersed, but that in so experiencing, she was entering the final ecstasy. . . . She was all but identified" (RC 439-40).
The life of Mary Hare follows the earthbound philosophy of the Aborigines: "The earth gave life to a man, gave him his food, language and intelligence, and the earth took him back when he died" (Chatwin 11). The concept of the Dream time which serves to unite the Aborigine with the land is appropriate to Mary's intimate relationship with the earth, as White recognizes the "belonging" of the Aborigines which is so essential to truly belong to that vast landscape. Finally she dissolves into the elements: "It was decided by reasoning . . . that Miss Hare . . . had stepped into the cold waters of the southern river, where trout had nibbled at her till the state of anonymity was reached" (RC 464), and her spirit is dispersed like the Aborigine's, becoming part of the environment, like the spirit child of the dream time. David Tacey also refers to the concept of dream time which he finds expressed in Alf's painting (Mother-Goddess 208).

Mordecai Himmelfarb, the "intellectual" in the quarternity, learns as a child that the Jew is peculiar, "a persona he would have to carry in a Christian world." (Roderick 70), and it is his Jewishness that seals his mythic fate. For a time in his youth, Himmelfarb is torn between the secular rationalism of his father and the devout Jewish piety of his mother, and when
his father converts to Christianity, he is totally disillusioned and experiences a spiritual aridity. He begins his journey to his Jewish roots first by marrying into the Jewish community and then by reading the Cabbalistic and Hasidic mystical works. As Roderick points out, "Himmelfarb now comes under the spell of Merkabah mysticism - Merkabah signifying the Chariot - throne of God as depicted in the vision of Ezekiel" which he tries to explain to his wife, Reha:

... 'This it appears is the Chariot.'
... 'Which Chariot?' she did certainly ask ...
'That, I am not sure,' he replied. 'It is difficult to distinguish. Just when I think I have understood, I discover some fresh form - so many - streaming with implications. There is the Throne of God, for instance. That is obvious enough - all gold and chrysoprase, and jasper. Then there is the Chariot of Redemption, much more shadowy, poignant, personal. And the faces of the riders. I cannot begin to see the expression of the faces.

(RC 135-36)
The understanding of Redemption becomes his obsession and his quest now turns inwards. He finds himself "racked by his persistent longing to exceed the bounds of reason: to gather up the sparks, visible intermittently inside the thick shells of human faces, to break through to the sparks of light imprisoned in the forms of wood and stone" (RC 140-41). And like Stan Parker, he sees "God in a table" (RC 142).

As the Jewish Prophets have announced, suffering is the Jews' special destiny, and it begins for Himmelfarb when the Jews are persecuted by the Nazis during the second world war. One night when he leaves his wife alone and seeks refuge in a friend's house she is taken away by the gestapo and he never sees her again. He takes full responsibility for the horrific deed and is broken by a guilt which he feels he can never atone (RC 150). He refrains from death only because he is unable "to see any purpose in dying twice" (RC 157), and wanders around as a "dead man, or distracted soul... Unable to reason, he would drift for hours in a state between spirit and substance, searching... for a solution to the problem of atonement" (RC 157). In this period "of bewilderment and spiritual destruction, the concept of the Chariot drifted back, almost within his actual
grasp" (RC 158). And one night during an air raid the vision of the Chariot appears before him:

. . . wheels were arriving. Of ambulance? Or fire-engine? The Jew walked on, by supernatural contrivance. For now the wheels were grazing the black shell of the town. The horses were neighing and screaming, as they dared the acid of the green sky. The horses extended their webbing necks, and their nostrils glinted brass in the fiery light. While the amazed Jew walked unharmed beneath the chariot wheels. (RC 170)

It is then that he gives himself up as a Jew to the Nazis having realized that the knowledge he seeks cannot be arrived at through intellect or reason but through suffering.

Himmelfarb is miraculously delivered from the Nazi camp and he continues his wanderings till he finally comes to Australia "possibly because it was farthest, perhaps also bitterest" (RC 193), and like Voss, finds his fulfilment there. The intellect having failed him, he gives up his academic profession and becomes a worker in a bicycle factory in Barranugli. The employment
bureau officer thinks it the perfect place for Himmelfarb as "the proprietor is a foreign gentleman" (RC 199). But Himmelfarb discovers that Harry Rosetree, the proprietor, has abandoned his Jewish identity to be an Australian and even attends the Catholic Church! (RC 203).

It is in Sarsaparilla that the Jew falls in with the quarterinity of the other Riders in the Chariot. He first meets Mary Hare in the orchard at Xanadu and identifies her as a "zaddik" when she utters a profoundly simple truth. He recognizes that "despite the differences of geography and race, they were, and always had been, engaged on a similar mission. . . . He was not in a position to dismiss her as a mad woman, as other people did, because of his involvement in the same madness" (RC 304-6). On meeting Mrs. Godbold he is "truly humbled" (RC 219) by her goodness, and is surprised at her offer to take up the washing of a Jew. To this she replies: "I do not know Jews, . . . but I know people, and there is no difference between them excepting there is good and bad" (RC 219). It is at the bicycle factory that Himmelfarb discovers the 'abo', and with this "fellow flotsam", the Jew forms "an extraordinary non-relationships. If that could describe anything so solid, while unratified, so silent, while so eloquent" (RC 309). When he finds that Dubbo reads Ezekiel,
the subtle relationship established in the beginning intensifies: "something almost tactile took place between them, but scarcely ... was there any exchange of words" (RC 311).

As the week of Passover moves to Good Friday Himmelfarb goes through the ancient Sedar ritual, setting out the shank bone of a lamb, the burnt egg, the dish of bitter herbs, and the cup for wine (RC 381). He remembers the stranger who is to come and share the meal, and while he waits the conviction grows that "he was the stranger whom some doorway must be waiting to receive" (RC 381). And so he goes to the Rosetrees' house, but they who have denied their Jewish community, reject him. However a "miracle" occurs in the form of Mrs. Godbold who brings him the shank bone of a Lamb for Easter. Symbolically it becomes his Last Supper, for the next day he is "crucified" by the brutal employees of the factory who decide to have some fun by playing a joke on the Jew. As he hangs from the tree the Jew prays for some sign of strength and becomes "conscious of a stillness and clarity, which was the stillness and clarity of pure water, at the centre of which his God was reflected" (RC 413).
Himmelfarb's sense of mission is first impressed in his mind by his mother who detects signs of his election and seeks a rabbi's confirmation that he is a "zaddik" (RC 97). His belief in his Messianic role is reinforced by the dyer, Israel, and his wife, Reha. The latter tells him that he is the one to whom "much will be made clear" (RC 142). And in time he believes, as he tells Mary Hare, that it is he upon whom others were depending to redeem their sins (RC 154). Hence, when he is rescued from his "crucifixion" he gives way to despair, realizing that he has not been called upon to play the role of redeemer, that "it had not been accorded to him to expiate the sins of the world" (RC 418). But he accepts his humanity and in this state of dissolution he achieves a mythic vision: the hills of Zion open to him, "again he was the Man Kadmon, descending from the Tree of Light to take the Bride" (RC 430). In this final vision of himself, Himmelfarb becomes as Roderick points out the archetypal man of the Kabbalist vision (70).

The Jewish myth is integrated with the Christian myth in Dubbo's Christian account of the "crucifixion" in his art. For him, as for Mrs. Godbold, Himmelfarb is a Christ figure, and the latter expresses her conviction by telling Harry Rosetree
that "Mr. Himmelfarb too died on Good Friday" (RC 446), and that he has been given a Christian burial just like "Our Lord and Saviour" who was also buried (RC 446). She is envisioned by Dubbo as the First Mary, "the Mother of God" while Mary Hare is the Second Mary, the "Second Servant" of the Lord (RC 454-55). In his denial of the Jew, Dubbo is like St. Peter. Harry Rosetree plays the role of Pilate, having washed his hands of the "crucifixion" and having allowed it to take place. But he is also like Judas having betrayed his faith, and full of remorse he hangs himself.

As Burrows points out, the mythic element is essentially related to contemporary issues and through the crucifixion episode, "White is seeking to express at once the Judaism of Himmelfarb, the received Christianity of Dubbo, the grinding tension between Judaism and Christianity that is destroying Rosetree and the Xenophobia of the Sarsaparillan mob" (50). Brian Kiernan describes the metaphoric use of the "crucifixion" as "apt for the way in which the novel seeks to relate religious myth, historical catastrophe and the mundane (but threatening) immediacies of contemporary Australian life" (Patrick White 67).
Ruth Godbold, the third Rider of the Chariot, is introduced as "the best of women" by Mary Hare who also sees her as "the most positive evidence of good" (RC 64). She embodies Christian piety and charity and is always stopping to help the fallen and the needy. Her first act of compassion is when she picks up the body of her brother whose head has been crushed by a cart and carries it home. At the early death of her mother she cares for her siblings, but when her father remarries she emigrates from England to Australia where she takes up service as a maid to Mrs. Chalmers Robinson. Even her employer sees that she is "too good" (RC 253), "a kind of saint" (RC 485). Her instinctive sense of duty and devotion makes her care for Mary Hare when she is ill, and help the drunken Aborigine when he collapses wiping the blood from his mouth "as nobody had ever done" (RC 436). Her "supreme act of love" (RC 436) is when she takes the fatally wounded Himmelfarb to her shed, lays him against her white sheets, and cares for him. It is this which causes Dubbo to identify her as the "First Mary" who received her Lord "with her whitest linen" (RC 436).

In addition to inheriting her father's sense of duty Ruth "was granted a rapture her father had never known" (RC 234).
The hymns and the sound of the organ lift her to ecstasy, it was "bliss, surging and rising, as she climbed upon the heavenly scaffolding and placed still other ladders, to reach higher" (RC 236).

It is through the hymns that she sings in Church that she knows her Chariot:

    See the Conqueror mounts in triumph,
    See the King in royal state
    Riding in the clouds His chariot
    To his heavenly palace gate. (RC 229)

Being a solid earthy woman the wheels of her chariot were "solid gold, well-axled, as might have been expected" (RC 67). Her own vision of the Chariot touched "her very centre" with "the wings of love and charity" (RC 489).

Ruth Godbold's Christian piety is not orthodox and she is not portrayed as a regular attendant at any church. The simple acts of daily life are her form of worship and in the performance of her duties she would "surrender herself to a state of passive adoration, in which she would allow her substantial body to dissolve into a loveliness of air and light, . . . she could have been offering up the active essence of her being in unstinted praise" (RC 245).
Ruth Godbold understands that suffering is a prerequisite for redemption, "she had to suffer" (RC 231) to be saved. Hence, when she marries Tom she does not expect the easy way in life (RC 265), and carries out her "life sentence of love and labour" (RC 67) in a shed at 'Sarsaparilla. However the Godbolds' marriage is a failure as Tom is not "strong enough to suffer the full force of his wife's love" (RC 286). He is brutish and sceptical, and resents his wife's faith and spiritual strength which he recognizes very early in their relationship when she tells him that she would bear all his sins (RC 263). Ruth is determined to save him, to follow him "to hell if need be" (RC 286), which figuratively she does when she follows him to Mrs. Khalil's brothel. But it is too much for Tom to accept and he tells her: "You have done a lot to show me up, Ruth, in our time, but you just about finished me this go. . . . You won't need to follow me no further" and he leaves her never to return. She realizes "there was nothing more she could do for him, and that she herself must accept to be reduced by half" (RC 287). Years later when she sees her husband's dead body she cries not for her dead self which "lay in the keeping of her husband" but
for the condition of men, for all those she had loved, burningly, or at a respectful distance, from her father, seated at his bench in his prison of flesh, and her own brood of puzzled little girls, for her former mistress, always clutching at the hem and finding it come away in her hand, for her fellow initiates, the mad woman and the Jew of Sarsaparilla, even for the black fellow she had met at Mrs. Khalil's, and then never again, unless by common agreement in her thoughts and dreams. She cried, finally, for the people beside her in the street, whose doubts she would never dissolve in words, but understood, perhaps, from those she had experienced. (RC 288)

As Chapman notes she seems momentarily transfigured into an archetypal earth-mother (95).

At the end of the novel Ruth Godbold is the only Rider to survive. Though she had also worn the crown (RC 491), she is the only one earthbound: "Mrs. Godbold's feet were still planted firmly in the earth" (RC 492).
Alf Dubbo who completes the quarternity, like the other Riders, exists in a mysterious world of his own being the alienated social outcast, a "brute that no decent man would touch, only with a broom" (RC 309), and the alienated artist: "Neither the actor, nor the spectator, he was the most miserable of human beings, the artist" (RC 407). An illegitimate half-caste, Alf is adopted by the Reverend Timothy Calderon and his widowed sister, Mrs. Pask, as their "Great Experiment" (RC 313). From his childhood he "did love to draw, and would scribble on the walls of the shed" (RC 314) and would not "attempt to express himself except by those riddles in paint" (RC 319). Mrs. Pask encourages the boy's artistic talent but when she sees his painting she does not understand it and calls it mad and dirty. The boy tries to convince her that it is all really beautiful if only he could develop his ability to express it (RC 326). The rector however realizes that the boy's gift may have been given to him as a means of expressing his innermost convictions (RC 324). His painting of the tree with undreamt dreams is significant at this stage as his vision remains clogged in paint, and he "wondered how he might penetrate what remained a thick white mist in his mind" (RC 325).
Alf is forced to leave the Calderons when Mrs. Pask discovers him in the Reverend's bedroom. He drifts from place to place avoiding his own people because of the "delicacy . . . acquired from the parson's sister" (RC 341), which leaves him removed from black society, while his colour alienates him from the whites. Here, Patrick White reveals the fate of the "educated" black, the bicultural consciousness which is only a confirmation of alienation from both societies.

Alf's only "meaningful relationship with life" is his art and his first vision of the Chariot is through a painting by a Frenchman which he had seen as a boy. At that time he had been scornful of the four stiff figures in the "tinny chariot" (RC 320) claiming that his horses "would have the fire flowing from their tails. And dropping sparks. On stars. Moving. Everything would move in my picture" (RC 320). But years later, looking at the same painting he realizes how differently he sees it "and how he would now transcribe the Frenchman's limited composition into his own terms of motion, and forms partly transcendental, partly evolved from his struggle with daily becoming, and experience of suffering" (RC 342). At this period the Chariot is still beyond his knowledge to paint but he paints the Fiery Furnace of Daniel's
vision (RC 354). He is however betrayed by Hannah, the prostitute with whom he lives, when she sells his paintings, "his only proof of an Absolute" (RC 344), his "acts of praise" (RC 371). He goes away to Barranugli where he takes up a job at Rosetree's factory. It is here that he meets Himmelfarb and Alf is "comforted to know that the Chariot did exist outside the Prophet's vision and his own mind" (RC 372).

It is Alf who is fated to see the "crucifixion" and his artistic vision transforms the four Riders into Biblical archetypes. He sees Himmelfarb as Christ crucified to the jacaranda tree. He "knew that he would never, never act" (RC 410) and cast as St. Peter, "it was his nature to betray" (RC 435) and he denies his acquaintance with the Jew. Seeing Mrs. Godbold and Mary Hare caring for the dying man he pictures them as the two Marys. The Deposition is conceived. After painting it, he commences his last picture, that of the Chariot:

First the foundations were laid in solid blue, very deep, on which he began to build the gold. . . . the Chariot . . . it's tentative nature became, if anything, its glory, causing it to blaze across the sky, or into the soul of the beholder. (RC 458)
Painting "The Four Living Creatures", Mrs. Godbold "might have been done in marble, massive, white, inviolable" while Himmelfarb is "conceived in wire, with a star inside the cage, and a crown of barbed wire", Mary Hare in her "Fox-coloured coat" is ruffled by the wind, and Dubbo, the fourth is "constructed of bleeding twigs and spattered leaves, but the head could have been a whirling spectrum" (RC 458). And the four

sat facing one another in the chariot-sociable,
the souls of his four living creatures were illuminating their bodies, in various colours.
Their hands, which he painted open, had surrendered their sufferings, but not yet received beatitude. (RC 458-59)

After this last song of praise, his act of worship, Dubbo dies. Edgar Chapman points out that in the artist's

perception of the infinite in his Deposition and Chariot paintings, Dubbo is a Blakean figure. For Blake, as for Ezekiel the purpose of art was to create a vision of transcendence showing an identity between God and man.
(And) by recreating the image of the Crucifixion with Himmelfarb as Christ and Miss Hare and Mrs. Godbold as the two Marys, and by creating his vision of the chariot with the four riders, Dubbo uses art to renew religious myth.

Through Alf Dubbo, White is able to integrate elements of two cultures, Aboriginal and European. At first, Alf's artistic vision is contained in a bicultural sensibility, and he abandons his Christianity for his pagan self which he feels will give him a more direct vision of God: "Why put on a pair of boots to walk to town, if you can do it better with your bare feet?" Having read the Bible, the Prophets, "he could accept God because of the spirit that would work in him at times" but "the duplicity of the white man prevented him from considering Christ, except as an ambitious abstraction, or realistically as a man" (RC 371). As Cotter observes ("Fragmentation" 184), it is Dubbo's abo self which gives him the insight to express a universal identification with the human condition: "Because he was as solitary in the crowd as the man they had crucified, it was again the abo who saw most. All that he had ever suffered, all that he had ever
failed to understand, rose to the surface in Dubbo. Instinct and the white man's teaching no longer trampled on each other" (RC 412).

The Chariot serves as the symbol of the consciousness of the four Riders who are fellow-travellers in their quest of the infinite, their lives marked by isolation, guilt, dissolution through suffering, and the final transformation. The four Riders may be seen as four archetypal figures. The pattern of each life follows the four archetypal stages of man's development. But the passage from innocence to experience varies considerably from one Rider to another, as each one traverses diverse and individual paths. The four seekers are accordingly seen by Chapman and Green to represent four mystical traditions, and are associated with the four traditional elements of air, earth, fire, and water, and the four Jungian faculties of mind, Blake's four Zoas, Instinct, Intellect, Feeling, and Imagination: Mary Hare's closeness to the natural world identifies her with the nature mystic and she is associated with the element of air, and the Jungian faculty of instinct. Himmelfarb's search for reality within himself follows the mystical tradition of Judaism, and he represents the Intellect, and is associated with the element of fire. Mrs. Godbold's life of action and service embodies the Christian mystical fervour,
and she is associated with the element of earth and the Jungian faculty of Feeling. Dubbo is the artist visionary associated with the element of water and embodying the Jungian faculty of imagination. However, as Chellappan points out, all the four are but "different manifestations of the same, just as the truth of the vision is the same though it is experienced in four different ways" (27). And as Chapman describes it "the fourfold symbolism suggests an integration into unity and wholeness" (198), it is the "quarternity of the One". The interlocking profusion of myth - Christian, Jewish, Aboriginal also suggests an integration - the blending of the different cultures as a unified whole. In Mrs. Godbold's vision is the profound truth that all men are the same "except for the coat they are told to put on" (RC 445).

The novel is a tragi-comedy, the tragic hero pitted against "the chattering monkey society" (Frye, Anatomy 48) and ironically regarded as the buffoon or clown. The severely structured world where the spiritually elect inspire antagonism in the shallow, petty minded people is essential to Patrick White's vision, as the battle against the indifference and hostility of society, is also the battle against evil, against "the grey conformist forces within society which perpetually seek to crucify the individual,
or the group, who dares to be different" (Brissenden 31). This implied division of characters into the two groups, runs through all White's novels, and has lent the ironic and satirical force to his writing.

The Solid Mandala

But evil on it self shall back recoyl,
And mix no more with goodness . . .

Milton, Comus 593-97

The quarternity archetype used in The Riders in the Chariot is again employed in The Solid Mandala, which is constructed around the mandala quaternity - the "squaring of the circle" as described by Jung (Mandala 4). In the novel, the circle is in the form of a glass marble, which for Arthur Brown, the protagonist, takes on a mandalic significance. It becomes "a symbol of totality . . . the dwelling of the god" (SM 238). Like the Chariot of the Riders, Arthur's mandala marble initiates his quest for wholeness, the "wholeness" which is denied to his twin, Waldo, because the marble remains just a glass marble for him. The apparent dual nature of the brothers forms the central conflict in the novel which again reflects the antagonist
principles at war - good and evil, love and hate, intellect and simplicity, happiness and misery, glory and shame, sensitivity and insensitivity - which are the universal themes of legend and myth.

The narrative also adopts the mandala's four fold structure. First is a brief prologue "In the Bus", which introduces the brothers as old men walking down the Barranugli road with their dogs, holding hands. This event, interwoven with the narrative which scoops backwards and forwards in time, acts as a metaphor of their life's journey. In the two central sections labelled "Waldo" and "Arthur" respectively, each twin records the events of his life individually and their narratives reveal the discrepancies between the two minds. Their final tragedy which combines the "grotesque and the apocalyptic" (Colmer, White 51) is presented in the last section called "Mrs. Poulter and the Zeitgeist".

The brothers Brown had been brought to Australia from England in their early childhood, a time when they existed in an almost paradisal state of togetherness:
In the beginning there was the sea of sleep of such blue in which they lay together... nesting in each other's arms the furry waves of sleep nuzzling at them like animals. (SM 215)

And each was an integral part of the other:

Sometimes Waldo buried his face in the crook of Arthur's neck, just to smell, and then... they would start to punch each other... They wrestled together, and laughed, and even their breathing was inextricably intertwined. (SM 32-3)

But the bliss is destroyed when Waldo bites into the fruit of knowledge. He decides to be a scholar like his father and believes himself to have "intellectual tastes and a creative gift", and hence grows away from his brother who is dim-witted and more inclined to do household chores. Though their mother persuaded herself that "Arthur was some kind of genius waiting to disclose itself Dad was not deceived. Waldo even less. Waldo didn't believe it possible to have more than one genius around" (SM 35) and
he tries to detach himself from his twin who is a source of embarrassment, a handicap analogous to their father's club foot (SM 41). He "could not bear to listen to Arthur breathing the way he breathed. . . . He could not bear what he had to bear, his responsibility for Arthur" (SM 41) and in disgust calls him "a big fat helpless female" (SM 41). But Waldo's delusion that Arthur is helpless and that he has to look after him breaks when Waldo is rescued from the school bullies by Arthur: "Waldo Brown shuddered to remember his deliverance by what had appeared to be the flaming angel" (SM 45). It highlighted his dependence on his "stronger" twin and his resentment towards Arthur grows more intense. He feels that his very existence is clogged by his brother who drags "him back repeatedly behind the line where knowledge didn't protect" (SM 146).

Waldo retains his literary pretensions throughout his life, but is unable to realize his creativity. Like Elyot Standish, he is bogged down in a sterile intellectualism. When he decides to write a Greek tragedy and refuses to let Arthur act in it, Arthur immediately conceives and enacts a play of his own which shocks Waldo into the realization of the evident creativity of his brother. While Arthur's is a spontaneous and natural progression
through life, Waldo's is a pseudo intellectual progression and he becomes "all memory and brutal knowledge".

After finishing school, Waldo is employed in a library where he is comfortable because he thinks it suits his literary tastes whereas Arthus gets the job of a deliveryman. Waldo's pseudo-intellectualism isolates him and prevents him from loving anyone, for he thought:

To submit himself to the ephemeral, the superficial relationships, might damage the crystal core holding itself in reserve for some imminent moment of higher idealism. Just as he had avoided fleshy love - while understanding its algebra, of course - the better to convey eventually its essence. (SM 184)

And when he does decide to marry the "Plain . . . downright ugly" (SM 89) Dulcie Fienstein it is only because of the material advantages that marriage to her would bring:

Undoubtedly he would benefit by having a home of his own. A bed to himself. And the meals Dulcie would prepare, rather dainty,
foreign-tasting dishes, more digestable, more imaginative and spontaneously conceived.

... But it was his work, his real work, which would benefit most. The atmosphere in which to evolve a style. The novel of psychological relationships in a family, based on his own experience, for truth, illuminated by what his imagination would infuse. One of the first things he intended to do was to buy a filing cabinet to install in his study. (SM 150)

With these self-centred thoughts he goes to see Dulcie but finds himself forestalled by his awkward brother who is sitting close to her on the sofa, the two enjoying a comfortable relationship. When he does propose to her, she tells him that she is already engaged. Throughout the novel we see that the scenes have this tragi-comic structure, the scale of Waldo's tragedy measured against ordinary life and simple human feelings.

Waldo's emotional sterility makes him buy Mrs. Poulter, the "inalterably stupid creature" (SM 61), a plastic doll, which is the closest he can come to giving her the child she longs for. Arthur, on the other hand, offers himself. Unlike Arthur
who establishes a warm and loving relationship with the two women, Waldo remains cold and distant. He cannot even feel affection for his pet: "To atone for dishonesty in other men ... he had thought it out, oh seriously - he would mortify himself through love for this innocent, though in every way repulsive creature, his dog" (SM 181).

The brothers had not been taught to pray, because their mother had felt that everything depends on will. And Waldo, who relies on his will, is eventually destroyed by it, whereas Arthur, even in the absence of Gods apprehends the Absolute - "offering his prayer to what he knew from light or silences" (SM 265). Though he did not have the answer to his question "who and where are the Gods" he "knew in his flooded depths" (SM 217). This awareness is White's primary concern, and all his novels consist of confrontations between those who seek the inner reality and those who are content with the material world. The novel's epigraphs, Paul Eluard's "There is another world, but it is this one", and Meister Eckhart's "It is not outside, it is inside. Wholly within" reinforce White's vision that the ultimate Truth can be perceived only when one accepts and experiences the inner reality.
The only area through which Waldo finds expression is in his transvestism, when he adorns himself in his mother's ballroom dress. He is:

... obsessed by it. Possessed. His breath went with him, through the tunnel along which he might have been running. Whereas he was again standing. Frozen by what he was about to undertake. His heart groaned, but settled back as soon as he began to wrench off his things...

When he was fully arranged, bony, palpitating, plucked, it was no longer Waldo Brown... Memory herself seated herself in her chair... (SM 193)

Waldo is transformed in his fantasies and is enjoying "a remarkable increase in vision" when Arthur intrudes yet again. Waldo then tears off the "wretched dress" and returns to his male form hoping he has not been seen by Arthur.
While Waldo stagnates in his dissociated condition Arthur strives towards wholeness by exploring his mandalic vision, which Jung has pointed out "occurs in conditions of psychic dissociation or disorientation . . . the circular image . . . compensates the disorder and confusion of the psychic state" (Mandala 3-4). Arthur tries to bring order to Waldo's psychic chaos by offering to give him the mandala, the glass marble with the knot inside, but Waldo rejects it (SM 169).

Arthur's four marbles, his "solid mandalas", are for four members of the quarternity - Arthur, Waldo, Dulcie, and Mrs. Poulter, and Arthur dances out "the passion of their lives" in a mandala dance (SM 265). The first corner is for himself and he dances his life which "was always prayerful". The second corner unites him with Dulcie and Leonard Sapata. Theirs is a "three-cornered relationship" imaged by the triangle, suggestive of the Christian trinity and the triangular components of the Star of David. When he gives Dulcie the cloudy blue marble just before her marriage to Len he knows that "in her marriage she would be made round", and he sees her at the end, enveloped in the mandalic wholeness when she is surrounded by her loving family. The third corner is for Mrs. Poulter, for whom Arthur
becomes "the child she had never carried" (SM 265), and he gives her the speckled gold marble after the dance. But Arthur is unable to dance the fourth corner which belongs to his brother and he realizes "He couldn't dance his brother out of him, not fully" (SM 266) and the knotted marble which is reserved for Waldo is what he loves best. The knot is Waldo who "was born with his innards twisted" (SM 32) and to whom he is tied. In Waldo's refusal of the mandala he senses that "Waldo would never untie the knot" (SM 273). And Arthur finally understands it must be untied by himself if he is to develop into an individual. This takes Arthur through his quest for self-understanding and knowledge. He first uncovers the definition of the mandala in an encyclopaedia (SM 238), but the definition does not convey the meaning and impelled to seek it out he asks his Dad the meaning of totality. But his Dad's reply makes him realize that "Dad would never know, any more than Waldo. It was himself who was, and would remain, the keeper of mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light" (SM 240).

At this stage Waldo starts reading, The Brothers Karamazov, The Upanishads, Japanese Zen, and Jung hoping to "storm his way, however late . . . into the obscurer corners of his mind" (SM 280), an act which makes Waldo paranoid. Arthur tries to
quell his fear by telling him that they have each other but Waldo pushes him further away from his life. However, as he walks out of the library he is described as the hermaphroditic Adam, followed by his shadow and carrying away inside him - his brother (SM 279).

As the two old men take their last walk Arthur turns his attention to Waldo's creativity which he feels is "festerling" and advises him to write about simple things because they "are somehow more transparent - you can go right into them, right into the part that matters. Then you can write about them . . . it doesn't matter what you write about, provided you tell the truth about it" (SM 30). He tries to direct Waldo to the essence of experience beyond the realm of words: "Words were not in Arthur's line. Waldo collected them like stamps or coins. He made lists of them. He rolled them in his mouth like polished stones" (SM 36). Arthur reminds him that "words are not what make you see" (SM 57) or be, and when Waldo refuses to listen Arthur becomes "tired of telling" (SM 58).

In a last gesture to help his brother, Arthur holds up the blue dress that Waldo had thrown away "so that Waldo might see his reflexion in it" (SM 212) but Waldo is enraged:
'Put it away!' he shouted. 'Where it was!'
Arthur threw away the dress.
Which turned into the sheet of paper Waldo discovered in a corner. . . . On smoothing out the electric paper at once he began quivering.
Then Waldo read aloud, not so menacingly as he would have liked, because he was, in fact, menaced:

"my heart is bleeding for the Viviseckshunist
Cordelia is bleeding for her father's life
All Marys in the end bleed
but do not complains because they know
they cannot have it any other way"

This was the lowest, finally. (SM 212)

The poem is a threat to his role as the "secret poet" and when he examines his own poems they are "lustreless" whereas Arthur's poems "glitter" (SM 214). Finally Waldo sees something other than the mentally retarded persona of Arthur and at this moment Arthu sees
... the hatred Waldo was directing, had always
directed, at all living things, whether Dulcie
Feinstein, or Mrs. Poulter, or the blasphemous
poem - because that, too, had life of a kind
- the poem which celebrated their common
pain. (SM 294)

This time Arthur knows that he cannot save his brother.
He is "lost" to him like Tom was to Ruth Godbold. Arthur had
known that "he could never give out from his own soul enough
of that love which was there to give. So his brother remained
cold and dry" (SM 286). And this sense of failure makes him
accept the blame of Waldo's death when Waldo dies attempting
to kill Arthur: "he not Waldo was to blame Arthur Brown the
getter of pain" (SM 294). His guilt engulfs him and he locks
himself in a room for three days lost in dirt and darkness. It
is Mrs. Poulter who walks into the grotesque scene of the starving
dogs gnawing on Waldo's body. By then Arthur is a helpless child
wrecked by the experience and "it was necessary (for Mrs. Poulter)
to take him in her arms, all the men she had never loved, the
children she had never had" (SM 311) and comfort him. To her
he becomes an object of faith, someone to believe in, through
whom she is able to re-enter "her actual sphere of life". Finally, Arthur, muttering about orange ju-jubes, his guilt and his love for Mrs. Poulter, is led away to the asylum.

The novel may be seen as a recreation of the myth of Cain and Abel, the two Principles of Dark and Light. But there is a different ending. Cain and not Abel is killed. Waldo's hatred, ambition and envy kills him in the end, while Arthur, in his disintegration experiences a psychic death. But he is reborn whole, for Arthur without Waldo the shadow, (Waldo, as the evil half also symbolises Satan who in Christian theology represents the shadow), is purged of evil, and he achieves an apocalyptic vision of wholeness. Metaphorical allusions to "purging" and "separating" become real in the framework of pre- and post-historic events, where the last shall be like the first: a state of purity and simplicity succeeding the confusions of history.
The Vivisector

He is to mingle Bits of the most various, or discordant kinds, Landscape, History, Portraits, Animals, and connect them with a great deal of Flourishing, by Heads or Tails, as it shall pleasure his Imagination, and contribute to his principal End . . .

Pope, Peri Bathous, v

The theme of the artist which Patrick White had introduced in his earlier works, The Tree of Man and Riders in the Chariot is brilliantly reworked and developed in The Vivisector through the life of the protagonist, Hurtle Duffield who reaches out towards infinity through his art. The mythic quest, a recurring theme in White's novels, is intensified in the artist as it involves a conflict or Agon, the archetypal theme of romance (Frye, Anatomy 192), between the created scripture, his own artistic creations, and the revealed scripture, the revelation given by God, till finally he finds himself "stroked by God" and "forced to surrender his will" (Vs 589) and instead of painting, he is finally "being painted with, and through, and on" (Vs 639). At this moment he experiences a "sense of grace" (Vs 639) and he perceives the Ultimate Truth.
In the manner of the Bildungsroman, the novel traces the life of the artist protagonist from childhood to old age and death. Like all White's protagonists, Hurtle Duffield is an alienated and isolated character. Even as a child he realizes that he is "different", and it is his artistic consciousness that sets him apart from his family:

There was so much of him that didn't belong to his family. He could see them watching him, wanting to ask him questions. Sometimes they did, and he answered, but the answers weren't the ones they wanted. They looked puzzled, even hurt. (Vs 13)

And the children of his own age: "He would play hard with the other kids in their street... then pull away, and start mooning about by himself" (Vs 13). It is drawing that he liked best and drew all the time "in the dust of the yard, and on the walls" (Vs 13), and colours and shapes are all that matter to him. He loved "the feel of a smooth stone" and the sight of "the pepper tree breaking into light" (Vs 17), but his special consciousness is not something he could talk about, nobody understood, "people looked down at their plates if you said something was 'beautiful'" (Vs 17). This love for beauty attracts him to Sunningdale and
its wealthy mistress Mrs. Alfreda Courtney:

He was in love with how she looked. Each of her dresses was more than a dress: a moment of light and beauty not yet to be explained. He loved her big, silent house, in which his thoughts might grow into the shapes they chose. Nobody, not his family, not Mrs. Courtney, only faintly himself, knew he had inside him his own chandelier. This was what made you at times jangle and want to explode into smithereens. (Vs 53)

The chandelier symbolises his other world of "silence and beauty" (Vs 31), a world in which the artist can shape and give birth to his conceptions, and it is imperative that the child should be separated from the social nexus of his birth to realize a personal destiny. He is sold for five hundred pounds to the Courtney family.

In the Courtney home Duffield realizes that the ideal beauty of Mrs. Courtney is more artificial than real. She is a worldly, vulgar, sensuous woman, and the relationship between the two
develops in terms of a repressed sexuality. Mrs. Courtney has an incestuous possessiveness towards her adopted son and she lures him to sensuous excitement: "she moved her hand to the nape of his neck, and shoved his head in amongst the limp dresses. The sensation was at first one of blinding, then of a delicious suffocation as his face was swallowed by the scented silky darkness" (Vs 90). She liked him to go to bed with her, and in the darkness beside her, the boy had never been so close to what they probably meant by bliss . . . she stuck the chocolate in her own mouth, and warmed it up till she had it ready to offer; or so he understood, from the bird-noises she began to make. They were like two birds together, feeding on the same food, as they worked the chocolate, neither soft nor hard, neither his nor hers; the chocolate trickled blissfully. (Vs 126)

The sensual titillation culminates in a sexual attack by Mrs. Courtney (Vs 172) which causes Duffield to leave Sunningdale and enlist in the army. The scene is reminiscent of Dubbo's departure from the Calderons home. However she remains in
his mind as Robert Baker notes "the archetype of the threatening female" (217) and the women who follow possess something of her but "of all those who came and went, none was more terrible than Maman" (Vs 261).

The central theme of vivisection is introduced through Mrs. Courtney who is a strong anti-vivisectionist. She is involved in various "humane" activities but her particular obsession is her fight against cruelty to animals which she finds "heart-rending" (Vs 33). Once in a London street she sees a display of a dissected dog and launches into an emotional frenzy about the inhumanity of human beings masking her own role as a human torturer. She tortures her hunch backed daughter, Rhoda with board exercises in an attempt to make her "presentable" and the child who also sees the vivisected dog identifies it as herself "stretched on the operating table" (Vs 139). Mrs. Courtney also tries to destroy Duffield with her "scented flesh" and he dreams of her as a vivisector pulling "the guts out of sheep" (Vs 109).

In her role as vivisector, Mrs. Courtney shares a mythical bond with Hurtie Duffield who possesses the vivisecting vision of the artist. It is she who realizes that he has the terrible
eye, "the mad eye" (Vs 77), "you Hurtle", she says, "you were born with a knife in your hand. No, she corrected herself, in your eyes" (Vs 150). As Thelma Herring explains it, in reaching out towards infinity through his painting, Hurtle rejects "the rewards as well as the penalties of ordinary human relationships in order to pursue the truth . . . In doing so he becomes a vivisector, carving up his victims with his knife - life vision" ("Vivisector" 9).

"It is this which frightens Rhoda to live with her artist brother for she "might be vivisected afresh in the name of truth or art" (Vs 462) having already been "born vivisected" (Vs 463).

At first Hurtle is repulsed by Rhoda's deformity but later becomes obsessed with it. Once during their holiday in France, he sees Rhoda standing naked beside the bidet and his initial disgust turns into fascination and "he began to try her out in his mind in several different attitudes and lights" (Vs 135). Able to penetrate the outer reality he is "soothed by the beauty of the forms disguised in Rhoda's deformed body" (Vs 135), and as Rhoda points out to him, her deformity, and his art bind them together: for both are "suffering from something incurable" (Vs 181). It is then that Hurtle realizes that "there were moments when Rhoda became so recognizably himself, together they blotted out the twin nightmares of war and misunderstanding" (Vs 182).
In Hurtle's life as a Courtney, White is again satirical of what he calls as the "Sydney plutocracy" who emphasise the primacy of money value (qtd. in Bjorksten 101). Hurtle is bought for five hundred pounds and is bestowed with an education and a wealthy environment which he rejects to go his own way. And after the war "he was Duffield again . . . In any case, how could be ever be a Courtney?" (Vs 183). He returns to Sydney and takes up with a prostitute, Nance Lightfoot. The innocence of experience in his two worlds, the Duffield's and the Courtney's, yields place to the ripeness of experience with her. It is the beginning of a combination of sexual activity and artistic creativity.

During his relationship with Nance, Duffield translates their sexual world into terms of his own (Vs 194) and is chiefly concerned about the dependancy of art on sexuality. He realizes that he needs Nance's bodily form: "not her actual body so much as its formal vessel, from which to pour his visions of life" (Vs 210), which therefore made him the prostitute. And Nance offers "herself to the knife she only half suspected" (Vs 207) and in the process is both created and destroyed. She provides him the model for two of his significant paintings of this period - "Electric City" and "Marriage of Light". He then becomes obsessed first with
painting rocks, trying "to dissect on his drawing-board down to the core, the nerves of matter; but pure truth, the crystal eye, avoided him" (Vs 230), and then with a portrait of "the self he had not yet explored to its bestial depths" (Vs 243) when he comes to the horrific realization of his role as Nance's vivisector:

He had torn the hook out of her gills; he had disembowelled her while still alive, he had watched her no less cruel dissection by the knives of light. You couldn't call an experience an experiment, but he had profited by whatever it was. His centrifugal rocks suggested something of her numb throbbing; but he hadn't till now entered into her life as he had into her body. (Vs 257)

She knows that he has made use of her "in the name of the Holy Mother of Truth" (Vs 258) and kills herself. Through her tragedy Duffield is forced to confront his "devilish, furtive, ingrown" self-portrait, "his only true achievement was his failure" (Vs 258), and overwhelmed by self-disgust, he smears it with his own excrement.
Duffield moves to a house in Flint street but is still haunted by Nance's death. However, the guilt is expiated when he encounters Cecil Cutbush, a grocer, and recalls Nance's suicide. He also confesses his belief in God as "The Divine Vivisector" (Vs 269) because only his existence could explain where men get their brilliance and their cruelty (Vs 269). This talk with the grocer, he recalls later, raises him from the dead (Vs 421). He is then inspired to paint the "Lantana Lovers under Moonfire".

In this period, Olivia Davenport, a patron of his art, desires to meet him, and her name alone sparks off his creative power and he is stimulated to paint Rhoda, his "Pythoness at Tripod". When he does meet Olivia, the twice widowed, wealthy lady, he finds that she is Boo Hollingdrake, Rhoda's friend. When she sees the portrait of Rhoda she is profoundly moved, and is "both appeased and shattered" (Vs 304) by it. The painting arouses a sense of guilt in her, as it is a part of her life that she has lost (Vs 305). He recognizes in Boo "a core he desired to possess, and which she was apparently determined he shouldn't" (Vs 310). It is she who introduces him to Hero, his Greek mistress.
Duffield is enamoured by Hero's perfect form: "she herself was a work of art" (Vs 327) and he wanted to love her "not in the usual sense of wanting to sleep with her," but, as a "desire to worship and be renewed by someone else's simplicity of spirit", a "pursuit of truth" (Vs 335). But he is shocked to find an animal passion in her which demands "the ultimate in depravity" (Vs 364) which makes her, as he remembers years later, "coarse and brutal" (Vs 418). But "she was (also) a very beautiful woman when she was least unhinged" (Vs 418). He is unable to help her in her search for sanctification, her journey of redemption, and they part. When her husband accuses him of being responsible for her death he is once again filled with a guilt which deadens the artist in him, till a friend reveals the truth that she had spent her last days in an asylum and finally died of cancer. However, Duffield did indirectly kill her, as he did Nance through his erotic painting of her which he sees as "an expression of truth, on that borderline where the hideous and depraved can become aesthetically acceptable" (Vs 376-77).

Soon after Hero attempts suicide on seeing the vivisectomy effect of his art, Duffield wishes he were rid "of women who wished to hold somebody else responsible for their self-
destruction... then he might reach his resisted objective, . . . (his) vision of GOD" (Vs 385). He feels that his creative work so far has been "no more than fragments of a whole" (Vs 385) and is left with a void still unable to find the answer to his aphorism:

God the Vivisector

God the Artist

God

(Vs 412)

But when he meets Mothersole, a printer, he talks of Hero's death, his own, that of his paintings, and is reborn. At the same time the seed of his "unborn child" (Vs 422) germinates inside him. In this last phase of his life he meets "his spiritual child of infinite possibilities" Kathy Volkov (Vs 438).

Parallel to his meeting Kathy is his re-union with Rhoda, "the cat woman", who comes to stay in Duffield's house with her fourteen cats. Though he had employed Rhoda as a "moral force" (Vs 460) against Kathy, the thirteen year old pianist prodigy almost destroys him, devouring him sexually, while he had only "hoped to love, not possess her" (Vs 484), and she becomes his "aborted spiritual child" (Vs 485). Their relationship, however, helps both of them in their artistic pursuits. Kathy later attributes
her musical creativity to this relationship calling him "the father of anything praiseworthy that will come out of me" (Vs 494). And for him, "throughout this phase of his painting life", there is greater clarity discernable in the colours he used which were noticeably clear (Vs 503). Though she is his "flawed masterpiece" she is "one in which the artist most nearly conveyed his desires and faith, however frustrated and imperfect these might be" (Vs 536).

After Kathy leaves he continues his vivisectionist art "trying to arrive at the truth" (Vs 537), when Rhoda makes him face "the worst truth of all", that the paintings he believed in, his "gods" could fail him (Vs 538). Rhoda is his inescapable mirror, his "sister of conscience" (Vs 468) who almost allegorizes his affliction, which is his art, through her deformity telling him "almost everybody carries a hump, not always visible, and not always of the same shape" (Vs 488), for as Carolyn Bliss says, Duffield "has allowed the artist in himself to swell like Rhoda's hump" (Failure 124). And finally, "he recognized himself in the glass she was holding up to him" (Vs 627). She is also "his growth" (Vs 536) whom he hates because "Rhoda, the reality, not Katherine Volkov, the figment was what he had been given to love" (Vs 529). But he did love her, for, as he realizes early
in his life, "if he hadn't been able to love Rhoda, he couldn't love his own parti-coloured soul" (Vs 353). Thus, while Kathy symbolizes beauty, Rhoda symbolizes truth, they are two complementary aspects of the same reality, which makes Duffield wonder if he could believe in "God the Merciful as well as God the Vivisector" (Vs 510).

All the women in Duffield's life serve as a means to discover his creative potentialities, to help him become Rimbaud's "great Invalid, the great Criminal, the great Accursed One - and the Supreme Knower" (Vs epigraph). But in doing so he usurps God's role, and hence is "struck" down literally and metaphorically by a stroke. It is an essential part of White's mythic vision that the vivisector is also vivisected, for the suffering has its purpose - it is the means to the ultimate vision. He surrenders his will as Voss did, "exhausted by what had turned out to be, not a game of his own imagination, but a wrestling match with someone stronger" (Vs 100). He waits for "grace" hoping that his art "might eventually suggest . . . the soul itself" (Vs 589). Finally, just before his death he experiences the ultimate in religious experience, and artistic and religious consciousness become one as he reaches "towards this vertiginous blue . . . the otherwise
unnameable l-N-D-I-G-O ... (the) end-less indi-goddd" (Vs 641-42). In this final vision the artist becomes one with God the artist/vivisector or creator/destroyer.

The novel thus follows the pattern of the quest-romance, and the polarising tendency in romance carries the hero from the idyllic or paradisal world of innocence and beauty to the demonic world of adventure which involves anguish, guilt and suffering. But there is a progression from decline and collapse through the rebirth of the artist into higher planes of awareness and "the point of epiphany" (Frye Anatomy 203) occurs when "nadir and zenith coincide with the moment of pure Grace" (Beatson 19).